

# *DRAWING-ROOM CONVERSION*



A SOCIOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF THE  
OXFORD GROUP MOVEMENT

BY

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### *Editorial Note*

WE HAVE in recent years witnessed a *rapprochement* among students of religion who treat its phenomena from theological and philosophical points of view, and those who employ the more empirical methods of history, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. This increasing interdependence of various disciplines is based upon a profounder understanding of their common subject matter than former generations possessed. For the development of more adequate techniques and the study of religion in an ever greater variety of sociocultural contexts have disclosed a complex of phenomena so protean in character that a full exploration of its meaning is beyond the capacity of any single viewpoint and method.

Religion, therefore, must be tentatively defined in terms generic enough to do justice to this protean character, yet specific enough to enable its investigators to identify and agree upon the phenomena to be studied. Whatever else it may be, religion is that phase or aspect of experience in which man feels and acknowledges his relationship to the *numen*, to that which provides the ultimate meaning of his life and the ground of his existence. This may be conceived of in many and varied forms, ranging all the way from primitive animism through the personal gods or God of the theistic faiths to the naturalistic "Choir Invisible" of modern humanism.

The earlier sociological studies of religion sought to determine the objective validity or invalidity of such conceptions: to reduce them to primitive ghost fear (Spencer); to explain

them as the result of man's heightened self-consciousness under conditions of group solidarity and crowd mentality (Durkheim); to dismiss them contemptuously either as symptoms of neurosis (Freud), or as "the opium of the people" by means of which the ruling classes maintain their mastery (Marx), or as degenerate sentiments sustaining the morale of "slaves in revolt" (Nietzsche), depending upon the psychological, proletarian, or aristocratic predilections of their authors; and in various other ways. To the extent that sociology has been or continues to be such a weapon of aggression against the objective validity of the object of religion, there can be no co-operation with other disciplines that do not share these evaluations. It has taken considerable time to develop a competent descriptive sociology of religion sufficiently mature to realize the limitations of empirical methods in determining these questions of the ultimate nature and validity of religion, and to leave such problems without prejudice to be worked out by theology and epistemology in a competent theory of religious experience.

Although the sociologist is not concerned with the objective validity of any particular interpretation of religious experience, it does not follow that he will be indifferent to it, and that he has no contribution to make toward its final evaluation. On the contrary, as Joachim Wach has expressed it, he "must give his most serious consideration to the *self-interpretation* of any religious group he studies."<sup>1</sup> For upon such interpretations depend the relationships of the members to the religious object (*numen*) and to one another. They also determine the doctrinal statements of faith, the ritual acts of worship and communion, the accompanying moral and social obligations, the intensity of group loyalties, the nature and duration of the group structures, the intensity and persistence of the group loyalties, and other modes

<sup>1</sup> Joachim Wach, "The Sociology of Religion," in Georges Gurvitch and Wilber E. Moore, *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York, 1945), p. 419.

through which the religious experience finds expression. The stability and change of these empirical phenomena are functions of the central core of religious experience which produces them.

The merit of this volume as a scientific contribution to the sociology of religion lies in its consistent application of this point of view to the study of a specific religious movement small enough in compass and limited enough in time to permit intimate acquaintanceship with its representative personalities, activities, and documents. Through attendance upon its meetings, detailed conversations and correspondence with its participants, and extensive and sympathetic reading of its literature the author has endeavored to understand the meanings, concepts, emotional experiences, and overt behavior of the group as its own members interpreted them, as a basis for the analysis and description of the structure and dynamics of the Oxford Group movement.

But although religion develops out of an aspect of experience which is uniquely its own, and is not reducible to a function of man's total social and cultural life, it develops in interaction with its general sociocultural context. Consequently, the author studies the Oxford Group movement in relation to the historical period in which it appeared, to determine if possible the type of need which the religious experiences provided by the Group were designed to satisfy and how the urgent problems of a culture in crisis were interpreted by it and resolved within it.

It is to the accumulation of such verifiable data as is disclosed by monographs of this nature in the sociology, psychology, and history of religion that we must ultimately look for a more adequate evaluation of its significance and role in the total experience and social existence of man.

HOWARD E. JENSEN

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## *Preface*

**N**EW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS are a source of perennial interest to the social scientist. They are the stuff out of which new institutions are sometimes formed. Often they open up fresh cleavages in society (or uncover latent ones); and not infrequently they have added important new values and patterns to the culture. At the same time these new movements bear the marks of the social order out of which they spring and are themselves products of significant social trends operative in society.

The student who selects any of these movements for study, however, is likely to face a number of difficulties. Some are inherent in the subject itself; others arise for lack of adequate analytic tools. Since these movements tend to be impermanent, the patterns of social interaction that occur within them are evanescent and elusive. What is not learned by direct observation or participation during the lifetime of the movement can be obtained thereafter only indirectly. Where this is done by interviews with individuals who are attempting to recall information over a period of years, some error seems unavoidable. Added to this, the uncertain size and the vague requirements for membership of many religious movements may make it difficult to sample their populations adequately. Finally, the desire on the part of many participants and their leaders not to permit the purposes of their movement to be diluted or the spirit of the undertaking profaned by secular analysis may add other handicaps.

Several of these difficulties have been present in some degree in this study, which was begun in 1936, some fifteen years after the Oxford Group movement began. The author cannot guarantee that the various types of meetings at which he was present or that the opinions, interpretations, and testimonies he listened to or read are entirely representative of the movement as a whole. Effort was made, however, to read everything published by the leaders of the movement or under the auspices of the movement and to talk with as many persons as he knew had had any active connection with the movement. These included some who had been participants at one time but were no longer active and others who had attended one or more of the meetings but had not become participants. The data for this study were gathered from informal conversations and from the spoken or written testimonies and statements of over five hundred persons. Of this combined group approximately three fourths were men and one fourth women.

At no time during the interviewing was a formal questionnaire used. Also, unless he was asked, the author did not reveal to any of those who were interviewed what his intentions were in questioning them. This procedure seemed to be necessary in order to avoid any inclination on the part of informants to tailor their remarks to what they might suppose he should be told.

In conversation and in open meetings, as well as in the printed testimonies of participants, there is a marked tendency for participants to repeat phrases, sentences, and sometimes whole paragraphs from the literature of the Group. In cases where there was any choice in the matter, written sources have been cited in preference to the verbal source. There are two reasons for this. One is that the author has assumed that feelings uttered in private conversation might

be less readily quoted than sentiments that have been published. The second reason is ease of verification.

The episodes appearing in the first chapter are not strictly verbatim since they were reconstructed from notes. None of the names used are those of actual participants.

The study cannot be regarded as definitive. It is simply an effort to determine what kinds of religious experience were had, what kinds of ideas about personal and social problems were expressed by participants in the movement, and how these might be related to each other and to the structure and organization of the movement. In this case only certain aspects of an admittedly far more complex phenomenon have been selected for analysis. By using generic analytic concepts, the author has hoped to contribute data in such a form that comparable studies may be made of other religious movements and a sound inductive theory in the sociology of religion built up. It may be that in the sociology of religion the various typologies and concepts thus far developed lack too much in precision to become part of any sound, general theoretical system. In this case the task is still primarily one of assembling information out of which to improve our concepts.

It is not possible to list here the names of all the persons who have co-operated in supplying information or who have contributed in other ways to this study. I must not fail to express my appreciation and thanks to Professor Howard Becker, under whose direction this analysis first took shape as a doctoral thesis, or to Professor Caroline F. Ware, whose provocative teaching first prompted me to begin gathering information about the Oxford Group movement. I am also very greatly indebted to Mr. Ashbel G. Brice, editor of the Duke University Press, and to Professor Howard Jensen for their friendly interest and hours of labor on manuscript and proofs of this study. Professors John L.

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Dallas, Texas

A. W. E.

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- New York *Times*.
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- Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr.: *God and America*.
- Henry P. Van Dusen: "An Apostle to the Twentieth Century," and "The Oxford Group Movement," *Atlantic Monthly*, July, August, 1934.
- Washington *Post*.
- John Wiley and Sons: *The Psychology of Social Movements*, by Hadley Cantril.

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## I

### *Introduction*

**HI THERE, BILL,** Come on in fellows. The others aren't here yet, but they ought to be along any time now."

We are welcomed at the door by a young man, perhaps in his mid-thirties, and we step directly into the living room of a small but comfortably furnished suburban home. Betty, his wife, joins the group immediately, and everyone is introduced to the others.

We sit down in chairs and a sofa that have been drawn into a rough circle; and the easy, friendly talk about daily routines, jobs, vacation plans, and so forth flows on.

Within a short while five others—three young men and two girls—arrive. Presently Jim, apparently the leader for the gathering, hands around pencils and paper, and the conversation turns to plans and projects of the group: who has got in touch with whom in the past few days; who is to make arrangements for the next public meeting; what the group thinks about Mr. Williams's reaction to the last meeting, expressed in a letter he has written to a friend in the group.

After a time Jim suggests that the group ask for guidance on several of the points that have been raised. Heads are bowed, and Jim offers a short prayer. After this everyone around the circle sits in silence, some looking at the floor, some at the ceiling, some with eyes shut, others looking apparently absently at the blank pages in their laps or at some object across the room. Someone begins to write a few phrases or a sentence. The only noise is the quiet rasp of the pencil moving across the paper. Then someone else writes . . . and someone else.

After about ten or fifteen minutes of this, the leader breaks the silence: "It came to me that I should apologize to Joe for overlooking his suggestion last week about a meeting place. The

G— ballroom might have been more accessible.” There are other notations he has made on the page in front of him, and Jim mentions each of these.

The next person in the circle, a girl, interprets the guidance she has received to the group: “Only as God’s love prevails in each individual life can it prevail in the world at large. . . . Time is God’s gift to his children for His work.”

Around the circle each person in turn reports what he has received. Jim summarizes briefly those items where a clear call for action seems to have been received, and the group discusses the problem of who will take responsibility for different tasks. Nearly every job has a volunteer, and finally when every item is disposed of, Betty sits down at the piano and the group sings a hymn.

With this the meeting comes to an informal close. Jerry and Phil move from their places to talk with Ed and Ann on the other side of the room, and the talk again becomes animated and general. Presently someone makes a move to leave, and the others prepare to leave in twos and threes as they came. Our group of four young men is the last to leave.

\* \* \* \*

The time is 6:30 A.M. It is daylight, but not very many cars and busses are moving yet on the street in front of the apartment house.

Quickly George and I dress and go upstairs and down the corridor to an apartment the door of which is slightly ajar. We enter quietly and settle down among the four other young men already sitting in the chairs or on the floor or lounging on the day bed in the small, half-dark living room of the apartment. The fellows are sitting in silence. Two glance up at us and nod a friendly “good morning.” The other two are lost in meditation or prayer. Presently another young man, in pajamas and a dressing gown, steps in and sits down. The rough circle is complete, and we sit thus for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes. Then someone begins to say the Lord’s Prayer, and the morning quiet time comes to an end.

There are no slips of paper for recording guidance this time—

only meditations and silent prayers, relaxed reflection. The gathering lasts only a few minutes. After hearty greetings and some joshing back and forth, the group breaks up with everyone going back to his room to finish dressing and get ready for breakfast.

\* \* \* \*

Promptly at eight o'clock, the time set for the meeting, a young man stands up at the front of the room and speaks a few words of welcome to the group of a hundred and fifty or so persons seated in a rough semicircle in the ornate dining room of the small residential hotel. "Let's sing while we're waiting for some more chairs to be brought in," he suggests, and printed song sheets are circulated. Everyone joins in singing two stanzas of "America." After this the group sings three stanzas and the chorus of a song:

On sure foundations  
 Build we God's new nations:  
 Strong and clear  
 Tells each year  
 Of new-bridged relations.  
 As land reaches to land  
 On a world-front will we stand,  
     And build together  
     What none shall sever,  
     Bridges from man to man  
     The whole round earth to span.

Out beyond our knowing  
 Are these bridges going,  
 Spanning need,  
 Hate and greed,  
 Far-flung highways growing,  
 The call rings clear and plain,  
 Work as one, with but one aim,  
     And build together . . . (etc.)

Now for our decision  
 Waits the greater vision

All we have,  
Lord we give,  
Grant us thy commission!  
Thy strength we claim day by day,  
Thy command gladly obey,  
To build together . . . (etc.)

"Folks, I'd like to read a message to you tonight that has come from some of our friends across the Atlantic. In Great Britain alone over fifty-five thousand men and women have already signed this message and there are thousands more in Scandinavia and Holland and South Africa and the Orient. Four continents have sent this message to the New World. Let me read it to you:

"To the Citizens of the United States of America, Greetings: Born out of Crisis, the challenge of Moral Rearmament has brought us new vision and new hope—a new vision for our nation and a new hope for ourselves. Moral Rearmament is the strength of a nation's resolve. It conquers fear, ambition, greed, self-indulgence and hatred. Moral Rearmament is the foundation of true liberty. It frees all citizens to give their highest service. Moral Rearmament is the secret of peace. It builds peace in the heart, peace in the home, peace in the nation. It offers the one sure hope for peace between the nations—a constructive peace which issues out of common obedience to one Supreme Plan.

"Moral Rearmament is a battle cry—challenging men and women of all classes and all ages to enlist now in the war against the forces of chaos—the war that starts with God-given victory over those same forces at work in ourselves.

"Moral Rearmament means first of all a change of heart. It means admission of our responsibility for the past; a frank acceptance by nations as by individuals of the standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love; and daily obedience to God's direction.

"At this fateful hour we pledge ourselves to give the last full measure of our devotion—the service of heart, mind, and will—

for the Moral and Spiritual Rearmament of our nation; for building the world of tomorrow, a world of new men and new nations where every resource of human genius is liberated under God's leadership to enrich the heritage of all mankind.'

"There are a lot of folks here in America who are thinking this way too," he continues. "In our own group here tonight there are many men and women who know from their own lives and experiences about Moral Rearmament, and I think you'll want to hear from them."

A tall, blond young man stands up facing the gathering and speaks with a slight accent: "My name is Richard Eric Nilsson. I work for a business firm in Stockholm. I think I have been like most people—'a good Christian' nominally. I went to church, I was a member of Christian societies, I was even president of the student Christian movement in my university. But there was something lacking. . . ." He continues his testimony in pleasant even tones and concludes, "We have the answer; and together with some of my countrymen I have come to this country to ask the Americans to help us in the battle for peace."

Following this testimony, another young man rises to speak: "My name is Edward Everett, and I have been working in my father's business firm for four years since I graduated from college. It wasn't until last spring that I began to see what it was going to take if we are going to save this old world from another war. But there are some other things I want to tell you about first. . . ." The young man outlines a list of personal shortcomings—laziness, indifference to God and His plan, some petty dishonesties, callousness toward other people. "One night a friend asked me along to an Oxford Group meeting. There I met a crowd of fellows who were taking life seriously and religion naturally and not being long-faced about it. I got to talking with one of those taking part in the meeting, and he told me just what God meant to him. He also had what he called a *quiet time* every morning, when he listened to God to find out how he should spend the day. To me this was quite new, and I had never been spoken to like this before. I left that meeting feeling that I had struck something really worth while. Next morning

I had a quiet time and asked God to show me where I fell short in Christ's standards of absolute purity, honesty, unselfishness, and love. A whole lot of thoughts began to run through my mind, and I wrote them all down on a piece of paper just as they came. Later in the day I talked through this quiet time with one of the chaps I had met so that together we could find out just what had to be done about my past. There were a lot of letters of apology to write, and I also had to let my family know just what kind of a chap I really was. . . ."

One by one different people—a young woman, a middle-aged man and his wife, an older man, and a young couple—stand to speak. At length the leader of the meeting rises to say that he is glad there are so many persons present and that he hopes that everyone will have an opportunity to meet and talk with each of the others. The meeting concludes with a song and a short prayer. There is friendly buzzing and a great deal of general conversation over the room as people stand up or move their chairs back to continue talking. It is after eleven before the last small groups leave.

Thus, in the summer and fall of 1938, was the Oxford Group movement presenting its program for Moral Re-armament. This was the movement which a few years previously had been identified as one of the most dramatic expressions of evangelical Protestantism to appear in America.

Begun as a quiet venture in "personal evangelism" by Frank N. D. Buchman, a former Lutheran minister and college Y.M.C.A. secretary, the movement grew, between 1921 and 1939, into one of the largest and most skilfully directed evangelical movements to appear in recent years. Writing in 1934, Dr. Henry P. Van Dusen judged it to be certainly the most striking spiritual phenomenon of our time. It has vigorous and rapidly expanding centers in England, Scotland, Holland, Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Rumania, Egypt, South Africa, the Near East, South America, India, the

Far East, as well as in every corner of the United States and Canada. Its professed adherents number thousands, its sympathetic inquirers many times as many. The inner circle of its leadership includes several of the ablest minds of the Christian world and a considerable sprinkling of church leaders of eminence and wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

To many Christians this movement came as an eloquent and compelling testimony to the power of God in the world—a “rebirth of the spirit of First Century Christianity,” a resurgence of “vital religion,” capable of meeting and solving the bewildering problems of the time. For others the significance of the movement lay, not so much in what it would accomplish in the world at large, as in what it meant for them immediately in helping them to resolve inner conflicts and find new and quite wonderful religious experiences which they could share with others.

From outside the ranks, the Oxford Group movement has been viewed variously as a sinister instrument of Fascism, a tool of reactionary business, an emotional orgy, a pacifist crusade, an elaborate “escape mechanism,” and an entertaining show.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Henry P. Van Dusen, “Apostle to the Twentieth Century,” *Atlantic Monthly*, CLIV (July, 1934), 3. In a subsequent article Van Dusen added: “The plain truth is that there is probably no spiritual force in the world today which is bringing to the lives of hundreds such light and power and freedom and happiness and spiritual certainty. . . . And there is no contemporary movement of similar proportions which, in the judgment of many wise and consecrated persons, is so freighted with danger, self-deception, and even perversion of authentic Christian experience” (“The Oxford Group Movement: An Appraisal,” *Atlantic Monthly*, CLIV [Aug., 1934], 240).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, H. M. Goodwin, “Moral Rearmament: Crypto-Fascism in the Oxford Group,” *Canadian Forum*, XVIII (Jan., 1939), 310-311; “Buchmanism Exposed” (editorial), *In Fact*, VIII, No. 22 (March 6, 1944), 1-4; R. H. S. Crossman (ed.), *Oxford and the Groups* (Oxford, 1934); Ernest S. Bates, “Buchmanism: Opiate for the Classes,” *American Mercury*, XLVII (June, 1939), 190-197; Halford E. Luccock, “Buchmanism: An Escape,” *World Tomorrow*, XVI (Jan. 18, 1933), 62-63; John C. Brown, *The Oxford Group Movement: Is It of God or of Satan?* (London, 1933); Marjorie Harrison, *Saints Run Mad: A Criticism of the 'Oxford' Group Movement* (London, 1934).

Still other responses to Oxford Group practices are found in the satire of

The variety of responses it has evoked makes it clear that the movement is not one that can be quickly or easily understood. Van Dusen, in a later article, spoke of it as "the most baffling religious phenomenon of our time" and went on to add:

Many of the foremost leaders of the Church on both sides of the Atlantic have, in their personal conversation, voiced their bewilderment. Never had they encountered a movement which so defied final estimate. Never have they felt themselves so puzzled in deciding their own relation to a vital religious work.<sup>3</sup>

This sense of confusion has not been confined to the religious leaders alone. Journalists, labor leaders, church laymen, and others have also been puzzled about the vocabulary, the methods, the objectives, and the social philosophy of the Group. And despite the fact that the movement is now in its third decade there is a notable lack of uniformity in reports about it and in the various estimates of its significance. One of the purposes of this study is to suggest a possible basis for understanding and interpreting this movement by examining what seem, from a sociological point of view, to be its salient features. But first a few general remarks about the movement.

Essentially the Oxford Group movement was evangelistic—in its own terms "a new spirit rising like a tide" to combat and destroy "the oncoming forces of materialism" and to restore to Christianity a philosophy and a program, a spirit and a set of practices which its members believed to be absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith and unquestionably true.<sup>4</sup> The avowed purpose of the movement

journalists, playwrights, and novelists, e.g., Frank Devine, "Salvation for the Select," *American Mercury*, XXVIII (March, 1933), 313-319; T. S. Mathews, "Spiritual Nudists," *New Republic*, LXXIV (March 8, 1933), 103-105; Rachel Crothers, *Susan and God* (New York, 1938); Rose Macaulay, *Going Abroad* (New York, 1934).

<sup>3</sup> Van Dusen, "The Oxford Group Movement," p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> "Do not be surprised," explained one of the leaders of the Group, "to hear

from the very beginning was to arouse within every individual it reached not simply a conviction of his own sinfulness, his need for utter reliance upon the grace of God, his obligation to change himself and others, but also—and perhaps primarily—the assurance of the power and joy that could be had in following the guidance of God and in sharing these experiences with others.<sup>5</sup>

Two premises in the ideology of the movement and its founder stand out as particularly important and basic in the total pattern of values. These are (1) the conviction that the world of men is sinful and in need of spiritual regeneration which is to be accomplished through the changed lives of individuals and only in that way, and (2) a belief in the direct and detailed guidance of God accorded those individuals who have “surrendered” their wills to the point of listening for the divine commands. These two provide the leitmotif of the movement’s ideology throughout the entire course of its development from soul surgery to Moral Rearmament.

Only slightly less significant in the total pattern that was evolved was a third strong conviction of Frank Buchman that evangelism, in order to be effective, had to be on an individual basis—somewhat comparable to the case work

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them speak of this ‘way’ with the disturbing authority of first-hand experience and in full conviction that it is available to all. It was a distinguished professor of philosophy who wrote, commenting on a certain ‘divine right’ implied in the apostolic message, ‘Historically speaking, the crux of Christianity is its element of presumption.’ These people have found what is a very rare thing in this modern world—a core of inward spiritual certainty. They have, not a question, but an answer” (John M. Roots, Jr., “An Apostle to Youth,” *Atlantic Monthly*, CXLII [Dec., 1928], 817).

<sup>5</sup>In a statement published in 1933, thirty leaders of the Canadian Church attempted to summarize the central assumptions of the Oxford Group as follows: (1) that men are sinners, (2) that men can be changed, (3) that confession is prerequisite to change, (4) that the changed soul has direct access to God, (5) that the Age of Miracles has returned, (6) that those who have been ‘changed’ must ‘change’ others (The Committee of Thirty, *The Challenge of the Oxford Group Movement: An Attempt at Appraisal* [Toronto, 1933]).

of the psychiatrist or of the physician, though with quite different diagnoses and objectives—and that nothing but a complete purge of sin and especially the secret sins of the individual could provide a solid foundation upon which to build the new life. It was this emphasis upon the need for thoroughgoing if not drastic measures that gave the name “soul surgery” to the operations worked out by Buchman and very early standardized in a manual of the same title.

“Personal evangelism,” as the case-work, individualized approach had come to be known, was not a new or original idea. It was urged by the Edinburgh professor, Henry Drummond, as early as 1873 and developed and practiced by such religious leaders at Dwight L. Moody, Henry B. Wright, Henry Clay Trumbull, and John R. Mott. Although there is no evidence at hand to show that Frank Buchman ever met Drummond, it is known that he read and studied his essays and books and urged them upon others. As early as 1910 he was using Wright’s manual on personal evangelism, *The Will of God in a Man’s Life Work*, and he frequently attended the latter’s classes at Yale.<sup>6</sup>

With undoubted skill and abundant self-confidence, Frank Buchman and his followers found it possible to identify all kinds of personal difficulties and unhappiness with the sinful nature of man, often tracing the difficulty to some particular sin. Confession and proper atonement through restitution or similar means would remove the difficulty and open the way for peace, happiness, self-assurance, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that one was living according to the dictates and the desire of God. The fulcrum in the process lay within the individual’s “will” and his desire to surrender and to change others.

<sup>6</sup> Walter H. Clark, “The Oxford Group: Its Work in American Colleges and Its Effect on Participants” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1944, unpublished), p. 149.

Every individual was held personally accountable not only for his own conduct and condition of life but ultimately also for the state of world affairs. Through individual conversion, and only in this way, did Frank Buchman and his converts see it possible to begin to solve any of the problems facing man or to achieve even a modicum of satisfactions from living. Of ordinary intelligence, good will, and idealism the movement and its leader were suspicious since, in their understanding, cause and cure alike lay beyond the reach of all three.

The major purpose of the movement, however, was not to solve problems. It was to "change lives," to spread a gospel and to share a type of experience which those who had had it felt was incomparable and had to be experienced in order to be known—or at least appreciated. In the rationale of the movement everything else was secondary. Under the name of "soul surgery" Frank Buchman and his earlier followers set out primarily to arouse nominal Christians, especially ministers, missionaries, and religious workers, to a sense of their evangelical obligations and opportunities. None was exempt. The sole test of the genuine Christian leader was his ability to change the lives of those with whom he came in contact so that everyone in turn might become a happy, confident, determined, and successful personal evangelist.<sup>7</sup> If the worker were not evangelically active, the reason was sin, although this could be in some cases the lack of full or thoroughgoing conversion experience. It did not matter greatly what the problem was or indeed whether the individual felt himself to have any problems at all—the divine demand upon him was the same, and the opportunity that lay before him was the one that he must take.

<sup>7</sup> "The terms 'Christian' and 'life-changer' ought to be interchangeable. A professed Christian who is not busy to some extent in the work of witness-bearing to individuals, can be no true follower of Christ" (H. A. Walter, *Soul Surgery* [4th ed.; Oxford, 1932], pp. 18-19).

In practice, however, and largely because of limitations of time and energy, the insatiable young evangelist who was to become the leader of this movement found himself attending chiefly to those who could and would admit their unhappiness and dissatisfaction with themselves and who would, after more or less struggle, accept his diagnosis of the difficulty and attempt to embrace the cure. Moreover, the evangelical ministry came to be narrowed somewhat further to those who were regarded as "key people," and there developed within the movement a highly self-conscious strategy to bring the message to the attention of these and others and to "sell" it. Eventually the movement, which originally had been an ambitious but quiet fellowship of individuals seeking to lead a spiritual life under the guidance of God, came to see itself as a Christian revolution to remake the world.

As Van Dusen and others acquainted with Dr. Buchman early in his evangelical career have observed—and indeed as is evident in the latter's own statements—Frank Buchman from the start firmly insisted upon the necessity of thoroughgoing religious revival as the only occurrence which could save either man or society from complete collapse. Nothing but a frontal attack upon sin, which he taught his associates to identify as "anything that stands between God and the individual," could avail.<sup>8</sup> The wish to be free from sin as only God could free him represented for Frank Buchman a kind of ultimate logical necessity which eventually every human being must accept. "One can keep the consciousness of God in his heart," he had declared, "only when it is free from all sin and of all traces of a disharmonious past."<sup>9</sup> The vigor and forthrightness with which he presented this case led at least one observer to the conclusion that this austere

<sup>8</sup> Van Dusen, "Apostle to the Twentieth Century," pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ferdinand Laun, *Unter Gottes Führung* (Gotha, 1931), p. 192.

claim provided the entire basis for the Buchman program. "Strangely enough," wrote Rom Landau in 1935, "sin is its entire basis. . . . We are told that in the 'I' in the word lies the secret of sin's power. The I or the ego is more important to sinners than spiritual health."<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the history of the movement converts and prospective converts were reminded that sin is the final and sole explanation for every variety of problem or undesirable condition, and that confession, surrender, and atonement (or restitution) followed by life-changing and by steadfast reliance upon guidance are the sole answer and cure. Various means were used to convey this idea. Sometimes the lesson was put in the form of simple aphorisms like "Sin binds; sin blinds." Sometimes it was more graphically presented:

Sin is a force. . . . It adds to a man's troubles, subtracts from his energies, multiplies his aches and pains, divides his mind, takes interest from his work, discounts his chances for success, and squares his conscience.<sup>11</sup>

In the early days of the movement the process of convicting the sinner of a sense of sin, i.e., getting him to avow his sinfulness, was often forthright and relentless; and specific techniques for achieving this were evolved. Later the lesson was taught in a much wider variety of ways, through testimonials offered at mass rallies and in various other ways. Whether they were exposed by direct assault or by some more oblique approach, the consequences of sin in most cases were identified as unhappiness, conflict, failure, or defeat, while sin itself was identifiable as selfishness, greed, hate, fear, or some other shortcoming in personal character. In this connection mention might be made of the four "moral absolutes" which Frank Buchman adopted from

<sup>10</sup> *God Is My Adventure* (New York, 1936), p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. Russell, *For Sinners Only* (New York, 1932), p. 268.

earlier evangelical writing as convenient and suitable "tests" of Christlike character and which Group usage tended to erect into pillars of exemplary conduct. These were the "absolutes" of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. Although later these tended to be regarded as *the* standards of Christ, there is evidence to suggest that they were at first simply useful concepts chosen by Dr. Buchman and recommended to his followers as criteria against which they might attempt to measure their own daily conduct.

Usually it was assumed that the sin was consciously known to the sinner, and the problem in the technique of conversion was primarily one of getting him to acknowledge it once the sin was pointed out to him as the cause of his difficulties.

Closely related to these various assumptions regarding sin was the doctrine or "principle" of guidance, the belief in the direct and detailed guidance of God in everyday matters of life as well as in the large course of events in which all men are bound up together. For each man, as well as for society as a whole, God was declared to have a plan as detailed and as comprehensive as any human being could possibly desire it to be. By means of surrender to God in quiet time and otherwise preparing oneself to receive and act upon God's messages and by means of guidance, the changed individual would find himself able to discover what this plan was or what part of it was for him. Next to the joy of release from confusion and doubt and inner conflict it was this second aspect of the experience of Oxford Group participation which lent most joy and delight to the Christian spirit as the Group conceived it.

The concept of guidance used by the group was a comparatively simple one. It was available not only to those who had been converted but also to anyone with the will to listen or, more strictly speaking, to anyone willing to "sur-

render, listen, and obey." The veteran participant presumably had at his command "better contact" and "more spiritual power" with which to receive the messages or guidances and carry out the commands which he heard. "Anyone can listen," a pamphlet circulated by the movement declared, and the clear implication was that *everyone should*. Much Group energy was spent in convincing people of the power and effectiveness—the results—of listening. Converts and prospective converts were assured, for example, that listening for guidance had been the secret of the success of every great leader in American history.<sup>12</sup>

In Group theory guidance could be very detailed. Instances are on record of individuals who have sought and received guidance in making minor everyday decisions. Although Group leaders have issued repeated warnings against abuse of guidance, the extent to which members were willing to depend upon the guidance which they received was often taken as a measure of their faith; if the decision or the action taken resulted in a successful conversion, the instance could be cited in subsequent testimony or witness as dramatic evidence of the value of the practice, the interest of God in the individual, the existence of a Divine Plan, or whatever other portion of the ideology the speaker was attempting to justify. Frank Buchman himself has been said constantly to keep himself open to guidance and prepared to act upon these "hunches" when he feels they are genuine.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, "The greatest men of our past knew that God-control was the only adequate program for a nation. Their experience can be our experience. Definite direction, accurate information can still come from the Mind of God to the mind of man. It can come to our nation as men and women everywhere listen to God and obey, as they learn to plot their own course and their nation's course by the four compass points of MRA—honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. But everyone must listen, every last man, in every last place, in every last situation. Not the religious leaders alone, but the business leaders, the cultural leaders, the national leaders" (Frank Buchman, *Remaking the World* [Abridged ed.; Washington, 1945], pp. 27-28).

<sup>13</sup> See chap. iv, p. 111, below.

Possibly the most striking instances of Group reliance upon guidance are found in connection with the dependence of Frank Buchman and his full-time workers upon money and means provided by guidance. The Group fosters the notion among its participants and others that everything that Frank Buchman receives comes through the generosity of his followers, prompted in turn by Divine guidance which is acting to promote his program because it is a divinely appointed mission. "Living on faith and prayer," as this practice is called, is restricted to a comparatively few full-time life-changers whom Frank Buchman himself has selected and over whose actions he maintains, according to report, strict supervision and control.

Scarcely less prominent than guidance in the pattern of Oxford Group thinking is the principle and practice of sharing. Although nowhere specifically defined or its reference pointed out, the idea of sharing is nevertheless one that had definite meaning for Frank Buchman and his followers. Essentially, no doubt, it refers to the possibility of and the need for sharing the truths of the gospel which it was the avowed aim of the Group to spread. This might mean sharing of one's personal experiences in an effort to gain confidence of a sinner, the sharing of one's faith through witness or testimony privately or in public, the sharing of resources, the exchanging of guidance among members of a "team." On the subject of sharing, Philip M. Brown had this to say:

I have found that to deal drastically with sins it is necessary to share them completely with someone in whom we have confidence. Few persons are honest and definite with God. There is an inevitable tendency to be vague when we confess our sins alone. We do not name them in ugly detail. We do not lay them out as it were on a table and look at them objectively. We do not face squarely the nature of all our relationships, particu-

larly of what may be termed our "affectional" life. We cannot possibly see our sins in their true light, or understand all of their implications of restitutions to be made and wrongs to be righted, until we 'share' deeply with another human being.

The method of sharing or of 'confession' is good psychology: it is used by priests and psychiatrists alike. . . . The confessional, whether with a priest, minister, or another understanding human being, is the safety-valve for a soul in agony. When a man pours out his story of disillusion, frustration, and defeat, it is an immense relief to find someone who understands it all and who, best of all, can share in turn his own difficulties and victories. Everything is then brought out into the open without extenuation or distortion. We see for the first time just what it is that has been shutting us off from God and from our fellowman.

This is the heart of sharing: one human soul going out to another in all humility, generous understanding, and confident faith, so completely and fearlessly that for once in his life a man can know the immense relief of being absolutely honest without reservation or concealment. . . .

The spiritual life, if normal and vigorous, cannot possibly be a lonely life: it must be an adventurous life of joyous companionship. We find it to be literally true that we are the sons of God and that we share in a common divine inheritance. We drink from the same well of 'living water' and enjoy all that life has to give to all who acknowledge their royal origin. . . .

We are told that 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' To share deeply, if so guided, out of the defeats and even the degradation of one's life, in order to help another of God's own children to see his own self and to achieve complete victory over the sins that separate him from God; that, I take it, is the finest way to lay down one's life along side of a friend's.<sup>14</sup>

Sharing was thus not only the basis for the type of evangelical conversion practices which the movement de-

<sup>14</sup> Philip M. Brown, *The Venture of Belief* (New York, 1937), pp. 33-34, 35-36.

veloped; it also lay close to the heart of another of the main principles of the movement, namely, the reliance upon "the group" and group influences in the development of one's spiritual life. This emphasis was felt by Van Dusen to be a definite part of the movement's program and purposes.<sup>15</sup> If Protestantism had lost something essential in dropping the practice of institutionalized confession, certain branches of it had lost even more, in the opinion of some participants and observers, by overlooking the collective character of spiritual endeavor and by appealing so heavily to the individual conscience and expecting each person to fight his spiritual battles apart from his fellows. This left most people spiritually lonely and disheartened. Nor did Anglicanism or Roman Catholicism appear to some participants to offer any more satisfying fellowship. These deficiencies the Oxford Group sought to remedy. Through participation in the movement one might regain both the inspiration and the discipline of the intimate circle in his local Group as well as the importance of belonging to a larger and, even more significantly, a God-directed world-wide fellowship.

Because of its importance in the development of the Oxford Group movement, particularly during the "soul surgery" phase of the movement, and also because of its close relation to the above principles and practices of the Group, it seems advisable to outline here briefly the principal steps in the conversion process. Conversion in the Oxford Group movement, in contrast to similar experience required by most other evangelical groups, was seldom if ever considered to be achieved in a single step. As one well-informed observer explained it:

"Surrender" with the Group movement is not a condition achieved in one cataclysmic experience. As acquaintance with the Movement deepens, more and more unsundered territory

<sup>15</sup> See chap. iv, pp. 103 ff., below.

in one's life is discovered. The Will of God is revealed as increasingly exacting in its demand for unconditioned self-giving.<sup>16</sup>

Actually several steps were conceived to be involved in the process, and others of these besides "surrender" might need to be repeated.<sup>17</sup>

The first step from the point of view of the soul surgeon or life-changer was to win the complete confidence of the prospective convert. This might be done in any of several ways which would be suggested to the life-changer by God. Generally it involved a steady show of friendly interest and concern for the sinner as a person. Great care was taken not to alienate him or frighten him off by the use of words or mannerisms that might be offensive. Such characteristics as sheer friendliness and "radiant jollity," were urged as attractive and appealing traits of the life-changer, qualities which would enable him with God's help to win others to Christ and which he should therefore strive to cultivate in himself. Because of this principle Oxford Group members took great pains to present the most attractive possible appearance, or the appearance best calculated to "intrigue the interest" and "win the confidence" of prospective converts. It may explain in part the attention which the Group gave to quality and social position as well as its customary prac-

<sup>16</sup> Van Dusen, "The Oxford Group Movement," p. 244.

<sup>17</sup> "His [Buchman's] principles of action centre about five words—Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, Continuance. The first is the natural development of friendly acquaintance. The second is the normal result of intimate friendship, when barriers are leveled and each sees the other as he is. The third, conviction of sin, is the normal result of the impact upon a man of a quality of life which he instinctively knows to be superior to his own, the lack of which he recognizes as an offence against God and as his fault and only his. Continuance is that life-long process of growth familiar both to religion and to psychology. In the realm of religion it involves personal discipline—prayer, Bible study, times of quiet for listening to the direction of the Holy Spirit, and it involves personal witness, mediating to others what conversion to Christ has meant to one's self. In the realm of psychology it involves an outlet in intelligent expressional activity for the emotion which otherwise would either die or show itself in undesirable ways" (Roots, *op. cit.*, p. 810).

tice of using first-class accommodations. In theory at least this emphasis was designed to gain the confidence of people who were normally a part of the upper classes. It was a source of much criticism and ridicule, however, and in this respect many critics have overlooked the fact that the Group life-changer could and did assume other roles, using street slang and old clothes when necessary.

After he had won the confidence of the prospective convert by whatever means were at his disposal, the next specific objective of the life-changer was to get the individual to acknowledge his sinfulness and under the pressure of conviction—although sometimes conviction was thought to come as a result of the avowal—to have him confess to as many specific sins as he could remember or would accept once they were suggested to him or pointed out by the life-changer. Several devices were available for coaxing out a preliminary confession of sin. One of the lines of approach found most successful was to encourage the sinner to speak of his own feelings of unhappiness or frustration. By pointing out that these feelings were similar to those he himself had once experienced and by suggesting sins that he or other Groupers had found to be standing in the way of their real happiness, the life-changer might get the sinner to see where his sin or sins lay and to believe that he, too, like others before him, might find escape. At first very little pressure would be applied. The first confession could be private, although frequently, if it were felt necessary by the group into which the convert came, he might be urged to repeat his confession publicly. The reason given for this might be either that public confession would help somebody else suffering from the same sin or would help “drive stakes,” i.e., put the sinner on record publicly as a convert and thus identify him with the program and help to “save” him from backsliding. Many of the more specific sins to

which sinners referred and avowed as their own were possibly suggested by the testimony or "witness" of other Group members.

Conviction was described as almost entirely an "inward and purely personal experience involving the acknowledgment of the individual to God of his essential sinfulness and unworthiness." Psychologically it might involve feelings of guilt and shame, "divided self," bad conscience, and a whole complex of related responses. In Group terms it was implanted entirely by the action of God, just as the kind of salvation which followed (in the form of release from anxiety, etc.) was regarded as an act of God's grace.<sup>18</sup>

The fourth step, Conversion, was also described in Group terms as a "miracle of God's spirit." Essentially it was considered, as we have already seen, to involve the surrender of the individual's will to God and the promise to listen and to obey commands which he would inevitably receive as guidance through listening in his regular morning quiet times or at any time or place when he needed it. Conversion was described by one participant as "the radical change of values brought about by God's Spirit working in the heart."<sup>19</sup> It could be and frequently was an experience extending over a period of several weeks or several months.

No surrender could be regarded as complete or the conversion as successful unless the individual not only confessed his sins but made some effort to make up for the wrongs he had done. This was called "restitution" and was felt to be a normal and necessary part of the conversion process.

Conservation or continuance, the terms generally applied to the "follow up" techniques of the life-changer as well as to the guiding rules given to the new convert, consisted of a wide variety of practices and activities. Chief among these, in terms of the rationale of the movement, was the obliga-

<sup>18</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 64 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Roots, *op. cit.*, p. 810.

tion to try to change others as he himself had just been changed. Most of the practices that were followed, however, were not solely designed to make the new convert himself an effective life-changer. Much of the program was to provide comradeship or fellowship in the new life through group listening, group planning of strategy, sharing, and the like. Without this emphasis much of the acknowledged value of the Group to individual participants would have been lost.

Of the various institutions developed or used by the Oxford Group movement in carrying forward its program, none is more distinctive than the "houseparty." This rather unique institution represents a cross between a religious conference and the type of social gathering from which it took its name. It might be a large or a small group of participants and their friends gathered for a week end or for a longer period. Primarily it was a device for bringing together in an atmosphere of friendly informality life-changers and prospective converts in order to introduce to the latter the "spirit" and "the way of life" of the movement.<sup>20</sup> There were other functions of the houseparty, but its chief purpose was evangelical.

In Oxford Group annals the first houseparty originated in a gathering of missionaries and statesmen at the home of a Chinese lawyer in Kuling in 1918.<sup>21</sup> Frank Buchman was present and utilized the opportunity to interest others in his program. Subsequent houseparties ranging in size from twenty to a hundred and fifty or more participants were held in England and America. The gathering could

<sup>20</sup> For a good first-hand account of a typical houseparty in the early days of the movement written by a young man who subsequently became an active worker with the Group, see A. Graham Baldwin, "A Critical Study of the Movement Called Buchmanism" (graduation thesis, Yale Divinity School, 1928). See also K. I. Brown, "Religious House Party," *Outlook*, CXXXIX (Jan. 7, 1925), 27-29.

<sup>21</sup> *Roots, op. cit.*, p. 811.

be held in a private home, although more often it came to be held at a country inn or a hotel where there might be a minimum of distractions and where there would be ample space for the needs of the group. "The nearest counterpart to the Oxford Group houseparty," Clark comments, "is what a Catholic would call a 'retreat,' although in spirit it is closer to the Protestant evangelical prayer meeting."<sup>22</sup> A good brief account of the houseparty and its purpose as it appeared in 1928 to one of the leading participants in the movement is that offered by J. M. Roots, Jr.:

The period of time extends from a week-end to a week or ten days. Youth in the twenties is more in evidence than age, but there are now a growing number of parents, teachers and older people who come. . . . Professions represented are apt to run all the way from selling newspapers and bootlegging to presiding over schools and theological seminaries. Younger business men and their wives, college undergraduates, society girls, and stenographers make up the balance.

Groups are held in the living room, and people are free to go or not as they choose. Informality is the order of the day. The basis of invitation is friendship, and this, together with the times when simple introductions are in order, makes for a relationship among those present that is warm and personal.

The object of the houseparty is frankly to relate modern individuals to Jesus Christ in terms which they understand and in an environment which they find congenial. The fundamentals of the Christian message are covered in a series of informal talks on Sin, Surrender, Conversion, Guidance, and the rationale of intelligent Witness, or how to mediate to another one's own experience of Christ. Bible study usually takes up an important part of each day. Separate groups for men and women, often divided as to age and profession, provide an opportunity for discussion of various problems connected with sex or money or life work in a more intimate vein than is possible in a mixed

<sup>22</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

gathering. Each morning opens with a time of united quiet, during which thought is directed toward God in full conviction that, to a mind and heart eager to discover it, He can make known His will. The evenings provide a period when anyone can talk who wants to.<sup>23</sup>

In view of the interest frequently expressed in the financing of these houseparties it may be noted that those attending generally paid their own expenses. These were sometimes high, and in order to bring to the gathering individuals whom he felt would be helpful to the advancement of the program Dr. Buchman undertook to find means for meeting the expenses of a few.<sup>24</sup> In other cases these expenses were borne as conference expenses by such organizations as College Christian Associations.

By the mid-1930's the term "houseparty" was being applied to mass gatherings held by the Oxford Group in different parts of the world with groups as large as one thousand or more gathering annually at Oxford. Later these rallies came to be known as "assemblies for Moral Rearmament." Although they became a less prominent feature of the movement, the small houseparties continued.

Other types of gatherings which emerged within the Oxford Group movement by the middle of the 1930's included, in addition to the regular early morning quiet time circles, the luncheon groups and the comparatively small groups of local strategists who sponsored public gatherings held in the ballrooms and dining rooms of smart clubs and hotels.

At the center of the movement's program of expansion at all times was another institutionalized group to which reference may be made at this point—the "traveling team." This would be a group of anywhere from a half dozen to

<sup>23</sup> Roots, *op. cit.*, pp. 811-812.

<sup>24</sup> See chap. iv, pp. 112 ff., below, for further discussion of this matter.

several score hand-picked life-changers chosen to carry the message of the group into some new area or community. As a matter of principle a member of the movement seldom appeared anywhere to represent it alone. Frank Buchman reputedly always preferred to surround himself with a group of active, personable life-changers. These individuals, sometimes referred to as the "spearhead" of the movement, traveled with or without Dr. Buchman and constituted a traveling team. Various reasons for this emphasis upon team action were suggested, chief among which no doubt was the opportunity which it afforded for enhanced "striking power." Mutual discipline within these teams appears to have been very strong. Group travel also afforded opportunity for such collective activities of sharing, checking guidance, and the like.

Enough, perhaps, has been said in the foregoing survey of Oxford Group ideas and practices to accomplish the purpose of introducing the movement. Taken together, most of the principles and practices to which we have given attention in this chapter can already be seen to comprise a fairly comprehensive and internally consistent pattern of activities. All that has been accomplished so far, however, has been to indicate in broad and general terms the objectives and some of the more distinctive practices of the movement. The extent to which these various items can be said to belong together, as well as the discovery of any key which may supply a satisfactory interpretation of the entire program, remains to be accomplished—if it can be—in succeeding chapters. Why the movement came into existence at all, why it prospered as it did, or why it drew the kind of support which it received are other questions which await additional evidence and closer analysis.

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## II

### *History of the Oxford Group Movement*

THE DATE TAKEN by most participants to mark the beginning of the Oxford Group movement is 1921. Early in the summer of that year Frank Buchman met with a young former artillery officer and some of his friends in Christ College at Oxford University, and the first group activity began.

For several years prior to this time, however, Frank Buchman had been devoting himself to personal evangelism as a college Y.M.C.A. secretary and later as a traveling evangelist and extension lecturer. Historically the movement of which he became the head seems to stem most directly from American collegiate evangelism. It was on the campus at least that his activities and the following he attracted first took on the form and proportions of a social movement.<sup>1</sup> There are many other strands from the past woven into the ideas and the pattern of practices of the movement, but the story of the rise and development of the movement can best be told, perhaps, by focusing attention first on the leader.

Frank Buchman was born at Pennsburg, Pennsylvania,

<sup>1</sup> Among the best sources of information concerning the early history of the Oxford Group movement are Walter H. Clark, "The Oxford Group: Its Work in American Colleges and Its Effect on Participants" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1944, unpublished); J. Calvin Keene, "The Doctrine of Guidance in the Oxford Group Movement" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1937, unpublished), and A. Graham Baldwin, "A Critical Study of the Movement Called Buchmanism" (graduation thesis, Yale Divinity School, 1928, unpublished). Other important sources are J. F. Laun, *Unter Gottes Führung*; E. P. Pfatfeicher, *The Man from Oxford* (Paradise Falls, Pa., 1934); and A. J. Russell, *For Sinners Only*.

June 4, 1878, the son of a couple described as "simple, religious people, typically 'Pennsylvania Dutch.'"<sup>2</sup> The family moved to Allentown, Pennsylvania, fifteen years later; and it was from the Allentown High School and also from Muhlenberg College in the same city that he was graduated. His upbringing has been described as theologically conservative and pietistic, the family background being Swiss-Lutheran. The father of the family is described in one account as a notably "ethical businessman" and the mother as "a quiet, cultured woman of deep insight, rigid self-discipline but with a sense of humor."<sup>3</sup> In college the young man appears to have had an undistinguished career. He was a member of Alpha Tau Omega social fraternity and active in various other campus organizations until his graduation in 1899. He is mentioned in the college annuals in a variety of roles and was one of the cartoonists for the volume published by his own class.<sup>4</sup>

From college Frank Buchman went directly to the Lutheran theological seminary in Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, where he was graduated in 1902. Subsequently he received M.A. and D.D. degrees from Muhlenberg, but he was evidently not regarded by himself or others as a scholar. An incident, reported to have occurred at theological seminary, apparently had some influence on Frank Buchman's decision, upon graduation, to choose what has been described as "a comparatively poor and difficult" parish in west Philadelphia. This was a taunt from a fellow student that Buchman was socially ambitious.<sup>5</sup> Before assuming his duties at Over-

<sup>2</sup> Garth Lean, "One Man's Faith Inspiring Nations," Allentown (Pa.) *Sunday Call-Chronicle*, June 5, 1938, p. 13. See also *Who's Who in America*, XXII (1942-43), 422, and numerous feature articles on Frank Buchman listed in the bibliography below.

<sup>3</sup> Lean, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ciarla*, published by the Junior class of Muhlenberg College, VI (1898), 49, 50, 67, *et passim*. See also the college annual for the following year, VII (1899), 88, 138.

<sup>5</sup> R. H. Murray, *Group Movements throughout the Ages* (New York, 1935), p. 304.

brook, however, he spent a year in study and travel abroad, staying at Westminster College, Cambridge, for a time and also at the Inner Mission in Germany. He also visited the Rauhe Haus in Hamburg, the Johannestift in Spandau, Neuendettelsau, Gnadenenthal, and Kaiserswerth.<sup>6</sup>

The parish of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Overbrook had a corner-shop church and a congregation composed largely of servants from Main Line homes.<sup>7</sup> In addition to his parish duties, which, apparently, were quite varied, Buchman found time to set up a work place in an attic in a poorer district of Philadelphia where "the distressed, the drunkard, the ne'er-do-well came to him for food and clothing, comfort and understanding" and where he "gladly shared with them what little he had and proved the truth that 'Where God guides, He provides.'"<sup>8</sup> In 1904 or 1905 he also organized a Lutheran hospice for boys—possibly the first of its kind in the United States. It was so successful that soon afterwards he was called to take over the management of a settlement house in central Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> From these two enterprises developed a series of hospices and settlement houses which spread into other large cities. According to one source, they took so much of his time that soon Buchman gave up his church work entirely and devoted himself to them. Both were under the direction of the same Board of Trustees. Not all of his time, however, was spent with the underprivileged. An associate, the Reverend E. P. Pfatteicher, recalls that during this period he also spent some time in the homes and at the dinner tables of the wealthy.<sup>10</sup>

In his work at the hospice he learned how to handle boys and is reported to have converted many, but in 1908 he fell

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Lean, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Pfatteicher, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Keene, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

into sharp disagreement with the trustees over a matter of policy and resigned in anger against the six trustees who had opposed him in his humanitarian aim. Tired and in poor health he left for England to attend the Keswick Conference in June. It was here that his conversion took place, and it is from this experience that his mission and work as an inspired evangelist are dated by him and his followers.<sup>11</sup>

In 1908, upon his return to the United States, he was recommended by Dr. John R. Mott to head the Y.M.C.A. at Pennsylvania State College, where he spent the following six years, from January, 1909, until the spring of 1915, experimenting with the practice of personal evangelism and developing his ideas.<sup>12</sup> Although his duties and responsibilities were pretty well prescribed by his position as secretary of the college Y.M.C.A., he reportedly brought to the job a number of original ideas and a great amount of energy. Selecting three "key men" in the situation (the college dean, a popular graduate student, and one Bill "Pickle," a bootlegger described as "the despair of the college authorities"), Frank Buchman succeeded in attracting to his program an increasing proportion of the students. Within three years there were reported to be twelve hundred men in voluntary Bible study.<sup>13</sup>

In his work at Pennsylvania State College, Buchman began to attract the attention of various leaders and chroniclers of Student Christian evangelism, notably Henry B. Wright, with whom he corresponded and who came to the campus several times during this period. George Stewart, Jr., biographer of Wright, cited Buchman as "a master at connecting men with those who could be of greatest help."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 36. See also Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Roots, *op. cit.*, p. 809.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 810.

<sup>14</sup> George Stewart, *The Life of Henry B. Wright* (New York, 1926), pp. 82-

He was active in planning and organizing both large-scale conferences and evangelistic campaigns, in which he is reported to have shown a genius for detail, and small group programs, including, in addition to Bible classes, a small "Morning Watch" group which gathered every morning at five o'clock in his room for Bible reading and for "listening" to God and planning evangelical activities.<sup>15</sup>

To carry out these plans Buchman is reported as having been highly successful in raising money by bringing his work to the attention of those who would be in a position to finance it. While he continued to be interested in the conversion of the rank and file of students, there is evidence that he took special interest in those whom he considered the leaders on the campus. In a letter to Henry B. Wright he wrote, "We are after the key men and we are getting them." In the same letter he asked Professor Wright to write congratulations to the Penn State football captain on his successful season, which Clark cites to show "what pains he took with those whom it was his desire to convert."<sup>16</sup>

Leaving Pennsylvania State College in 1915, Buchman toured with Sherwood Eddy for a year in India, Korea, and Japan; returned in 1916 to become an extension lecturer at Hartford Theological Seminary; and then left to spend another period of time in the Far East in 1917-1919.<sup>17</sup> In contrast with his experience at Pennsylvania State College, his contact with Hartford Theological Seminary, with which he was associated from 1916 until his ultimate withdrawal in 1922, was neither pleasant nor tranquil.<sup>18</sup> Opposition from students and from some faculty members appears to have centered about his naïve fundamentalism and his bald and unorthodox evangelicalism. When some of the students complained that he interrupted their studies, he was re-

<sup>15</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-46.

<sup>17</sup> Roots, *op. cit.*, p. 810.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-56.

quested to live off campus. From among the faculty members part of the opposition appears to have stemmed from his unabashed criticism of their lack of evangelical fervor, i.e., their not being "vital." Throughout this period, however, Buchman appears to have had the support, if not the unqualified approval in all that he was attempting to do, of Dr. William D. Mackenzie, the president of the Seminary Foundation. At Hartford, as at Penn State, Buchman conducted an early morning prayer group which some of the students regularly attended.

When Frank Buchman resigned from the Seminary Foundation in 1922 it was ostensibly to launch his evangelical program. According to one source he decided to give his whole time to "world changing through life changing" while on a train en route to Washington to meet delegates to the World Disarmament Conference in 1921.<sup>19</sup> His letters indicate that this journey was taken late in 1921 after a summer visit to Oxford. The success which he is reported to have had in interesting certain wealthy persons in his work appears to have had some influence in his decision to devote his full time to his own program and to live on faith.

To the work of organizing his program Buchman brought a number of habits and personality traits that apparently fitted him well for the job. As a leader he had already proved to be extremely able and resourceful. "Buchman," wrote one student of his movement, "has great political ability, as the term may be understood broadly. He would not only have been a good politician but a successful business man, advertiser or strategist in any field demanding attention to detail and the handling of people. . . ."<sup>20</sup>

Other qualities that have been mentioned by those who knew him at this time include

<sup>19</sup> Peter Howard, *Innocent Men* (Toronto, 1941), p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

a quite extraordinary skill in administration; personal attention to the importance of the minutest detail; intimate solicitude for each person's needs and idiosyncrasies; tireless resilience of body and nerves; playful and unclouded gayety of spirit; financial sagacity, not to say shrewdness; tenacious memory; a sense for strategy which might quicken jealousy in a Napoleon; exuberant and contagious optimism.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these, many other particular traits have been mentioned—ambition, desire for power (in the form of the desire to convert souls), a great wanderlust. An associate in the Lutheran ministry listed as “one of Buchman's three passions the desire ‘to hobnob with those in position of social prestige’ and speaks of being shown letters from Andrew Carnegie, which Buchman highly prized.”<sup>22</sup>

A trait which Clark finds closely related to this interest in the great was “an unblushing flair of self-advertisement” mixed with “an apparent passion for self-effacement.”<sup>23</sup> That Frank Buchman's interest was not confined to the rich and powerful is evident in the several humanitarian enterprises in which he engaged as pastor of a poor parish and as head of the settlement house and hospice in Philadelphia. There is little doubt that he had a genuine interest in, and concern for, those whom he regarded as “sin sick” and in need of change. It is here, in the opinion of some, that his greatest talent lay, in his almost intuitive sense of the problems which lay heaviest upon the mind and conscience of a prospective convert. Once sure of himself, Frank Buchman did not hesitate to confront the individual with his diagnosis of the difficulty and his assured cure.<sup>24</sup>

But the most important trait, in the opinion of Van Dusen, who first became associated with Buchman in 1919,

<sup>21</sup> Van Dusen, “Apostle to the Twentieth Century,” p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Pfatteicher, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

was a "rock-like consecration" of himself to his God and that God's intention for him. "Frank Buchman," he wrote, belongs in that tiny company of the centuries who have known themselves summoned to the surrender of all to the exacting demand of the Divine Will, and who, making the surrender, have pressed on . . . in immovable confidence in the Divine Guardianship of their destiny.<sup>25</sup>

From this trait, as well as from the others that have been mentioned, flowed additional traits that were to give the movement many of its distinctive emphases and characteristics.

By 1922, when Frank Buchman resigned his position at the Hartford Seminary Foundation, the intercollegiate movement of which he was the leader was well begun. Van Dusen recalls:

Something approaching revival . . . began to stir the campuses of Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Williams, Smith, Vassar, Bryn Mawr—the most unlikely colleges in the land. Men flocked into the leadership of the church. Of the fifty ablest younger ministers on the Atlantic seaboard today, somewhere near half were directed into their vocation through his influence at that time. During the summer holidays Oxford and Cambridge were the centre of activity.<sup>26</sup>

There began the international visitation by traveling teams of young life-changers which were later to become a very prominent feature of the movement. Activities continued for the most part quietly and unpublicized, "almost in secret" as Harold Begbie wrote in 1922, until the fall of 1924, when the tide began to turn and opposition, which had hitherto been latent and spasmodic, flared into the open. Major setbacks occurred at Princeton in 1926 when opposition came to a head in charges of cultism leveled against

<sup>25</sup> Van Dusen, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the Philadelphian Society.<sup>27</sup> This led to an official investigation and subsequent unfavorable publicity for the movement.<sup>28</sup> Frank Buchman himself was presently barred from the campus by President Hibben. In 1926 his followers in the Philadelphian Society were charged with surreptitiously probing into the sex lives and personal problems of the undergraduate students, stimulating "a most unhealthy interest in morbid sexual matters among the student body," and generally disturbing the tranquillity of the campus. An informal investigation, the results of which were not made public, found the Buchman methods "dangerous from medical and psychological viewpoints," and Buchman was asked to refrain from evangelizing on the Princeton campus. A subsequent official investigation, published in December, 1926, exonerated the student leaders of the Philadelphian Society but served to give the movement a black eye in the public press.<sup>29</sup>

A similar episode occurred at Oxford University, when the undergraduate paper, *Isis*, published an editorial in May, 1928, demanding that "student leaders of the semireligious cult known as 'Buchmanism' be suspended from the university."<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, in spite of the opposition which had flared in various other quarters, the intervisitation of the traveling teams continued. In the summer of 1928 a team of six young men from Oxford and one from Holland went to South Africa to offer personal evangelism as the solution to the race tensions and cultural conflicts present among

<sup>27</sup> For a full account of the "Princeton episode," see Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-74. See also the *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1926, p. 14; Oct. 23, 1926, p. 10; Oct. 29, 1926, p. 16; and Nov. 7, 1926, sec. IX, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> A satire of a "Buchmanite" testimonial, "Good News for Sinners," by T. S. Matthews, appeared in the *New Republic*, XLIX (Dec. 8, 1926), 71-72.

<sup>29</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-74. See also the *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1927, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *New York Times*, May 17, 1928, p. 7.

Negroes and Caucasians, Boers and English. "Their work there," according to a subsequent Group witness, "affected national problems of race hatred, caught the attention of the whole country and won them from the South African press the name, 'Oxford Group.'"<sup>81</sup> During subsequent summers teams of nineteen and twenty-three life-changers were active in South Africa. Three more men went to Persia. The work in South Africa, observed another member of the movement, brought not only a name to the movement but also for some "the first realization that there was a new force at work in the world."<sup>82</sup> It also brought some of the first sympathetic newspaper publicity the movement had received since its beginning.

The record of the movement during the following few years was reported by one news writer as

filled with ever-broadening achievements. Inspired teams went out to many nations. They did not represent a creed or an organization or a class. They were simply propagating an age-old set of laws that Moses formulated. But the Oxford Group had embraced all ten of them in their "Four Absolutes" and had amassed countless recorded instances to prove their practical workability in our own times.<sup>83</sup>

Although the movement appears to have spread rather rapidly, there was no census of participants; and any effort to count members was definitely discouraged.

### *A First Century Christian Fellowship*

In the fall of 1930, the Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker, rector of Calvary Church in New York City, announced that the new parish house was to become the headquarters for Frank Buchman and his followers in "A First Century

<sup>81</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 279, 283.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Foot, *Life Began Yesterday* (New York, 1935), p. 158.

<sup>83</sup> Ben Jackson, quoted from the Carmel (Cal.) *Pine Cone* in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 33 (Aug. 16, 1939), 4.

Christian Fellowship." The *New York Times* reported that he spoke

with great hope and enthusiasm of the movement. . . . He termed it a movement within the Church for the awakening of personal religion. It was his belief that the idea, which has become international in character, is likely to have great social consequences. . . .

Dr. Shoemaker said that "the world seems ready for a revival" and that "God may be using this movement to usher it in."<sup>84</sup>

Convinced that "Park Avenue needs conversion as much as the Bowery," the rector had begun to conduct a "soul clinic" for personal evangelism among those who might find themselves "too much at ease in Zion . . . [and] grow warm with concern about themselves and demand a more challenging and vital spiritual experience" than normal church participation afforded them.<sup>85</sup>

Interest in the movement was not confined to any single denomination, and individuals from different social classes were urged to surrender their lives. The Oxford Group movement spread rapidly into many urban and suburban communities as converts caught and carried the "spirit" of the movement, its vocabulary and its by now quite clearly formulated patterns of conversion and participation. Typical, in certain respects, of the community campaigns carried forward in the United States was one launched in Louisville, Kentucky, which was reported in some detail:

L— went down to Louisville, made contacts there with strategic people; then R— P— and a small band of fervent men and women in the Group followed to prepare the way for a still bigger effort. . . .

The guidance came to the Oxford Group that a strong team

<sup>84</sup> *New York Times*, April 22, 1930, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

should be sent into Louisville, where conditions were symptomatic of the national emergency. Invitations to join the team were sent to a good many people, one to myself in England. . . . "Ninety of them came," one leader reported to me. "They ranged from wealthy society people to tradesmen and students. There was a Scotswoman who had run for Parliament at home and who had travelled to America for this series of meetings; and an Oxford student. There was a distinguished minister, for many years a missionary in China. There was a young married couple from Rhode Island whose lives and home had been completely changed by the message three years before. There was a young Episcopal clergyman who had a perfect genius for winning the confidence of boys and helping them to understand how Christ could aid them with their problems. There was a New York woman with a European title whose whole existence had been re-made through finding that an old friend of her husband had been brought to Christ through the Group.

"Pentecost saw no motlier crowd in its human composition, and they met with one accord in one place. Each had somewhere arrived at a decision for Jesus Christ, and learned the price and the necessity of full sharing fellowship with like-minded Christians. . . . There was a human leader but he could not possibly have carried the details of all the hours in the day of all the workers who were there. Yet there was not a single bit of individual sharpshooting; we worked almost like one person, because unity was there at the beginning. . . .

"There were daily groups for special interests: one for business men, one for women, and one for girls, one for boys, one for younger married women, and one for ministers; each was led by someone belonging to his particular group. There was daily Bible study. In the evenings we gathered for a united meeting. This began with 300 and ended with 2500. The theme was not preaching or exhorting, but simply individual witness to what Christ had done. As a result, family tangles were unsnarled, personal problems were solved, hundreds of people found a new power in Christ; the level of confidence in that city, depressed by the business slump, was enormously lifted."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-154.

On other "fronts" the message was being introduced—in churches, clubs, private schools. Through the houseparty the Oxford Group introduced itself and its message to New Yorkers and others. A ten-day houseparty at Briarcliff Manor, New York, typical of many that were held, began late in April, 1932, with some five hundred gathered, as one newspaper account said, "for golf and soul revelations." The activities included informal gatherings throughout the day. Not every one attended the "religious sessions"; in fact guests were free "to play golf all day or sit rocking on the porch" if they preferred to. "But all of them," the news story continued, "do go to the meetings, and most of them start the day with a half-hour period of private prayer in their rooms."<sup>87</sup>

A few months later a large group which had left London several months before to tour Canada and the United States addressed a meeting in Philadelphia. Speakers included the rector of Calvary Church in New York City, a Dutch count, a former president of the National Education Association, and others introduced as representing various occupational groups and social classes.<sup>88</sup> The meeting was held at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel with Dr. Buchman present and about nine hundred persons attending. The bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania welcomed the team to Philadelphia. Follow-up sessions were planned, and the Philadelphia Groups announced fellowship meetings in the city on the first Mondays of July, August, and September (1932).<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *New York Times*, April 25, 1932, p. 10. Items appeared in the *New York Times* during several days of the houseparty; see issues for April 20, p. 18; April 24, p. 25; April 25, p. 22; April 26, p. 22; and May 2, 1932, p. 15. Other newspapers and periodicals took note of the Buchman houseparties at Briarcliff Manor and elsewhere in the 1932 season. See, for example, "Spiritual House Party," *Literary Digest*, CXIII (May 28, 1932), 20.

<sup>88</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 14, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 14, 1932, p. 2.

The traveling team which had begun its tour of the United States in May included about sixty members, twenty-two of whom had come from abroad. The first meetings had been held in Washington, where the group was received by President Hoover and where meetings were attended by Supreme Court Justice Harlan Fiske Stone and other notables. A meeting at Dearborn, Michigan, was attended by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford. Other meetings to which prominent persons in the community were invited as sponsors were held in Detroit, Asheville, North Carolina, and several other cities. Following the meeting in Philadelphia the team returned to New York, and several of its members went on to London. In all, Dr. Buchman estimated that more than twenty-five thousand persons had attended meetings held by the team and their fellow Group participants in the different localities. The plans now called for a series of religious meetings in Europe during the summer starting with an International Houseparty to be held at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, June 24 to July 4. Subsequent meetings were scheduled to be held elsewhere in England and in Switzerland, Holland, and Germany; and in the fall the group expected to return to the United States.<sup>40</sup>

Impressive growth in activities and in support led one member of the Group movement to characterize it as "one of the most significant movements in religious history and certainly the most significant that has come to America."<sup>41</sup> Another felt that the movement had become popular "because it offered the only hope of saving the world from its present ills."<sup>42</sup>

Another season of houseparties and hotel gatherings was held in 1932-1933. At a large meeting in the Hotel Plaza

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, June 15, 1932, p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 4, 1933, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, June 15, 1932, p. 40.

in New York City in June, 1933, a team of forty workers, who had again toured the United States and Canada, reported "great and ever-increasing interest in the movement." "After people are 'changed,'" Dr. Buchman explained to the press, "they can understand others better and look more sympathetically on such problems as 'hunger marches' and potential riots."<sup>43</sup> About five hundred thousand persons were estimated to have been "reached" on the tour, and the leader of the movement was returning to Europe to take part in the annual houseparty at Oxford, June 28 to July 18.

### *The "Rising Tide"*

Larger and larger gatherings, and more and more publicity, were becoming characteristic of the Oxford Group movement although small Quiet Time circles continued active. Scores of news releases, magazine articles, and a steady stream of book-length testimonials began to appear in 1933 and 1934. Few of the books and articles which appeared escaped a strong bias either lauding or condemning the movement.

The first "national gathering" of the "Rising Tide" was held in 1934 in Denmark. Another, held a year later at Kronborg Castle, Elsinore, Denmark, was reported to have drawn ten thousand persons to organize "the Spiritual Mobilization of Europe."<sup>44</sup> To this gathering Frank Buchman declared:

... the Holy Spirit is the most intelligent source of information in the world today. He has the answer to every problem. Everywhere, when men will let Him, He is teaching them how to live. The world needs a miracle . . . of the spirit. . . . Divine guidance must become the normal experience of the ordinary man and woman.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, June 7, 1933, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

In July, 1935, the gathering at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, was organized as a "national demonstration of British goodwill."<sup>46</sup> In Geneva, the leaders of the Oxford Groups had also been active. They had approached and won the support of the president of the Assembly of the League of Nations, Mr. Carl J. Hambro, of Norway, who flew to London in December, 1933, to speak to 120 members of Parliament in a committee-room of the House of Commons about the Oxford Group movement and its implications as he saw them.<sup>47</sup> Mass meetings at Ollerup, Denmark (Easter, 1936); Lausanne, Switzerland (April, 1937); Utrecht, the Netherlands (May, 1937), marked the progress of the Oxford Group movement toward its Moral Rearmament crusade.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile in the United States the Group had made a somewhat less spectacular but still notable progress, chiefly in metropolitan and fashionable resort centers. The controversies which marked its progress served to publicize the movement widely both in religious and in secular journals.<sup>49</sup> A group of Chicagoans had "looked into" the movement at

<sup>46</sup> *Rising Tide* (Chicago, 1937), p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> In September, 1935, a luncheon was given in Geneva to several hundred delegates (chiefly from European countries) invited to hear the implications for international goodwill of Buchmanism. See *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 1935, p. 13; also "Oxford Faith: Statesman's Hope," *Literary Digest*, CXX (Nov. 30, 1935), 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Rising Tide*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Richard Roberts, "The Oxford Group," *Christian Century*, L (Feb. 1, 1933), 147-149, and J. C. Perkins, "Technique of the Groups: Reply to R. Roberts," *ibid.*, L (Feb. 22, 1933), 261; Halford E. Luccock, "Buchmanism: An Escape," *World Tomorrow*, XVI (Jan. 18, 1933), 62-63, and J. I. Daniel, "Buchmanism and Social Vision: Reply to H. E. Luccock," *ibid.*, XVI (Feb. 22, 1933), 186-187.

Controversy was not limited to theological issues or to questions of method for evangelizing. See C. S. Williams, "Buchmanism 'Settles' the Coast Strike," *Christian Century*, LI (July 25, 1934), 969-970, and S. S. Day, "Buchmanism Settles the Coast Strike: Reply with Rejoinder," *ibid.*, LI (Sept. 19, 1934), 1180; also R. V. Lennard, "Morals and the Group Movement," *Nineteenth Century and After*, CXIV (Nov., 1933), 592-603, and F. B. Bourdillon, "Morals and the Group Movement: Reply," *ibid.*, CXIV (Dec., 1933), 710-717.

a luncheon gathering; some had found it good.<sup>50</sup> Several prominent Americans were interested in the movement; Harvey S. Firestone attended one meeting to hear his son publicly testify to personal experience in the Group.<sup>51</sup> John D. Rockefeller, Jr. received a group of visitors from abroad at Radio City.<sup>52</sup> International Teams traveled between Europe and America, usually accompanied by Frank Buchman, and the movement drew increasing attention.<sup>53</sup> Despite the bitter denunciations of some churchmen and the less severe chidings of others, who were either personally or professionally interested in religious practices, the Oxford Group flourished.<sup>54</sup> *For Sinners Only* in a few years time underwent several printings; and other testimonials, e.g., *Life Began Yesterday, I Was a Pagan, New Lives for Old, One Thing I Know, He Came to Me, and Why I Believe in the Oxford Group*, appeared.

In June, 1936, the first National Assembly of the Rising Tide in America was held in the Berkshires at Stockbridge, a summer colony in Massachusetts.<sup>55</sup> This gathering was

<sup>50</sup> "Chicagoans to Investigate Oxford Group," *Newsweek*, I (March 4, 1933), 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1934, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, March 13, 1934, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 20, 1934, p. 22. See also issues for March 2, 1934, p. 17; April 22, 1934, p. 16; Feb. 5, 1935, p. 5; Oct. 15, 1935, p. 23; Nov. 21, 1935, p. 9. Arrivals and departures of Frank Buchman especially were publicized.

<sup>54</sup> Criticism of Buchmanism among religious leaders is so varied in nature and so extensive in scope that this aspect alone might be subject for analysis. Especially outspoken in his criticism of the principles and practices of the Oxford Group was H. H. Henson, Bishop of Durham (England), who wrote, "After a very careful study of Groupist literature, and much communication with those who have had close personal relations with Groupism, I find myself driven to the conclusion that Dr. Buchman's Movement is dangerously unsound" (*The Oxford Group Movement* [2nd ed.; New York, 1934], p. vii).

Illustrative of various other attitudes of churchmen are letters addressed to the *London Times* and to the *New York Times*. See, for example, "Oxford Group Scored by Dr. A. W. Gaebelin," *New York Times*, Aug. 14, 1933, p. 18; also issues of Feb. 27, 1933, p. 13; July 16, 1934, p. 9, and April 11, 1938, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Advance publicity began to appear in the *New York Times*, May 16, 1936, and in daily issues from May 29 through June 8. See also "Spiritual Drive,"

held just prior to the Republican and Democratic National Conventions in Cleveland and in Philadelphia. First to Cleveland and then to Philadelphia a team went to remind the candidates and the delegates that "God is the person that the American voter has to reckon with in the coming election."<sup>56</sup> It was explained that the purpose of the team in following the conventions was definitely "non-political," and "no direct efforts were made to influence party platforms."<sup>57</sup> Headquarters in Philadelphia were set up at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, where the Democratic National Committee also had its rooms, so that "delegates familiar with the Oxford Group movement might meet members of the Group if they wished."<sup>58</sup> Later Frank Buchman conferred with the Republican candidate for the presidency, Governor Alfred M. Landon, and some members of the Group gave the latter a campaign song.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile members of another International Team that had come from Europe were entertained by "social leaders in Newport, Rhode Island," and encouraged in their endeavors.<sup>60</sup> Popular interest also appeared to be strong. An article on the Oxford Group in the *American Weekly*, a magazine supplement distributed with Hearst Sunday newspapers, was reported to have "called forth more letters than any other article in the forty years' history of the paper."<sup>61</sup>

To publicize its message and the testimonies of the movement, the Oxford Group, through a volunteer editorial team

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*Literary Digest*, CXXI (June 13, 1936), 32-33; "Groupers in Stockbridge," *Time*, XXVII (June 15, 1936), 35-38; and *Newsweek*, VII, No. 23 (June 6, 1936), 26-27.

<sup>56</sup> *New York Times*, June 11, 1936, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, June 20, 1936, p. 2; June 21, 1936, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 20, 1936, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *New York Times*, Sept. 15, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 4, 1936, p. 23. See also "Buchman at Newport," *Time*, XXVIII (Sept. 14, 1936), 63.

<sup>61</sup> Mimeographed Oxford Group newsletter, June, 1939.

in New York City, published *Rising Tide* in a format suggestive of *Life* magazine. The telegraphic copy accompanying pictures on successive pages declared:

THIS AMAZING WORLD . . . IS SEETHING WITH . . . energy, endurance, enthusiasm, intelligence, imagination, invention . . . CURRENTS OF NATIONAL LIFE AND . . . DEATH . . . pride, prejudice, fear, greed, selfishness, hate. . . HUMAN WISDOM HAS FAILED. . . BUT GOD HAS A PLAN . . . A RISING TIDE OF MEN AND WOMEN New Men New Nations New World. . . .<sup>62</sup>

An insert explained that the *Rising Tide* was appearing simultaneously in ten countries and nine languages, with a first printing of more than one million copies, that it had been "put together by men and women who are new to pictorial journalism" but whose idea it was "to present in pictures the answer to the riddle of life and the unrest of modern nations." The financial backing of this first large-scale publication venture of the Oxford Group movement, it was explained, came from "men and women of every type—office worker, factory worker, truck driver, businessman—who have gladly dug down into their pockets to carry the expenses of the publication." The magazine was sold on public newsstands at a dime a copy; many issues were given away.<sup>63</sup>

It was as the movement for "Moral Rearmament" rather than as the "Rising Tide" that the Oxford Group reached its apparent climax. The term was introduced by Frank Buchman in a widely publicized speech delivered in Lon-

<sup>62</sup> *Rising Tide*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>63</sup> Only one issue of this magazine appeared. Publications by Oxford Group editorial teams included, in addition to *Rising Tide*, the *New Witness*, the *Berkshire Eagle*, and, more recently, *New World News*. The *New Witness*, a weekly publication edited in Montreal, was begun as an Oxford Group publication in January, 1936. Publication continued until June 26, 1940, when it failed for lack of financial support. Unexpired subscriptions were transferred to the *Calvary Evangel*, which was edited by the assistant pastor of Calvary Church, New York City.

don, May, 1938, when he declared: ". . . the world's condition cannot but cause disquiet and anxiety. Hostility piles up between nation and nation, labor and capital, class and class. . . . *The crisis is fundamentally a moral one. The nations must rearm morally.*"<sup>64</sup>

#### *Moral Rearmament—Before the War*

The new evangelical crusade evolved quite naturally out of the national assemblies which were begun in 1934. National unity, international peace, co-operation among labor, capital, and management were now to be achieved in the same manner in which personal salvation, inward peace, and security had been won by converts a decade before. Long-time members of the Oxford Group were quick to catch up and point out implications of Moral Rearmament; most of them moved quite easily and naturally into the publicity campaign from their previously less heralded work with individuals and small groups on a personal face-to-face basis. Work with individuals continued; but more sinners could be reached and led into the initial stages of "change" (or urged to experiment in seeking guidance and to follow other Group patterns on their own initiative) by means of a large-scale program for publicizing "M.R.A." The younger leaders who began to appear had not undergone the kind of soul surgery operations that Frank Buchman had conducted earlier at Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton, and elsewhere.

The crisis at Munich in the fall of 1938 gave impetus to the movement, and many prominent persons, particularly in England, either joined in the crusade for Moral Rearmament or publicly endorsed it. One American critic of the movement traced the British appeasement policy to the influence of Frank Buchman's ideas among English political leaders; for proof he cited a pamphlet circulated by mem-

<sup>64</sup> Buchman, *Remaking the World* (abridged ed.), p. 16.

bers of the Oxford Group entitled *Moral Rearmament: The Battle for Peace*, which contained letters of endorsement or signatures of approval from Lord Baldwin, as well as from twenty-five peers in important government positions, twelve baronets . . . thirty-three M.P.'s, thirty-seven champion athletes, twenty-one leading journalists, seventeen trade union heads, a number of industrialists, and a few distinguished academicians—in short, a fair section of the British ruling class.<sup>65</sup>

Other critics subsequently charged that the movement was pro-Nazi, reactionary, and pacifist.<sup>66</sup>

A "World Assembly" for MRA was held in Interlaken, Switzerland, during the first two weeks of September, 1938. Political spokesmen as well as Group delegates were present at a testimonial dinner tendered Dr. Buchman at Geneva.<sup>67</sup>

In the United States the Munich crisis had not been felt so acutely as it had been in England and on the Continent; Moral Rearmament, however, made rapid headway. A National Conference for Moral Rearmament was called in New York City, December 10 and 11. One hundred and twenty young men from several states, Canada, and England gathered to meet with Frank Buchman and a score of his veteran life-changers and to plan the campaign for the United States. Several conferees attended a luncheon at the University Club. Speaking informally, former President Hoover was quoted as saying:

I am one of those who believes that ethics and morality are at the basis of our social system—that we cannot escape individual responsibility of men toward their neighbors. Civilization

<sup>65</sup> Ernest S. Bates, "Buchmanism: Opiate for the Classes," *American Mercury*, XLVII (June, 1939), 190. The pamphlet referred to was edited by H. W. "Bunny" Austin.

<sup>66</sup> The so-called "Oxford pledge" against military service for king and country while associated by George Seldes in his editorials in *In Fact* with the Oxford Group was not originated or sponsored by it.

<sup>67</sup> *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1938, p. 15.

is founded upon an individual sense of truth, justice, and respect for the personality of others. The relaxation of moral standards—public, political, and private—constitutes the greatest of disasters. I believe that the solution of a thousand questions arises more in the quarter of moral rearmament than in any other quarter.<sup>68</sup>

At the evening sessions several persons "shared convictions about the part of the individual in national and world rebuilding." The Interlaken World Assembly was reported upon and a campaign for bringing Moral Rearmament to Americans outlined. One speaker sketched the "vast expansion of administrative detail demanded by Moral Rearmament on a national scale" and called upon fellow Group members to "master details, to think big, to move fearlessly." An Oxford Group film, *Youth Marches On*, was previewed and plans set under way for large rallies to be held in New York, Washington, and elsewhere in the ensuing months.<sup>69</sup>

Armed with endorsements from scores of the leading figures in almost every occupation and profession and purporting to represent all races, social classes, and many nationalities, the major sports, the different denominations and churches, Moral Rearmament came to America in force in the late spring of 1939.<sup>70</sup>

A large rally was held in Madison Square Garden Sunday night, May 14. Elaborate and extensive plans had been made, and the meeting was heralded with as much publicity as participants in the movement could give it. Sponsors for this "Citizens' Meeting" numbered some 130 prominent New Yorkers and others, including Governor and Mrs. Herbert Lehman, Mayor and Mrs. Fiorello LaGuardia, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred E. Smith, Col. and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt,

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in mimeographed Oxford Group newsletter, Dec. 21, 1938, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *New York Times*, March 10, 1939, p. 14.

Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Dr. and Mrs. Henry N. MacCracken, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Massey, Miss Geraldine Farrar, and Mrs. Sara Delano Roosevelt. Invitations and tickets were distributed widely, and an estimated twelve thousand persons attended.<sup>71</sup> "Though the man behind the meeting was born in Pennsburg, Pennsylvania," commented Stanley High in the *Saturday Evening Post* some weeks after what he called the "first American showing" of MRA, "its showmanship was unmistakably British."<sup>72</sup>

Varied reports concerning the effectiveness of the rally were forthcoming. "You have planted something far bigger than you know," said one New York City official. "What you have started is irresistible and will quickly sweep the country."<sup>73</sup>

An editorial in the Richmond, Virginia, *News-Leader* of May 22 stated:

New York still is echoing with more comment on the meeting in Madison Square Garden on May 14 than with plaudits of the World's Fair. Men who have attended many gatherings in the great hall say that never did they witness quite such a scene as when citizens of many lands rose to plead, in brief, persuasive, and convinced speeches, for moral rearmament.<sup>74</sup>

The *Washington Post* carried a full column editorial on May 16 commenting on the gathering:

The walls of Madison Square Garden have echoed to many manifestations of the human spirit. But seldom, if ever, have they contained a more significant mass meeting than that which on Sunday night inaugurated there a campaign for Moral Rearmament in the United States.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, May 15, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley High, "What Is Moral Rearmament?" *Saturday Evening Post*, CCXII (Aug. 12, 1939), 23 ff.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in mimeographed Oxford Group newsletter, May 25, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Mr. High's opinion was caustic:

Estimating results here by what has happened in England, it is safe to say that if the nation is not morally rearmed by Labor Day, it will at least know that it has been worked on.<sup>76</sup>

He had also noted that twelve thousand was not a capacity crowd for Madison Square Garden.

The extent of the planning and of the press "contacts" that had been made, or were made subsequent to the meeting, is indicated by the large number of editorials that appeared throughout the country. The "attack" was simultaneous. The Sunday *Dispatch* of Columbus, Ohio, for example, printed a statement on Moral Rearmament signed by the Governor of Ohio, the mayor of the city, and the president of its Chamber of Commerce. In Lincoln, Nebraska, the *Journal* for the same day affirmed that

the Oxford Group is apparently making the right approach. It is foolish to reform nations when no progress is made in reforming the men who make them. . . . Solve the problem of the individual, rearm him morally, and the problem of the collection of individuals will melt rapidly away.<sup>77</sup>

The week beginning May 14 had been proclaimed "M.R.A. Week"; and *Time*, the *Nation*, *Newsweek*, the *Christian Century*, and other publications carried news stories concerning it.<sup>78</sup> Groups in localities throughout the

<sup>76</sup> High, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Newsletter, May 25, 1939, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> "Moral Rearmament Week," *Nation*, CXLVIII (May 20, 1939), 575; "MRA Week," *Time*, XXXIII (May 22, 1939), 62-64; "Moral Rearmament: M.R.A. in the U.S.A.," *Newsweek*, XIII (May 22, 1939), 696-697.

Several articles briefly reviewing the Oxford Group and Moral Rearmament appeared in 1938 and 1939. See, in addition to the articles by Stanley High and Ernest S. Bates, cited above, the *New York Times*, June 5, 1938, VII, p. 5; "Moral Rearmament," *Time*, XXXII (Sept. 19, 1938), 52; A. S. Richardson, "The Oxford Group, What Is It?," *Woman's Home Companion*, LXV (Sept., 1938), 10 ff.; "God in Modern Dress," *New Republic*, XCIX (June 14, 1939), 146; "Un Croisade mystique pour le rearmament moral des Nations," *L'illustration*, CCIII (Aug. 5, 1939), 473-478.

country organized and carried out local drives both before and after the Citizens' Meeting.

Shortly afterwards temporary headquarters for the movement were set up in a suite in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D. C., and plans were carried forward for a "National Meeting for Moral Rearmament" to be held at Constitution Hall in the Capital on Sunday evening, June 4. Again, as in New York, sponsors whose names appeared on the printed invitations included an impressive array of political and social leaders: Hon. and Mrs. William B. Bankhead, Hon. Alben W. Barkley, Mr. William Green, Hon. and Mrs. Harold L. Ickes, Mr. and Mrs. Felix Morley, Hon. Frances Perkins, and many others. Salutations that had been sent to the Citizens' Meeting in New York were reprinted in the invitation. The Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, had written, for example, "International morality has seldom been at a lower ebb. The time is ripe and the need is urgent for a renewal and restoration of the former high standard of conduct of both individuals and governments."<sup>70</sup>

Several days before the meeting it was arranged that Frank Buchman and some twenty of his associates, including the Davis Cup tennis champion, H. W. "Bunny" Austin, meet newsmen at a luncheon at the National Press Club. Several Group participants spoke briefly: Sven Stople, a Stockholm journalist, emphasized that one could not be "a dictator in one's own home and an anarchist at heart and

<sup>70</sup> Quoted from printed invitation to M.R.A. National Meeting at Constitution Hall, Washington, D. C., June 4, 1939, p. 2. Statements from other high-ranking governmental officials were also printed on the invitation. "The great need of the hour," said Senator Robert F. Wagner, "is for a spirit of Moral Rearmament in every phase of national life. Inspired by such a spirit, Labor and Industry can take their rightful place of service in the public interest, and demonstrate to the world that unity in which alone lie liberty and peace."

Messages from former President Hoover, Attorney-General Frank Murphy, Speaker William B. Bankhead, Senators Alben Barkley and Arthur Capper and Congressman Joseph W. Martin, Jr., were reproduced along with an endorsement sent by Alexis Carrel.

expect to practice democracy." Another member of the team who spoke, a retired bishop of Hankow, said that he had discussed Moral Rearmament with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek and with a Japanese official in Tokyo, and both had agreed that it was the only plan for the solution of difficulties between the two countries. Frank Buchman himself spoke only briefly, introducing other members of his team, which included a "leader of the English Trades Union Congress," a "close friend of the Prime Minister of Greece," a British cricketer, two Swedish steelworkers, a French baron, a German baron, a former syndicate press photographer, and "several other press representatives." Several government officials, Congressmen, and diplomats were present in the audience.<sup>80</sup>

The mass meeting in Constitution Hall on June 4 was opened with a message from President Roosevelt:

The underlying strength of the world must consist in the moral fiber of her citizens. A program of moral re-armament for the world cannot fail, therefore, to lessen the danger of armed conflict. Such moral re-armament to be most highly effective . . . must receive support on a world-wide basis.<sup>81</sup>

Messages of endorsement and encouragement were read from other high-ranking political and social leaders. The principal address was given by Frank Buchman.<sup>82</sup> The day after the meeting the *New York Times* gave a front page

<sup>80</sup> *Washington Post*, May 6, 1939, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Philadelphia Record*, June 5, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> His speech, together with a large number of messages received from members of the British House of Lords, the House of Commons, and other European parliamentary bodies, from labor union officials, and from prominent industrialists, was read into the *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, Second Session* (Senate, June 8, 1939), at the request of Senator Harry S. Truman, who said that he felt it "particularly appropriate . . . [to record] these messages from Great Britain . . . because of the presence here of the King and Queen of Great Britain. Among the signatories," he explained, "are men who both personally and officially are associated with Their Majesties."

position to the news story concerning the President's endorsement, mentioning the support also of Governor Lehman, General Pershing, and Anthony Eden.<sup>83</sup> "It was front page in the *Herald-Tribune* also," the Group newsletter reported, "and, of course, in the *Washington Post*, and the *Times-Herald*."<sup>84</sup> A picture of the meeting was sent out by the Associated Press.

Almost immediately preparations were made to carry the Moral Rearmament crusade to California. No mass meetings comparable to those in New York and Washington were scheduled in the Midwest, but a great "Call to the Nations" rally was to be held in the Hollywood Bowl on July 19. This was to be followed by a second World Assembly for Moral Rearmament in a ten-day conference on the Monterey Peninsula. Local preparations in California followed the pattern that had led up to the meeting in Washington, with luncheon meetings and informal gatherings to introduce the Group leaders and their ideas to civic, business, industrial, and labor leaders. Interested groups had begun to make the necessary plans and to advertise the movement throughout southern California. Group spokesmen addressed meetings from Alhambra to Santa Monica in the Los Angeles area as the final drive began. A luncheon to which some three hundred Los Angeles business and social leaders were invited was held at the Biltmore Hotel, where Dr. Buchman was presented by the president of the Chamber of Commerce. The latter said that the Group was coming to "make M.R.A. practical for Los Angeles and California."<sup>85</sup> Similar introductions were arranged before the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, the Los Angeles Athletic Club, and

<sup>83</sup> *New York Times*, June 5, 1939, p. 1. See also "M.R.A. in Washington," *Time*, XXXIII (June 12, 1939), 54.

<sup>84</sup> Oxford Group newsletter, June 12, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> *New Witness*, IV, No. 29 (July 19, 1939), 1.

others. Headquarters were set up at the Hotel Vista del Arroyo in Pasadena. Free tickets for the Hollywood Bowl meeting were distributed not only by participants in the movement but by a drugstore chain in the Los Angeles area. "To swell the already large M.R.A. forces in Los Angeles," the Los Angeles *Times* reported, "a twenty-two car special Union Pacific train will arrive . . . with three hundred aboard. Their leader is H. W. (Bunny) Austin. . . . Still another one hundred and fifty Canadians will reach Los Angeles aboard a special Southern Pacific train from Vancouver. . . ."<sup>86</sup>

Teams who prepared the way were chosen to demonstrate the wide variety of types who were leading the Moral Rearmament movement, yet they were selected with an eye also to the character of the local group that was being approached. Telegrams, reported to be "flooding" MRA headquarters, were released to the press. One was from Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd; another was from "twelve British scientists."<sup>87</sup> Among the messages was one addressed also to the New York meeting, with signers "representing millions of citizens in all countries who have responded to the call of Moral Rearmament first sounded just over a year ago in East London."<sup>88</sup>

At the meeting itself thirty thousand people were reported present with ten thousand more turned away for lack of room. President Roosevelt's message was reread. Others from former President Hoover and Henry Ford were read, and Louis B. Mayer of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer spoke. The rally was pronounced a great success. "Our goal," Dr. Buchman suggested, "is one hundred million people listening to God every day by the week-end of December 1st, 2nd, and 3rd."<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Los Angeles *Times*, July 18, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> *New Witness*, IV, No. 34 (Aug. 23, 1939), 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, No. 30 (July 26, 1939), 5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

From Hollywood the Group delegates moved on to Monterey, California, to hold the second World Assembly at Asilomar. Sessions extending over several days were devoted to exchanging ideas and plans and hearing messages and reports of progress. For several weeks prior to the conference, MRA "Training Centers" had been set up to help train Group leaders. Brought together in conference, men and women from different backgrounds were urged to become "architects of the new age." They were asked by others to "vitalize and give meaning to their creative ability by a return to 'the Age of Faith.'"<sup>90</sup> Sessions on one of the days were "marked by messages from the president of the All-Canada Congress of Labor, by the president of the Vancouver Stock Exchange and by other Canadians," outlining their intentions and attitudes with respect to MRA. A veteran Canadian general termed the drive for a morally rearmed world "a new form of preparedness available either for peace or for war."<sup>91</sup> The assembly concluded with the conviction, the *New Witness* observed, that the world must achieve moral recovery before economic recovery is possible. In a pamphlet, *The Golden Age of M.R.A.*, other objectives had already been outlined. Now there emerged "the determination for an M.R.A. World Drive. . . . Delegates undertook responsibilities for broadcasting the plan [which had been 'hammered out' at a closed-door meeting of the Assembly] to their respective areas through radio, type, platform and personal contacts."<sup>92</sup> MRA aims were now "to keep the peace and make it permanent; to make the wealth and work of the world available to all and for the exploitation of none."<sup>93</sup>

Before the delegates to the second World Assembly dis-

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, No. 31 (Aug. 2, 1939), 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, No. 32 (Aug. 9, 1939), 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, No. 30 (July 26, 1939), 8.

<sup>93</sup> *The Golden Age of MRA* (New York, 1939), p. 2.

persed, the conference representatives moved on to San Francisco to conduct an "M.R.A. Day" program at the Pacific International Exposition. Activities consisted chiefly of a parade, broadcasts, and receptions at several foreign pavilions. Thereafter the delegates returned home to work toward the goal of one hundred million listening by December 3.

*Moral Rearmament—During the War*

Within a month World War II broke out, and the terse alternative which Frank Buchman had put before his listeners—"Guns or Guidance?"<sup>94</sup>—was set aside. Group response to the war, as we shall have occasion to note later, was neither uniform nor decisive, although efforts were made to redefine the objective of the movement in the light of the new conditions surrounding the Group.

Frank Buchman, interviewed on Moral Rearmament in relation to the war, said:

We are fighters ever—in the battle for peace. We have war today because we have had war for the last twenty years—war in industry, war in homes. Those wars still remain to be stopped before we shall have permanent peace in the world. If you want to stop war in the world, stop war in the home. War is "Peace" continued by other means. America's greatest contribution to the world can be made right here in America. She can build such a picture of peace—peace and cooperation in every sphere of life—that all the nations will want it. The enemy right within our borders is our colossal selfishness. Agreements and policies are secondary to the motives in the hearts of men.<sup>95</sup>

A September newsletter from the Gramercy Park headquarters urged:

Our great objective now is one hundred million people throughout the world listening to God during the week of December 1,

<sup>94</sup> *New Witness*, IV, No. 37 (Sept. 13, 1939), 1.

<sup>95</sup> Oxford Group newsletter, Sept. 28, 1939, p. 1.

2, 3. To achieve this, our most urgent need is a network of teams across the country, taking active and intelligent responsibility in mobilizing the resources of press, radio, motion picture and distribution of literature. We have a map on which we are marking in different colors the centers where a team is constantly reporting to us on one or more of these spheres of public inspiration. We are anxious to have four different colors in every city and town.<sup>96</sup>

The Oxford Group, apparently undaunted by the outbreak of the war and convinced of the adequacy of its diagnosis of the causes of the holocaust, continued in its course. "The very antithesis of war," the Seattle *Daily Times* commented, "Moral Rearmament partakes not at all of supine and flaccid pacifism. It is a virile manifestation; literally an aggressive movement toward the objective of peace among men."<sup>97</sup>

The organization of community drives, publicity campaigns in factories, and the activities of individuals among their friends and associates were resumed. Active participants in the Group were reported to be

writing articles and scripts, informing friends of broadcasts, and writing the stations afterwards to thank them, sending copies of newspapers to friends and thanking the editors, sending reports and clippings to New York, and all the time, day and night, there are those conversations which meet the needs of men and women, bringing them into first-hand touch with God to create the organism which can serve as the moral backbone of our nation.<sup>98</sup>

"Mobilization" of the one hundred million listeners began promptly. On Sunday, October 29, 1939, a world-wide broadcast, preparatory to the broadcasts to come on December 1, 2, and 3, was held. Participants included, be-

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 39 (Sept. 27, 1939), 1.

<sup>98</sup> Oxford Group newsletter, Sept. 28, 1939, p. 2.

sides Frank Buchman, Senator Truman of Missouri, Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, and Herbert E. Elvin, former chairman of the British Trades Union Congress. The full broadcast program was read into the *Congressional Record* in a speech by Senator Elbert D. Thomas of Utah and widely distributed.<sup>99</sup> Activities in scattered communities included the planning of publicity for the December week end as well as the older Group practices that had been carried on before the MRA campaign.

By the first week end in December the broadcasts had been publicized as thoroughly as possible; numerous editorials in papers throughout the country took note of the event. The San Francisco *Chronicle* termed the series of broadcasts

an unprecedented experiment in the application of moral strength to the mighty door of Mars which stand as seemingly insurmountable barriers between their peoples and peace.

With a new undeclared war raging in Europe and new griefs added to peaceful nations by internal dissensions, a hundred million people will join today, tomorrow and Sunday in listening for guidance through the hate, fear and greed-infested maze which is society.<sup>100</sup>

The world-wide broadcasts were sent out from London and from Boston. A featured speaker on the opening day's program from London was an uncle of the British King, the Earl of Athlone. Many messages and proclamations and semi-official statements from British mayors and others were read. Speakers from Boston included the widow of Thomas A. Edison, who spoke of Moral Rearmament as "The New Illumination," and Frank Buchman. Twenty-five thousand

<sup>99</sup> Reprinted from the *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, Second Session* (Senate, Oct. 31, 1939). Reprinted and circulated at Group expense.

<sup>100</sup> San Francisco *Chronicle*, Dec. 1, 1939, p. 9. See also the New York *Times*, Dec. 1, 1939, p. 28.

"listening parties" were reported arranged in Great Britain, another such party was "arranged by the Lord Chamberlain to Queen Wilhelmina, together with Catholic and Protestant Members of Parliament and civic leaders," and other groups were reported assembled in France, China, Japan, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries, as well as in the United States and Canada.<sup>101</sup> Dr. Buchman's speech was reprinted and widely circulated in both England and the United States; some two million copies of the British reprints were reported sold on the newsstands. Radio news commentators in the United States took note of the broadcasts.<sup>102</sup>

The actual extent of the listening, however, or of full participation in the practices of the Oxford Group movement could not be measured. There were only assertions as to the strength of popular interest in the ideas broadcast and only rough estimates of the consequences. The MRA week end in December, 1939, represented one last major effort of the Oxford Groups in their "battle for peace." Thereafter news items, magazine articles, and editorials dropped off sharply.<sup>103</sup> Pamphlets appeared less frequently; subscriptions to the *New Witness* began to fall off abruptly. By June, 1940, the editor of the latter publication wrote:

If we are all really convinced that MRA is more needed today than ever before—that it is a God-directed plan for these critical times, then we must each be backing MRA with all our power and abilities. Under this conviction, *The New Witness* has been carried on continuously at very heavy cost to its publisher till now, when his estate is no longer able to stand the strain. . . .<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *New Witness*, V, No. 2 (Jan. 10, 1940), 5.

<sup>102</sup> Frank Buchman's speech was printed in the United States in *Radio Guide*, Dec. 15, 1939, and elsewhere. See also the *New Witness*, IV, No. 50 (Dec. 13, 1939), 1.

<sup>103</sup> Indicative of this trend are the decreasing number of entries under "Oxford Group" in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*. For the period from July, 1939, through June, 1941, there were less than half a dozen articles listed as compared with 38 for the period from July, 1932, through June, 1935.

<sup>104</sup> *New Witness*, V, No. 24 (June 12, 1940), 6.

Financial difficulties forced the paper out of existence; the last issue appeared June 26.

The collapse of the *New Witness*, in itself not a serious blow to the Oxford Group movement, was, nevertheless, symbolic of a sudden deflation of enthusiasm for its Moral Rearmament crusade after the retreat from Dunkirk and the fall of France. Whether this breakdown of popular interest would carry the Oxford Group movement down along with it was not clearly evident. The Group movement, already some twenty years in existence, had demonstrated a considerable amount of persistence and flexibility.

In California the leaders in Moral Rearmament adapted the message of personal evangelism to the needs of national defense as they saw them. A pamphlet entitled *You Can Defend America* was released to the public newsstands throughout the country in the spring of 1941. It called for "sound homes," "teamwork in industry," and a united nation. In large red and blue letters the reader was told what he could do:

America needs guts as well as guns.

National character is the core of national defense.

Congress can't vote it.

Dollars won't buy it.

It's your job to build it.

How?

Change! Unite! Fight!<sup>105</sup>

A dramatic skit of the same title, "You Can Defend America," was worked up, and with it went the full-time life-changers who had become active leaders of the movement during the MRA crusade. About two dozen young men traveled among defense plant communities chiefly on the West Coast and in the Detroit area, although Groups continued active in Philadelphia, in New England, and elsewhere throughout the United States.

<sup>105</sup> *You Can Defend America* (Washington, 1940), pp. 14-15.

In the meantime dissensions which had been developing for some time in England came to a head. Application for incorporation had been approved but not without bitter protest from Mr. A. P. Herbert, Member of Parliament for Oxford University, who objected to the inclusion of the name Oxford in the charter. Fresh invectives were brought down upon the Group when sympathizers of the movement in Parliament protested the refusal of the British Labor Minister, Ernest Bevin, to exempt the Group's full-time lay evangelists, the life-changers, from military service. Bevin and Herbert defended this judgment with an argument which none of the sympathizers rose publicly to answer.<sup>106</sup>

In the United States, Dr. Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr., a former ranking leader of the Group, announced in November, 1941, that he was asking the Group to leave the Calvary Church parish house and that he himself was withdrawing from the movement "after careful thought and prayer" because "certain policies and points of view . . . have arisen in the development of Moral Rearmament about which we have increased misgivings."<sup>107</sup> In an interview with the press he voiced the opinion that Dr. Buchman was intent upon forming an independent sect instead of urging his following to remain loyal to their denominations and churches. The life-changers withdrew from their Gramercy Park headquarters to a near-by apartment and continued the program of lay evangelism. Dr. Buchman, who continued to travel among the faithful of his remaining followers, was stricken with a heart attack a year later and retired to Saratoga Springs, New York, to recuperate. Leadership of Moral Rearmament in the United States in the meantime

<sup>106</sup> "Less Buchmanism," *Time*, XXXVIII (Nov. 24, 1941), 59. For further information on the background of this controversy see "Oxford v. the Group," *Time*, XXXIII (March 6, 1939), 33, and "Oxford Begrudges Its Name to the Groups," *Christian Century*, LVI (March 8, 1939), 308.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60. See also the *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1941, p. 18.

fell to John McCook Roots, Jr., who directed activities from Washington, D. C.

A few months later twenty-eight life-changers—twenty-five British citizens, one Canadian, one Norwegian, and a Dane—all of whom were registered with a Selective Service Board in New York City, were classified 1-A for draft induction into American military service. Carrying with him a "highly complimentary introductory letter" from Representative James W. Wadsworth and a request that the classification of the local board be ordered reconsidered, Mr. Roots visited the New York State Director of Selective Service, Brigadier General Ames T. Brown. The men wished to file petitions for occupational deferment on the ground that they were contributing to the essential industrial morale of war workers.<sup>108</sup> On January 4, 1943, General Brown ordered the cases of the twenty-eight reopened in New York, but the Appeal Board in New York upheld the decision of the local board, and the young men in question were ordered to report for induction.<sup>109</sup>

This action on the part of Selective Service officials put what proved to be only a temporary damper on the movement. During the war those individuals who had deeply committed themselves to the crusade for Moral Rearmament held fast to their convictions that the program of the movement was the right one for them as well as for their society.

In Detroit and other industrial centers, the MRA skit on industrial peace, "The Forgotten Factor," continued to be given. Meetings for Moral Rearmament continued to be held in the East and in West Coast cities, with summer gatherings at Mackinac Island in Lake Huron. With the

<sup>108</sup> *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1943, pp. 1, 12. See also *PM*, Jan. 7, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> The case was followed rather closely by the press. See the *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1943, p. 4; Feb. 5, p. 12; Feb. 6, p. 21; and also the *New York Daily Mirror*, Feb. 6, 1943, p. 4.

publication, in 1945 and 1946, of two books on Moral Rearmament by a British journalist, Peter Howard, and the resumption of publication of a journal for the movement, *New World News*, the movement served notice of its intention to continue its crusade.<sup>110</sup>

After the war Frank Buchman acquired, at a very nominal sum, a palatial residence at Caux-sur-Montreux, Switzerland; and this place, called "Mountain House," serves at the present time as the international center of the movement. Here, amid beautiful surroundings, a kind of continuous houseparty remains in session. Celebrities and students, life-changers and invited guests from far and wide, numbering between three and four hundred or more, live and work in this community. For especially prominent persons and for older participants there are luxurious quarters, staffed by volunteer maids and waiters; others live more simply in near-by quarters. There is a small theater for presenting the Moral Rearmament message to "key people" who come to Caux; and opportunities are abundant for bringing together people of varied nationality and other social backgrounds.

In the summer of 1949 the major project of the group at Caux was the filming of Moral Rearmament's dramatic musical production, *The Good Road*. This was being done under expert Hollywood direction and with the aid of equipment loaned by the Swiss Government at the Comp-toir Suisse in near-by Lausanne. Plans called for worldwide distribution and showing of the completed film.

<sup>110</sup> The books are *Ideas Have Legs* (London, 1945) and *That Man Frank Buchman* (London, 1946). Dr. Buchman's speeches had been gathered together and published in 1941.

*New World News* began publication in January, 1945, and has been published monthly by MRA at 833 S. Flower Street, Los Angeles, California.

See also *Newsweek*, XXVIII (Sept. 30, 1946), 78 ff.; and Robert Root, "M.R.A. Attempts Comeback," *Christian Century*, LXIV (Jan. 15, 1947), 76-78.

In the meantime a number of public gatherings and several postwar pamphlets have served to keep the ideas of Moral Rearmament before the public.<sup>111</sup> Whether the movement would regain the pinnacle of public attention it had achieved prior to the war could not be foretold.

<sup>111</sup> *How Do You Make Up Your Mind?, Supposing You Were Absolutely Honest?*, and *The Strength of a Nation*, published by MRA, 833 S. Flower Street, Los Angeles, California.

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### III

#### *Some Tools for Sociological Analysis*

WITH THE FOREGOING outline of Oxford Group practices and principles and a brief history of the development of the movement as introduction, we are prepared now to carry the analysis a step further. Two concepts that have been developed out of previous studies in the sociology of religion appear to be useful as foci around which to organize observations of the Oxford Group. They may also serve to point up the kinds of questions about the movement which are sociologically relevant.<sup>1</sup>

These two concepts are *constructs* of ways in which new or young religious movements may be organized. The principle which differentiates them on the abstract level is the way in which each type of group is constituted or organized and maintained. Other characteristics that may be related to the basic sociological fact of the type of sociation found in each have yet to be determined. The concepts we propose to use are those suggested by Howard Becker and Leopold von Wiese and employed in the writings of other students in the field. They are the *sect* and the *cult*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In technical terms the method of analysis used in this study is that of constructed types. For my understanding of this method I am indebted chiefly to Howard Becker, whose essays on interpretive sociology and on the logic of constructive typology in Barnes, Becker, and Becker, eds., *Contemporary Social Theory* (New York, 1940), pp. 17-45 and 527-530, and "Interpretive Sociology and Constructed Typology" in G. Gurvitch and W. E. Moore, eds., *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York, 1945), pp. 70-95, should be consulted.

Other sources of information regarding this method of analytic treatment are listed in the bibliography below. For a lucid demonstration of the use of sociological constructs in interpretive analysis, see J. M. Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power: A Study in the Sociology of Religion* (Durham, N. C., 1946).

<sup>2</sup> Howard Becker, *Systematic Sociology on the Basis of the Beziehungslehre*

Strictly speaking these concepts are not hypotheses or theories; they are simply tools for analysis—categories in terms of which it becomes possible to assemble facts about the subject. In the discussion that follows we shall not trace out any of the theories that have been advanced to account for the observed differences in historical groups that approximate either type but shall confine ourselves simply to outlining the concepts.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Sect Type*

Many of the new groups which emerged during and following the major Protestant revolts in the sixteenth century were rigorous, closely knit groups intently focused upon some ideal, or ideals, some particular tenet, or practice, and frequently inclined to regard other groups as apostate in the faith—unredeemed and perhaps irredeemable. The list of plurels of this type includes groups both prominent and obscure—the Hutterian Brethren, the Shakers, the Dukhobors, the Russian Molokans, various “primitive” Baptist and Pietist groups, Adventist groups, the Russellites, the early Quakers, the Amana Society, the Amish, and many others. These are sects, a type of group whose members indicate by their conduct and attitudes that they have chosen to “live apart from the world.”

Partly because of the nature of its commitment to its faith and partly for the sake of mutual aid for protection in the practice of it, as well as for other reasons which we shall note later, this type of group has been highly selective and

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*and Gebildelehre of Leopold von Wiese* (New York, 1932) (cited hereinafter as Wiese-Becker), pp. 625-628. Both terms are employed in a neutral sense and should not be regarded as derogatory.

<sup>3</sup> There is a considerable amount of historical case material in the form of popular and semi-popular accounts of various religious sects and cults that has not yet been examined in sociological terms. The most reliable data, we shall assume, are provided in the monographs written by professional historians. Accounts written by others, both within and outside these groups, however, may be relied upon for certain kinds of facts in which sociologists are interested.

exclusive, admitting to membership only those adults who meet tests set for them. The followers of John Huss, for example, very early formulated their Fourteen Articles to which members and prospective members were required to adhere in order to be permitted to remain in or to enter the group. Among their other stipulations these Articles insisted that no other writings of learned men were to be received by the faithful except those contained in the canon. All other books were to be destroyed since "learning in polite letters" was sinful. The group and its leaders accepted "no decrees of the [Church] Fathers or ancient rites . . . except 'those which Christ and His Apostles have declared in the New Testament.'"<sup>4</sup> The whole ritual of the Roman Church was rejected, infants were to be baptized without sponsors and without exorcisms, all ecclesiastical vestments were to be destroyed, auricular confession was to be discontinued, and the clergy were not to hold property as clergymen. Persons who did not subscribe to these dicta were not to be regarded as members of the group.

Similarly the Shakers, who were among the most radical in their attitude toward the "pursuits and pleasures of the world," were very strict on the question of eligibility of those who sought membership in the Society of Believers. This group insisted not only upon withdrawal from normal social participation but also upon strict celibacy in the belief that no such "worldly" form of interaction as sexual intercourse should be allowed to stand in the way of the free play of "the Spirit."<sup>5</sup> Although there were requests for exceptions to the rule of strict celibacy, no exceptions were made. As one student of this group observed, "if any wished to become a Shaker he was obliged to accept IN WHOLE the rules and regulations of Shakerism or stay out in the world."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John H. Blunt, ed., *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought* (London, 1891), p. 210.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret F. Melcher, *The Shaker Adventure* (Princeton, 1941), pp. 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> Marywebb Gibson, *Shakerism in Kentucky* (Cynthiana, Ky., 1942), p. 125.

Based upon the assumption that "the unity, purity and stability of the church essentially depend on the character and qualifications of its members," the Constitution of the sect stipulated:

No member of any association in business or civil concern (Postmaster excepted); no partner in trade; no person under any legal involvement or obligation of service, no minor or bondservant, nor any person under legal bonds to another AS HUSBAND OR WIFE, who remains outside; nor any insane or profane person; nor any who are not willing to forsake the world and lead the Christ life of self-denial and regeneration shall be admitted into the Covenant relation.<sup>7</sup>

Generally the bond which unites the members of each sect has been described, as in the case of many larger and older religious groups, as a "fellowship of the Spirit" or a "communion of saints." In the case of the sect, however, this bond is held to be peculiarly and directly dependent upon the faithful measuring up of members to fixed standards of belief or conduct. Sect members frequently refer to themselves as "the elect" and regard rigorous discipline, each of himself and all of each other, as essential to the maintenance of the group in the desired "state of grace."

While the primary purpose in seeking membership in a religious sect was—or was intended to be—desire to express some form of religious zeal, this was not by any means the sole objective which might be sought within the sect. There were very real advantages in the way of economic security which membership in a Shaker community, for instance, provided. Many of the groups which have withdrawn into isolated communities at various times since the Reformation

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126. Other secondary accounts of Shakerism that have been consulted are Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States from Personal Visit and Observation* (New York, 1875), pp. 117-255; Elmer T. Clark, *The Small Sects in America* (Nashville, 1937), pp. 178-181; Alice F. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (Minneapolis, 1944), pp. 140-165.

have not been, of course, essentially or exclusively religious in their ideology or objectives. The Harmony Society, Brook Farm, the Oneida community, the Aurora and Bethel communes were only in part organized to fulfil or to express the kinds of religious imperatives that, in their own estimation at least, motivated the Shakers, the Hutterian Brethren, various Mennonite groups, the Amana Society, or certain Millenarian groups whose concern for "eternal salvation" outweighed any more immediate desire.<sup>8</sup> The Harmony Society, organized in 1805, has been interpreted by one of its members as an "each-for-all-and-all-for-each" organization of German immigrants in Pennsylvania dictated primarily by economic necessity and only secondarily by admiration for and emulation of the communal organization of the early Christian congregations.<sup>9</sup>

Many students of the sect have been impressed by the generally ascetic character and the moral and ethical rigor found in many of the historic Christian groups. Elmer T. Clark states categorically "the small sects are the strongholds of the puritan type of personal behavior. . . . Austerity of life, humility, self-denial in things naturally desired, simplicity, abstinence and mortification of the flesh and worldly promptings are the moral fundamentals of the sects. . . ."<sup>10</sup>

Ernst Troeltsch also noted the marked tendency of sects to place heavy demands upon their members not only in respect to their doctrinal commitments and beliefs but also in every aspect and detail of their everyday lives.<sup>11</sup> Asceti-

<sup>8</sup> See, especially, Gilbert Seldes, *The Stammering Century* (New York, 1928); Charles W. Ferguson, *The Confusion of Tongues* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1940); Clark, *op. cit.*; and Clara E. Sears, *Days of Delusion* (Boston, 1924).

<sup>9</sup> John S. Duss, *The Harmonists: A Personal History* (Harrisburg, 1943), pp. 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (New York, 1931), I, 331-333. See also Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago, 1944), p. 198.

cism has been particularly marked in the case of certain Amish and other "Old Order" Mennonite groups although it is repeated in instance after instance among "primitive" Methodist and Baptist groups, Millenarian or Adventist groups, early Quakers, Brethren, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others.<sup>12</sup>

Frequently, but as Max Weber insists, not necessarily,<sup>13</sup> the new groups which have appeared as sects were schismatic, i.e., arising within a parent ecclesiastical structure and later either quitting the established church or being expelled from it.<sup>14</sup> Mennonites were led by Menno Simons, a German priest who broke with the Church of Rome and required that his followers do likewise.<sup>15</sup> The English Puritans, and later the Methodists, sought to effect desired reforms within the Church of England, having no desire to break with the latter. Later it became necessary for both of them to do so.

In other instances sects have arisen, independent of any parent ecclesia, as exclusive groups following the practices

<sup>12</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, cites this as characteristic of many of the sects he surveyed. See especially pp. 58-68, 191-195, 223-237, 238-261.

<sup>13</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft and Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1922), Part IV, chap. ix, pp. 812-813.

<sup>14</sup> On this point of the schismatic character of sects considerable confusion exists among theologians, historians, sociologists, and others. One designation of the term is argued on the basis of etymological derivation of "sect" from the Latin, *secare* ("to cut"), implying the severance of a sacred heritage or of an apostolic line of succession. In this sense the word has been used as a label for heresy, a brand of reproach by the dominant religious (and often secular) authority. See J. L. Neve, *Churches and Sects of Christendom* (Burlington, Iowa, 1940), pp. 34-37.

Another etymological derivation has been made from the Latin, *sequor* ("to follow"), and on this basis the word "sect" is held to designate simply a group which follows a leader away from the dominant patterns of religious conduct. This latter usage is that adopted by W. T. Whitley in "Sects (Christian)," in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, XI, 315: "A sect, strictly speaking, is a group of people following some leader, whether his influence be permanent and world-wide or local and temporary."

Still other interpretations of the term are occasionally encountered.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

and interpretations of faith of some leader. This appears to have been the case, for example, with the Perfectionists who organized the Oneida community in New York State in the 1840's. Like Mormonism, the House of David, and certain other American sects the Perfectionist Movement, led by John Humphrey Noyes, was an independent and more or less spontaneously organized group rallied about a few specific standards and objectives and limited in membership to those who could conform with them.<sup>16</sup>

The radical definitions of political and social responsibility which the sects almost invariably found to be integral parts of their belief provoked a variety of responses from secular authorities and from the communities in which the groups were active. In some instances the sects were themselves aggressive in their condemnation of political and social institutions. The Mennonites and the early Quakers, for example, refused to enter military service, claiming a primary obligation to "higher Authority" than the state.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Perfectionists found the institution of monogamous marriage unsocial and even dangerous to communal interests and proceeded to substitute, not "free love," but a pattern of "complex marriage" in which every woman in the group was held to be the wife of every man and every man the husband of every woman.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See, especially, Tyler, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-195; Carl R. Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man* (New York, 1927), pp. 179-199; "The Perfectionists of Oneida and Wallingford," in Nordhoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-301.

The selective aspect of the sect—as distinguished from what has been designated the elective aspect—is stressed by John M. Mecklin: "A sect, sociologically speaking, is any religious group which makes no claim to universality and the bond of union between whose members is free and voluntary in character" (*The Story of American Dissent* [New York, 1934], p. 16).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Edmund G. Kaufman, *The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among Mennonites of North America* (Berne, Ind., 1931), pp. 36-37, and Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (New York, 1942), pp. 60-63.

<sup>18</sup> Tyler, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

The result of these differences between definitions of situation held by the sects themselves and the definitions held by the larger communities in which they exist has led so frequently to conflict that many sociologists have tended to regard conflict patterns and the patterns related to conflict as basic in the conception of the sect. Thus Park and Burgess, for example, speak of the sect as "a religious organization that is at war with the existing mores," seeking "to cultivate a state of mind and establish a code of morals different from that of the world about it" and for which it claims divine authority.<sup>19</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr also defines the sect as a conflict group.<sup>20</sup>

In what may be regarded as their "purest" form these various sect groups have been found completely withdrawn from "the world," frequently going voluntarily into isolation in order to live free of the contaminations and the persecutions of surrounding society and also, presumably, in order to live more thoroughly in accord with their standards. Among the better known of these groups, aside from the Mormons in Deseret,<sup>21</sup> are the Shakers "gathered into gospel order," the Amana Society in Iowa,<sup>22</sup> the Society of Separatists at Zoar (Ohio),<sup>23</sup> the Harmony Society (Rappites), the Adonai Shomo at Petersham, Massachusetts,<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (2nd ed.; Chicago, 1924), p. 872.

<sup>20</sup> Thus: "In recent years sociological analysis of religion has led to the adoption of the term sect for one particular type of division and organization. It has come to denote a religious conflict society which arises in opposition to an institutional church" (Niebuhr, "Sects," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, XIII, 624).

<sup>21</sup> See, especially, Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago, 1942); also Tyler, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-107.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Grace E. Chaffee, "The Isolated Religious Sect as an Object for Social Research," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXV (Jan., 1930), 618-630; also "Amana Society," in Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 450; Nordhoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-59; Tyler, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-132.

<sup>23</sup> Nordhoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-113; Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

certain groups of Amish, Dunkers, and others.<sup>25</sup> In this same category, of course, come some of the settlements in colonial America—the Theocratic Commonwealth of the Puritans at Massachusetts Bay and Penn's "Holy Experiment" on the Delaware.

Withdrawal into separate communities—vicinal and social isolation—has not been the sole means by which sect groups have isolated themselves. By their "plain speech" and dress and by other peculiarities, the early Quakers were able to retain a separate identity; members were dropped for "marrying out of meeting" and for numerous other infractions.<sup>26</sup>

Where these more external and overt evidences and devices of isolation have not been present there have been other ways in which sect groups have attempted (or been forced) to maintain their exclusiveness. These have roughly been described in terms of "mental isolation," a condition in which a group remains ignorant of, or indifferent or hostile toward, other premises and patterns of thinking than its own. The generally dogmatic character of such groups as the Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other millenarian and evangelistic religious bodies which have not vicinally withdrawn from "the world" is an example of this. The phenomenon has by no means been confined to the religious sect.

Different sectarian characteristics have been cited by sociologists and others who have approached this type of group

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, John L. Gillin, *The Dunkers: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York, 1906); Pauline V. Young, "The Russian Molokan Community in Los Angeles," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXV (Nov., 1929), 393-402, and *Pilgrims of Russia Town* (Chicago, 1932). See also M. S. Czatt, *The International Bible Student, Jehovah's Witnesses* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1933).

<sup>26</sup> See Auguste Jorns, *The Quakers as Pioneers in Social Work* (New York, 1931), pp. 43-47; William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London, 1912), and *The Second Period of Quakerism* (London, 1919); T. Edmund Harvey, *The Rise of the Quakers* (London, 1905); Elizabeth B. Emmott, *The Story of Quakerism* (London, 1908).

through sociological concepts. Thus Faris, Chaffee, and others claim for the religious sect a distinctive "life history," speaking of the sect as the effort of a whole community to "integrate itself anew" and stressing the conflict patterns, the persecutions from without, and the acute self-consciousness within the group.<sup>27</sup> Angell describes the sect as "a group of believers who wish to follow a sacred pattern of life," and adopts Max Weber's view of the sect as "a whole of qualified people."<sup>28</sup>

To recapitulate briefly, the sect is a rigorously organized group of people who by their conduct indicate that they have chosen to "live apart" from society in general according to what they conceive to be important and imperative standards. Partly as a result of conflict, which is usually generated between the sect and the larger society in which it is embedded, and partly out of concern generated within the group itself for the protection and inviolate preservation of its own ideals, the sect is, characteristically, a closed group with rigid qualifying tests for prospective members and with continuing tests, or disciplines, for elected members.

In contrast to the number of sociological studies of sectarian patterns of religious conduct and structure and to the relatively fuller understanding and clearer conception of this type of phenomena which these studies have made possible, the situation with respect to nonsectarian patterns presents a field comparatively barren in terms of the number of systematic monographic surveys of historical cases. It is readily apparent that there have been many new or young religious groups within post-Reformation Christendom, or marginal to it, which have not been constituted and organized along sectarian lines. Joachim Wach calls attention to groups

<sup>27</sup> Ellsworth Faris, *The Nature of Human Nature* (New York, 1937), chap. v, "The Sect and the Sectarian," pp. 46-60.

<sup>28</sup> Robert C. Angell, *The Integration of American Society* (New York, 1941), p. 169. Quoted by permission of the publishers.

which have been formed within parent ecclesiastical bodies either to accentuate some aspect of the religious experience or to reform in some way the parent organization and have remained within the parent group throughout as "ecclesiolae in ecclesiae." Among others he suggests such pre- and post-Reformation monastic orders as Benedictine, Augustinian, Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Jesuit, Theatine; the Beghins and the Beghards; and the Oxford Tractarian movement as representative of three types of young religious groups: the monastic order, the *fraternitas*, and the *collegium pietatis*.<sup>29</sup> In addition to these are various "independent groups" such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), which he distinguishes as a separate type.<sup>30</sup>

Although there will undoubtedly be need for an increasing number of sociological constructs for adequate analysis of various young religious groups as more becomes known about them, we shall center our attention here upon the more general type of sociation which Howard Becker has identified as the cult. This is a general designation for those young religious groups to which participants may adhere as they choose without undergoing any formal tests for membership and without necessarily severing either active or nominal membership in the churches or denominations in which they are already communicant members.

Unless considerable care is taken to distinguish between social action patterns that represent concerted action without sufficient coherence or continuity to warrant their being considered as groups, and those patterns that do at least approximate genuine group character,<sup>31</sup> confusion may re-

<sup>29</sup> See Wach, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-176, 179-180, 184.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> "Genuine group character" is discussed in Wiese-Becker, *op. cit.*, pp. 488-505. Characteristics of the group as an ideal type are listed as "(1) relatively long duration and relative continuity; (2) organization based on division of

sult. Much of what should be identified as cult conduct might be confused with some types of crowd or other transitory group conduct if the conceptions are not clear. Although the cult, as Becker suggests, is "usually so loosely integrated and so transitory that the term 'structure' is almost a misnomer,"<sup>82</sup> it would seem to be true, nevertheless, that certain modal characteristics exist in these groups and serve to distinguish them from crowds or publics.

### *The Cult Type*

There are certain respects in which all young religious groups, sectarian and otherwise, may be said to resemble each other. For example, all groups appear to reflect dissatisfaction with older patterns of religious faith, practice, or experience and desire new or different ones; they also seem to require vigorous leadership. Nevertheless, the basis for sociation among many new religious groups that have appeared, within the post-Reformation period at least, is quite different from that which has been taken to characterize the sect.

It should be noted at the outset that many nonsectarian movements and groups that have appeared within this period have not been strictly Christian, although some of them have sprung from among Christian groups and have directed their appeal to individuals reared in Christian theological traditions. Such groups as Christian Science, New Thought, certain Spiritualist groups, and others have sought to combine elements of Christian faith and practice either with

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function among members; (3) neuropsychic patterns, symbolic of the group, present in its members; (4) the growth of traditions and customs as the group grows older; (5) interaction with other plurality patterns" (*Systematic Sociology*, p. 490).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 627. The contrast between the structure of the cult, thus conceived, and the sect is confirmed in a recent study by Theodore W. Sprague, "Some Problems in the Integration of Social Groups with Special Reference to Jehovah's Witnesses" (Ph. D. thesis, Harvard University, 1942, unpublished).

elements selected from other religious traditions or with fresh revelations presented by the leaders of these new groups.<sup>33</sup> Other new groups, theologically more remote from Christianity, have aspired to some kind of universal faith. The Vedanta Society, for instance, claims to have succeeded in synthesizing all wisdom, seeking, according to its leaders, "to harmonize its teachings with the ultimate conclusions of modern science and to give religion a scientific and philosophic basis." This group denies "any purpose of forming a new sect or creed" but hopes "by explaining through logic and reason the spiritual laws that govern life . . . to harmonize all systems."<sup>34</sup>

The Unity movement,<sup>35</sup> Universalism,<sup>36</sup> "Positive Christianity,"<sup>37</sup> and innumerable other small groups have ad-

<sup>33</sup>In addition to the studies of Seldes, Ferguson, Blunt, Sears, and others mentioned above, there are numerous brief accounts offered elsewhere of cults that have appeared in Western Christendom and more specifically in the United States. The periodical census of religious bodies made by the United States Department of Commerce Census Bureau provides brief descriptive accounts of the several groups included. See *Religious Bodies: 1926*, Vol. II, and 1936, Vols. II and III. Good brief accounts of Theosophical Societies and of the Vedanta Society, for instance, are found in the 1926 volume, pp. 1333-1338 and 1386-1387. See also G. G. Atkins, *Modern Religious Cults and Movements* (New York, 1923), and entries under the names of the several cult groups in Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (1925 ed.), Vol. I-XII. Jan K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults: A Study in Present-Day 'Isms'* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1938) is a theologically biased source of information.

A few sociological studies of cults and of cult behavior have been made. See, for example, A. W. Griswold, "New Thought: A Cult of Success," *American Journal of Sociology*, XL (Nov., 1934) 309-318. Others are cited in footnotes below.

<sup>34</sup>United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies*, 1926, II, 1387. Similarly the aims of Theosophy, organized in New York City in 1875, have been indicated as being "to promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures of the world's religions and sciences and to vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature; to investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in Man especially, in order, through this means, to form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, color, sex, caste or creed" (*ibid.*, p. 1333).

<sup>35</sup>Full name, "The Unity School of Christianity" (Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 460).

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>37</sup>One of a large number of independent religious groups in Washington, D. C. (Located, in June, 1940, at 1722 H Street N. W.)

vanced similar ideas. While it differs markedly from the esoteric cults, the Ethical Culture Society is another example of this trend in the loosely organized religious groups to transcend barriers that separate the various faiths.<sup>88</sup>

When they are examined in terms of the manner in which they are constituted, the bases upon which they are organized, the ways in which new members are recruited and trained, and the kinds of experience and other objectives that are sought, it becomes clear that at least one outstanding difference exists between groups that have been identified as sects and those identified as nonsectarian. The latter groups, in contrast with the former, are more readily accessible. Where rigid qualifying tests and election into the group are required of prospective sect members, such obstacles are not generally placed before prospective participants in the cult. Cult participants are usually adults, and frequently only adults have been considered qualified to apprehend the experiences which the cult offers. Otherwise few if any formal commitments are required of those who choose to participate.

This is not to say that there are no differences in authority or prestige within the group, that there are no differences in grades of membership, nor that disciplines any less exacting than those which the sect demands of its members are not present in cults. On the contrary, for certain cult groups a definite sequence of clearly defined activities or disciplines may mark the progress of the participant from the role of novice on the periphery of the group to that of an acknowledged interpreter or leader in the rites, practices, or *cultus* of the group. Thus, for example, within the group of followers of Father Divine, Arthur Fauset has observed:

There appear to be two types of members. A great many mem-

<sup>88</sup> See David S. Muzzey, *Ethical Religion* (New York, 1943), pp. 23-34. See also Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

bers merely subscribe to the beliefs and practices of the cult, but otherwise live their lives normally as citizens of their community. These are commonly known as brothers and sisters.

The other type seems to have gone a step further. . . . He no longer plans his own life, but lives it completely in accordance with the instructions of Father Divine. If he is the possessor of worldly goods he disposes of them in a manner agreed upon between him and the leader. He does not choose his own vocation or business but places himself completely subject to Father Divine's suggestion, instruction or command. . . . Such members are the true angels of the cult.<sup>39</sup>

Somewhat more elaborate gradations of membership or participation have been reported in other groups.<sup>40</sup>

Individuals who wish to become members of sects are required to apply for membership and submit to certain specific tests before they can be considered for election to membership; then, upon election, they are required to accept disciplines, which are more or less uniform throughout the membership. In contrast cult participants simply choose for themselves, within the range of possibilities offered by the group, the kind and amount of discipline to which they will submit. Among Bahais, for instance, the participant is urged, but not required, to "cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge."<sup>41</sup> Likewise among Rosicrucians, whose objective has been "to improve mankind by the discovery of the true philosophy . . . without interfering with the religious or political actions of states," there are no elective processes although the fra-

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia, 1944), pp. 59-60.

<sup>40</sup> Especially cult groups that have been influenced by Hindu, Brahman, and Buddhist cosmology. Gradations of responsible leadership such as those found in the American National Spiritualist Association (*Religious Bodies*: 1926, II, 1320) are common in denominations and established churches as well.

<sup>41</sup> "Words of Baha'U'llah," *Bahai World*, p. 3. See also Horace Holley, *Baha'ism: The Modern Social Religion*. (London, 1913).

ternity does forbid its members to acknowledge or disclose their status.<sup>42</sup> Participation in the cult is essentially voluntary, usually accessible to any or all adults who choose to include its patterns, practices, or beliefs among their personal designs for living. The extent to which one penetrates the group appears to depend in large measure upon the extent to which he is willing to commit himself.

Although there are many respects in which sect and cult leadership appear to present similar traits, R. J. Jones finds the cult leaders are peculiarly adept in "building up and maintaining a group attitude of 'spiritual' rapport" in which participants in the observed groups "enjoyed a maximum of overt emotional expression without regard for the particular form in which such behavior might manifest itself in the performer."<sup>43</sup> In such a social grouping as this voluntary adult association the role of the leader is evidently a crucial one, resting, perhaps in even greater measure than in the case of sect leadership, upon elements of what Max Weber has termed "personal charisma."<sup>44</sup>

The prominence of emotionally exhilarating activities and thrill satisfactions in cults which have been examined leads Becker to conclude that a major part of the participation in these "amorphous, loose-textured, uncondensed" plurels is prompted by the desire for "purely personal ecstatic experience, salvation, comfort and mental and physical healing." The "sources of emotional satisfaction for the cult believer," he adds, "lie wholly within himself; the injustices

<sup>42</sup> Arthur C. Jones, "Rosicrucians," in Hastings, *op. cit.*, X, 856-857.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond J. Jones, *A Comparative Study of Religious Cult Behavior among Negroes with Special Reference to Emotional Group Conditioning Factors* (Washington, 1939), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Charisma, as Max Weber defines it, is "an extraordinary quality of a personality—expressing itself through supernatural, superhuman, or at the very least, highly unusual powers or attributes which come to be regarded as God-given or prophetic-exemplary and therefore as demanding obedience or indicating leadership" (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 140).

or good fortune which others may suffer affect him, to be sure, but the center of his cosmos is his 'I.'"<sup>45</sup>

In so far as it is thus far possible to formulate a concept of the cult, this type of group may be said to be a loosely organized, generally impermanent group of adults who seek to realize, through their association with some leader or leaders and with each other, satisfactions including some form of religious "thrill" or exaltation. Frequently the patterns of activity take the form of rites or *cultus*, including "mysteries" of one sort or another, although care must be taken not to confine conception of the cult to groups with esoteric patterns of conduct since the distinguishing feature of the cult is not its cultural patterns but rather its mode of sociation, its amorphous structure, its voluntary (or non-elective) membership, and, in certain instances, its scaled or graded classes of participation. Other tendencies may be present, such as a noticeable disregard for strict or narrow theological definitions, a common preference for eclectic universalist patterns of belief and practice, and a commitment to the group which, in contrast with the kind of commitment demanded of sect members, appears partial, segmental, and "faddist" rather than unequivocating, complete, and final.

More specific delineation of cult traits should become possible as further studies of groups exhibiting its mode of sociation are made. Before returning to further consideration of the Oxford Group movement, however, there are two or three additional aspects to the problem of formulating satisfactory concepts for the interpretative sociological analysis of new religious groups to be noted. Specifically it may be helpful at this point if we were to inquire briefly into the relevance of other sociological, sociopsychological, and ideological modes or factors in the conceptual formulation of the sect and cult types.

<sup>45</sup> Wiese-Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 627.

Some of the factors which may be related to sect and cult modes of sociation can be dealt with in generic terms; others are no doubt unique and nonrecurrent in their relation to each sect or cult that has come into existence. This is only to say that the modes of sociation into which new religious groups are classed may possibly be related to such general factors as the type of society within which the new groups appear, the type of aim or purpose, or the kind of religious experience which is sought. While it is not the purpose of this study to inquire into the general question of *why* new religious groups emerge or why the Oxford Group, or any other specific group, should assume the particular form which it has, such factors as these just cited should not be ignored since they may have a distinct and discernible bearing upon the types of groups into which young religious movements develop.

*Ideological and Other Factors in Relation to Sect and  
Cult Modes of Sociation*

The relation which we shall here assume exists between the sect and cult modes of sociation and certain other modes in which religious phenomena and experience are expressed is not entirely a matter of conjecture, even though a great deal remains to be determined concerning the exact nature of these relations. Studies of Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Heinrich H. Maurer, and others either point to or suggest a demonstrable relation that appears to exist between what may be called ideological imperatives of a religious sort and the form or structure of the group or groups in which these imperatives find expression.<sup>46</sup> Confining his study to post-Reformation Protestant Christianity and, more specifically,

<sup>46</sup> Weber and Troeltsch were primarily concerned with the relations which might be found to exist between ethical ideas and the economic attitudes and practices as these might be focused through different types of groups; interest in the structure of religious groups was, for both, secondary.

to Lutheranism and Calvinism in relation to the kinds of group structures in which they came to be practiced, Maurer seeks to show how certain doctrines of these two Protestant leaders governed the form which groups have taken to carry them out in practice.<sup>47</sup>

Although he maintains that the sociological modes in which human religious interests may be said to express themselves are quite distinct from what he calls the "theoretical," or doctrinal, and the "practical," or *cultus*, modes in which religious experience is cast, Joachim Wach also holds that ideological affirmations have a distinct bearing upon the form of the social structure or structures in which religious conduct occurs.<sup>48</sup> Even without the evidence offered by Maurer, Wach, and others it might be reasonable to assume that any religious ideology in which there was a marked concern for logical consistency, for instance, would find expression more readily in the sectarian rather than in the cult mode of sociation since in the latter no formal structural provisions are made for insuring the kind of thoroughgoing or consistent conduct among members which, presumably, is desired. In certain instances, the determination of leaders of new groups not to withdraw from a parent organization has served to prevent the formation of sects.

In a number of sociological studies of new religious groups the thesis has been advanced that sects and cults reflect a basic unrest in society and, in some instances, that they may be regarded as vehicles of proletarian protest and revolt. Thus John M. Mecklin states that "the sociological significance of the sect is vitally affected by the fact that its psychology is that of the lower disinherited classes."<sup>49</sup> H.

<sup>47</sup> Thus: "From different concepts of salvation follow different social types in the individual, the group, the state. . . . The justification by faith alone, in the one case, the insistence on effective faith in the other, entail different . . . terms of consociation" (*American Journal of Sociology*, XXX, 257).

<sup>48</sup> See Wach, *op. cit.*, esp. chaps. ii and iii, pp. 17-53.

<sup>49</sup> Mecklin, *op. cit.*, p. 25. See also A. T. Boisen, *Social Action: Religion and*

Richard Niebuhr in his discussion of the sect comments that this group "finds its support most frequently among the politically disfranchised or economically weak."<sup>50</sup> Similar observations have been made regarding the urban Negro cults studied by Raymond J. Jones, Arthur Fauset, E. D. Beynon, and others.<sup>51</sup> Although several of the groups designated in these studies as cults would be regarded as sects in the sociological terms which we have examined in this chapter, these observations are made concerning groups approximating both types.

While there is considerable evidence to support the thesis that sects and cults are recruited largely from among the disinherited, some sociologists suggest that the relations between the emergence and growth of these types of religious plurels and certain conditions in society do not follow such specific economic or political lines; instead, general conditions of heterogeneity and disorganization within a society create the kind of situation in which new patterns are felt necessary or desirable, or in which *any* sort of redefinition of religious experience and conduct may be free to develop. "Since ours is a time of rapid change and considerable disorganization," Robert C. Angell remarks, "we should expect the rise of . . . sects, for they are one way in which new definitions of the situation appear."<sup>52</sup> "Arising at a time when the fixed order

*Hard Times* (New York, 1939), pp. 14-15, for a modified statement of this thesis.

For a direct contradiction of the thesis, at least as it applies to certain Mennonite groups, see Paul Dedic, "The Social Background of the Austrian Anabaptists," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XIII (Jan., 1939), 8.

<sup>50</sup> Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 624.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 56; Fauset, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-109; E. D. Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIII (May, 1938), 894-907. See also John Hoshor, *God in a Rolls Royce: The Rise of Father Divine* (New York, 1936).

<sup>52</sup> Angell, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Efforts have been made to trace the origin of sects (and also, in part, to interpret the sociological form which the sect has taken) to a kind of rationalistic concern that the logical imperatives of some given ethic be realized consistently

is breaking up, or tending to break up," Ellsworth Faris suggests, "the sect is the effort of the whole community to integrate itself anew."<sup>53</sup>

John L. Gillin, in outlining the conditions within a society which may be conducive to the appearance of sect patterns, notes that heterogeneity in a society, and not the protest of its proletariat, is the significant social fact in the situation.<sup>54</sup> In somewhat different terms, Howard Becker observes in the case of the cult that "only a highly atomized and essentially secular order gives rise to extensive cult belief."<sup>55</sup> Sects, too, are not apt to be numerous in a comparatively static, sacred type of society as he conceives it.<sup>56</sup>

Still other factors may be related to the appearance of sect and cult patterns, and more specifically to the particular modes of sociation which differentiate them. The absence of satisfactory modes for the analysis of certain sociopsychological aspects of religious experience makes it difficult for sociologists of religion to cite psychological modes, processes, or mechanisms that may somehow be related to the modes of sociation of religious groups. Although progress has been made toward a more adequate conceptual formulation of these phenomena than is represented, for instance, in the

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and uncompromisingly in practice. Thus, for example, Troeltsch's analysis of the recurrence of sects within the Christian tradition has given rise to the thesis that the appearance of sects to challenge the same or successive ecclesiastical orders may be traced to an inherent logical incompatibility between the demands of the social ethics of Jesus and the imperatives of the group structure which emerges to maintain the tradition. This thesis is referred to by Becker and others as the "dilemma of the churches" (Wiese-Becker, *op. cit.*, pp. 620-642).

<sup>53</sup> Faris, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> John L. Gillin, "A Contribution to the Sociology of Sects," *American Journal of Sociology*, XVI (Sept., 1910), 236-252.

<sup>55</sup> Wiese-Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 627.

<sup>56</sup> Becker's formulation of "the sacred" and "the secular" appears in several of his writings. See especially Howard Becker, "Processes of Secularization," *Sociological Review* (British), XXIV (April-July, Oct., 1932), 138-154, 266-286; also Becker in H. E. Barnes and Howard Becker, *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (Boston, 1938), I, chap. i; and Howard Becker and Robert C. Myers, "The Sacred and the Secular Aspects of Human Sociation," *Sociometry*, V (May, Aug., 1942), 169-179, 207-229.

old triad of categories—"cognitive," "volitional," and "affective"—of Professor James B. Pratt and others,<sup>57</sup> there are comparatively few hypotheses that have thus far been developed concerning the relation of specific types of psychological or sociopsychological responses and the several sociological modes of sociation. It would seem to be true that whereas some types of groups place comparatively little emphasis upon the emotionally exhilarating aspects of religious experience, others appear to depend heavily upon it. Even though religious "thrill" responses, which may vary from the pleasurable feelings that envelop participants in a formal liturgical service to the ecstatic rapture of the entranced prophet or the frenzied exaltation of the saved sinner, are thus, in one sense, the inevitable accompaniment of virtually every religious experience, some groups stand out for their deliberate effort to cultivate them.

With the two concepts of religious group organization we have been outlining in this chapter before us, it now becomes possible to suggest questions about the Oxford Group

<sup>57</sup> See James B. Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study* (New York, 1907). In this volume Pratt suggests a number of hypotheses of interest in connection with the psychological mechanisms operating in the formation and maintenance of the several types of religious plures. See, especially, chaps. xii, "The Cult and Its Causes," and xiii, "How the Cult Performs Its Functions," pp. 255-289.

Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy* (London, 1936), offers one of the more searching analyses of the nature of religious experience although there are few intimations in his study of the relevance which his observations may have for sociological inquiry.

"The sacred," "the holy," and "the supernatural," which Howard Becker has used in conceiving religious experience and attitudes, designate what are essentially value orientations. Through these sociopsychological terms it is possible to conceive of religious objects—a commitment in which beliefs, actions, feelings are not categorically separated but are fused. Emphasis is placed upon the fact that both the object toward which the commitment is made and the nature of the commitment itself, the very nature of the attitude, vary together. For analytic purposes this is an important gain in conceptual formulations. Cf. Emile Durkheim, "De la définition des phénomènes religieux," *L'Année Sociologique*, II (1897-1898), 1-28, and also his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London, 1915).

movement that may reveal sociologically relevant data on which may be based further analyses. Certainly among the first questions that should be raised are: What kind of organization is found in the Oxford Group? Are there tests for membership, and, if so, what kinds of tests? What is the composition of the group? How is leadership determined within the movement? What kinds of disciplines, if any, are maintained within it? Are the attitudes and relations that prevail among members different in kind from those that exist between members and outsiders? And from this point we can go on to inquire what purposes or objectives participants seem to be seeking, what sorts of religious experiences are reported, and what other attitudes and values are expressed directly or indirectly by the members. There are, of course, other questions to be posed, but these will perhaps serve to indicate the direction in which we shall be proceeding through the three chapters which follow.

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#### IV

### *Organization and Structure of the Oxford Group*

THERE ARE MANY points at which a systematic analysis of the Oxford Group movement might be begun. Sociological relevance of such questions as the kind of association, the criteria of membership, and the locus of authority in the Group suggest that we examine first the organization and structure of the movement.

From the earliest days of the Oxford Group, participation in the movement or, more accurately, association with Frank Buchman and his lieutenants was accessible to any individual who could accept himself in the terms which Buchman employed and who was willing to join actively in the program and practices that were prescribed. The only limitations were those imposed by the admittedly limited resources and energy of the Soul Surgeon. Conscious of his inability to reach everyone on the campus or in the community on a personal basis, Buchman early appears to have decided upon the desirability of selecting individuals whom he regarded as key men in the situation and relying upon them and their influence to spread the gospel of personal evangelism farther and farther.<sup>1</sup> These individuals need not necessarily be rich or powerful in the community, but as the leader and the movement came to be more conscious of their strategy, it became apparent that the role or the status of the individual convert should be such that his "change" would constitute an impressive and possibly even

<sup>1</sup> J.E.K., personal interview. Data in author's files. See also Van Dusen, "Apostle to the Twentieth Century," p. 14.

dramatic testimony to the power of God. If the prestige of the individual concerned were great, this could be so much more to the good; no effort, at any rate, was made to play down this factor.

The chief consequence of this line of reasoning in the Oxford Group was that the movement very soon achieved the reputation of being exclusively concerned with the rich and the well-born and of capitalizing upon its association with socially prominent individuals by employing their prestige to advance its evangelical program. "Frank Buchman: The Man Whose God Was a Millionaire" was the title of one profile of the leader. "Buchmanism: Opiate of the Classes" was another. "Its primary concern," wrote one bishop in the Anglican Church, "is not with the poor, but with the rich. . . . Its acknowledged purpose is to reach the 'up and out,' that is, in plain terms, to adapt the message to the habits and prejudices of the well to do."<sup>2</sup> "Even in the College [Pennsylvania State]," another critic recalled, "the Buchmanites concentrated on applecheeked boys of wealth and family. . . ."<sup>3</sup> And constantly throughout the period of its ascendancy, hostile critics were quick to point out any preferences among the Group members for wealthy converts and the devices which they might use to reach and appeal to individuals in this class. That these charges were true or, at any rate, that they reflected the "true" purpose or the intention of the life-changers was, of course, categorically denied by apologists for the Group. "There is only one class distinction and that is fundamental," declared one spokesman, "the changed and the unchanged." "The only class distinctions known to the Group," another added, "are the 'God-guided' and the 'Self-guided.'"

Comparatively few persons outside the movement, how-

<sup>2</sup> Henson, *op. cit.*, p. xxx.

<sup>3</sup> Alva Johnston, quoted in Landau, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

ever, seemed willing or able to take such statements as these at their face value, and the result was that a wide variety of nonreligious motives ranging from snobbishness and "toadying to the rich" to outright "social climbing" were ascribed to the participants and to Frank Buchman himself.<sup>4</sup> Certainly there is some evidence of appreciation on the part of some participants, especially publicists of the movement in its latter period, of the "social splash" the movement was making,<sup>5</sup> but because of the extreme difficulty involved in accurately imputing motives we shall confine ourselves to descriptive accounts of what participants in the movement said or did in respect to this matter.

In a recent sample of some 54 of these, active on an average of 18 years prior to the date of the sample, taken by Walter H. Clark, it was found that not less than 15 (28 per cent) came from families whose income at the time of their participation was over \$10,000. Another 13 (24 per cent) came of families whose annual incomes ranged between \$5000 and \$10,000, and only 4 came from families with incomes of \$2000 or less. The median family income for the sample was above \$5000.<sup>6</sup> While in no sense conclusive, since the sample was not large or random, these figures do seem to indicate a prevalence of persons of comfortable means, if not wealth, in the movement.

At the same time it must not be overlooked that there were many whom Frank Buchman had "changed" who were not of the upper middle or middle class. His first

<sup>4</sup> According to a sarcastic limerick, which the author heard quoted in Philadelphia in 1940,

"There was a young man from Peoria,  
Whose sinning grew gorier and gorier.  
By confession and prayer  
And some savoir-faire  
He now lives in the Waldorf-Astoria."

<sup>5</sup> See chap. v, pp. 137 ff., below.

<sup>6</sup> Data gathered by Walter H. Clark and summarized in his Ph.D. thesis, cited above, p. 163.

"case" had been a Pullman car porter,<sup>7</sup> and he had worked extensively among poorer families in Philadelphia. Whether these individuals became part of the movement or could be said to be included in it is, however, not determined. As a movement there does seem to have been enough emphasis upon adopting the appearances and the mannerisms of the wealthy to suggest that much of the energy of the Group and its leader was being directed toward individuals in this class.<sup>8</sup> Where people of other classes were prominently featured, as they sometimes were on programs of the Oxford Group, the purpose seems to have been to impress listeners with the fact that Group participants were above and beyond the bitterness of class-conscious proletarian resentments. It was possibly also for the "strategic purpose" of counteracting the strong popular impression that the movement was for the "upper classes" only that the campaign for Moral Rearmament was opened in the East Ham section of London in May, 1938. This was described in publicity stories released by the Group as a "laboring class section of the city" and as an area of "workingmen's homes."

Whatever the intention of the leaders and of the rank-and-file participants in the movement might have been in respect to this matter of social climbing and related activities, it is clear that the Oxford Group did not consider itself to have rejected "the world" and drawn itself apart from it in any way resembling the ascetic evangelical sect. Nor did it seek to maintain any barriers other than those which might naturally arise from place of meeting and so forth between those who "belonged" and those who did not. It was to be a question rather of the personal decision of each par-

<sup>7</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, lists of sponsors for the Citizens' Meeting for MRA, Madison Square Garden, New York, May 14, 1939, and for the National Meeting for MRA, Constitution Hall, Washington, June 4, 1939. Titled Europeans were among those selected to comprise traveling teams.

ticipant whether or not he would surrender his life and to what extent he could give energies and time to the cause of changing others.

Although such terms as "pagan" and "cackler" were used to identify sinners who were ignorant of the Group's gospel or who resisted it, Frank Buchman and his associates did not deliberately erect barriers that would exclude anyone permanently. There was strong feeling among the members of the movement, in fact, that there were not only no barriers of race, creed, or class but that there were none of the characteristics of ordinary formal organization in the movement and no tests of any sort for distinguishing those who were acceptable for membership from those who were not.

"The Oxford Group," one participant explained, "has no membership list. It is just a name for a group of people who have surrendered their lives to God and who are trying to lead a Christ-like kind of life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

"They are not an organization . . .," A. J. Russell observed. "For in their own words: 'You can't join; you can't resign; you are either in or out by the quality of the life you live.'"<sup>9</sup> A later convert wrote:

This is probably the only world-wide group there is which is *not* an organisation in the usual sense of the word. I speak of "members" of the group but it really has no members. Those who are leading Christ-centred lives, asking God to make them absolutely honest, absolutely loving, absolutely pure and absolutely unselfish, those who are living as life-changers under God's control, are "members" whether they know it or not. And those

<sup>9</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 1. Frank Buchman himself explained, in reference to MRA, that it was "open to all creeds and bars none. It is a quality of life. You don't register with MRA; MRA registers with you. You don't join and you can't resign. You live a life . . ." (radio broadcast from Station WRUL, Boston, October 29, 1939).

who do not lead that kind of life are not "members" no matter how loudly they may claim to be.

There are, moreover, no committees, no officials and no official duties of any kind. There are leaders, to be sure, but only as through training and discipline they have fitted themselves for such service in God's eyes. The man that God guides us to choose as a leader one day for any given task may be chosen the next day to open windows in the balcony. . . .

All of these tasks and services consist in carrying out God's direction. Oxford Group "government," therefore, is entirely made up of "executives." We have no "legislative department" and no "judicial department." We make no laws and have no rules within the group because all our law comes from God while the only rule is obedience to guidance. Similarly God is our only judge.<sup>10</sup>

These and numerous other statements convey the idea that the Oxford Group movement was to be a movement within rather than apart from the Christian denominations in the community. Particular care was taken during the early days of the First Century Christian Fellowship to explain that the group had no desire to become a separate organization. A. J. Russell reported on the activities of the new movement:

As far as possible the Group were making their challenge through the Churches. . . . They were urging Christians, congregations and clergy alike, to expel sin from their midst . . . stressing the need to surrender entirely to God, and to trust His Guidance and support in every circumstance and vicissitude of life. Emphatically were they against being another religious "order" or "cult," "sect" or "organization." They wished to be an inner church in all churches, irrespective of denomination, for the deepening of spiritual life within Christ's body and for carrying Christianity to its . . . limits. In fact, a powerhouse within and without the churches for encouraging everyone to have a complete experience of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> V. C. Kitchen, *I Was a Pagan* (New York, 1934), pp. 130-131.

<sup>11</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

It was not just another church or denomination, explained another leading life-changer; it was "the Church—at work."<sup>12</sup>

"This movement," Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, was quoted in *Rising Tide* as affirming, "is most certainly doing what the Church of Christ exists everywhere to do. It is changing human lives . . . and giving them a real ardour to communicate to their fellow creatures what God has given to them."<sup>13</sup> An Anglican bishop, writing in the *Church of England Newspaper*, agreed that "This is the Church, and it is an army on the march. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

In spite of external opposition to the movement this disinclination on the part of leaders of the Group to form themselves into a separate organization continued on down through the Moral Rearmament program. In the pamphlet, *You Can Defend America*, published by one group in the movement in 1941, it was announced that: "It's like joining the army. You decide there's something worth fighting for. You enlist. You put yourself under orders. Then you are given new equipment. You find new comradeship. Your way of living changes. And your whole outlook on life."<sup>15</sup>

This is not to say, however, that there was no organization within the movement or that no attention whatever was given to the problems of planning, co-ordinating, publicizing, and financing the program and activities of the movement. On the contrary, there was considerable organization of talent within the movement, a certain amount

<sup>12</sup> Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr., quoted in the *New York Times*, Sept. 8, 1930, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Rising Tide*, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> *You Can Defend America*, p. 17. Later appeals to individuals to change urged that anyone could listen anywhere and at any time and that each should regard it as an experiment and begin immediately. See Hallen Viney, *How Do I Begin?* (New York, 1937), pp. 1-2.

of specialization of functions, and a skilful use of resources.

General headquarters for the Oxford Group in the United States were located, as we have noted, at 61 Gramercy Park in the parish house of Calvary Church from 1930 until November, 1941, when the Group was asked to leave, presumably because of a growing conviction on the part of the rector of the church and others who had been prominent in the movement that the Group was becoming "sectarian." Other headquarters in the United States were located at different times at the Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, California; at 417 South Hill Street, Los Angeles; at the Olympic Hotel in Seattle; at the Mayflower and at other addresses in Washington, D. C., and Los Angeles. Beginning in July, 1927, a weekly mimeographed "newsletter" was sent to a mailing list of local leaders and, although no funds were solicited through these channels in so far as I have been able to determine, many joint enterprises were co-ordinated in this way as well as through leadership training gatherings and conferences.

Within the Group special committees assumed responsibility for different tasks according to the guidance which came to them or was suggested and approved by others. In 1937 a committee was delegated to prepare and publish *Rising Tide*. In the local groups similar special committees existed for special purposes.

In all probability the most highly specialized groups functioning within the movement were the traveling teams of life-changers chosen from time to time to represent the movement and to carry its message into new communities or to communities where interest in the movement needed to be built up. The traveling team, of which more will be said later, commonly consisted of from half a dozen to a few score participants, some of whom might be offered travel expenses but many of whom paid their own expenses.

As a rule those who traveled for the Group would need to be veteran members, and usually they were carefully chosen in reference to the guidance which other members and which Frank Buchman received concerning them. It was such a team as this which had gone out to South Africa in 1928. Frank Buchman frequently accompanied a team, and, once the movement was well begun, was never reported to have traveled alone. Toward the height of the MRA campaign teams and delegations grew somewhat larger in size and also somewhat less direct in their life-changing tactics.

Partly because of its accessibility, but for other reasons as well, neither Frank Buchman nor his associates were able to estimate the number of participants in the movement. Asked by a reporter in Salem, Oregon, how many followers he had, Frank Buchman replied in September, 1939, "That I don't know. We keep no records. But millions all over the world."<sup>16</sup> Although an unofficial historian of the movement, Mr. A. J. Russell, estimated that there were "probably a thousand local Group circles enrolling thousands of participants" in 1932, he agreed that "none can tell their numbers. 'Nobody knows,' he had been told. "There are no statistics . . . the process of permeation is going on under the surface of life."<sup>17</sup> One interpreter of the movement noted a distinct aversion on the part of the Soul Surgeon to the common practice of evangelists of "counting scalps." "Any idea of 'mass production . . .,' it was explained, "is to him dreadfully repellent. . . . He . . . never for one moment dreams of calculating his gains in statistics."<sup>18</sup>

In view of the strong emphasis in the beginning of the movement upon individual, personal work among the "un-

<sup>16</sup> Stephen A. Stone, report of interview with Frank Buchman, in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 38 (Sept. 20, 1939), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 290. One participant told me, in the fall of 1938, that he regarded the movement as comparable in size and strength with the Wesleyan movement of two hundred years ago.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men* (New York, 1923), p. v.

changed" it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that sheer numbers had no particular meaning to Frank Buchman. Whether this actually was the case—or whether it remained so—cannot, of course, be said. At any rate, no records of membership were made, and no pledges of money from any mailing list were solicited. That the size of the movement varied greatly from time to time and in terms of how participation in it might be defined is evident in the circulation figures of the *New Witness* and in other indirect ways. Membership throughout appears to have been predominantly male and to have included younger rather than older persons. Both sexes and all age groups were included, however, in the activities of the movement, as well as representatives of every race and a considerable variety of creeds.

Aware of this fact, some advocates of the movement saw in it an opportunity for ultimate reunion of all the Christian faiths. "The fact that the Oxford Group has no particular creed, no ecclesiastical organization or government," said a writer in the *Catholic World*, "makes it an unprecedented means of co-operation between Catholics and Protestants and all other serious-minded people."<sup>19</sup> "The work of the Oxford Groups," a lay member explained, "is arranged exactly in accordance with the Acts of the Apostles, as directed by our Lord and Saviour," and she and others felt that all Christians of whatever creed could and should unite in its program.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Christian Richard, "The Broken Equilibrium," *Catholic World*, CXLV (Sept., 1937), 656. I found no evidence to show that this view was shared by the Roman Catholic hierarchy or its Pope. *Time* in its April 4, 1938, issue reported that, in some dioceses at least, Catholics were forbidden to participate (*op. cit.*, p. 66).

Another Catholic writer wrote, concerning the Oxford Group: "With a very imperfect equipment, it is doing at the moment for large numbers of people what we ourselves ought to be doing. Every individual who joins the Group takes the view that he himself has got to win souls for God . . ." (Maisie Ward, *The Oxford Groups* [London, 1937], p. 29).

<sup>20</sup> "Every man . . . may make trial of this method," Begbie had written in 1923, "whatever his religious opinions" (*op. cit.*, p. 35).

By its own wish, then, the movement took no steps toward challenging any of the established churches or denominations with an organization of its own. Asked if there was "any prospect of the Oxford Group becoming a separate church," one informant replied: "Not unless it is persecuted and driven out of the existing churches. It depends pretty much on the attitude of the ministers."

Whether they believed it could become a sect or not, many hostile churchmen were certain that some sort of separate religious body must eventually develop out of the movement's activities. "By the logic of its own system," wrote the Bishop of Durham, England, "Groupism must become a sect. . . . Groupism is a complete religious system, that is, it provides for all the needs of its members. Every other religious allegiance seems to be gathered up in 'loyalty' to the Group."<sup>21</sup> "Should the Group become a sect," thought a more sympathetic observer of the movement, "it will lack a basis of dogmatic and moral theology."<sup>22</sup>

While the movement was thus not withdrawn and retiring in a sectarian sense, the groups which gathered about Frank Buchman and his associates during their first years of evangelical activity on the college campuses were a far cry from the completely accessible and widely publicized movement which the Oxford Group became during the height of the Rising Tide and Moral Rearmament campaigns. Frank Buchman had traveled to Oxford with a letter of introduction, and he took care to observe certain English upper-class amenities and to keep himself and the names of his "patients" as nearly anonymous as possible. "He was tactful, quiet, discreet," observed one critic. "He considers privacy essential to his method," reported another observer; "at any rate, he regards publicity as a grave danger," and his work went forward at first "almost in secret."

<sup>21</sup> Henson, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Something of the same attitude continued to prevail within the movement after it had reached out from the college campus into other fields for evangelical activity. When one newsman, who later became an active participant in the movement, suggested a series of newspaper stories on the Group he found Frank Buchman "flatly opposed to the proposition. The Group were not seeking publicity [although] they were prepared to give information if published correctly and the subject treated with reverence."<sup>23</sup> Later on, however, as we have seen, this reticence gave way under various pressures to what became, in some instances, wholesale, publicity-wise campaigning. None of the very intimate faults to which earlier converts might publicly confess were usually spoken of in the mass meetings, but shortcomings, admitted as "sins," and personal hopes and aspirations were freely acknowledged and expressed.

The social structure resulting from the personal evangelical activities of Frank Buchman and his associates was thought of by those who had been "changed" as a fellowship, an intimate association, under the detailed guidance of the Holy Spirit, of all who had surrendered themselves to God. One member wrote:

Above all the Group was a Fellowship—a first century Christian Fellowship controlled by the Holy Spirit. . . . That exquisite Fellowship of the Spirit, so often talked about, and so little understood, was actually being realised. All barriers in such a fellowship were broken down by loving understanding, leading to greater depths of human experience, more happiness and abiding peace than was otherwise obtainable in human association.<sup>24</sup>

Although the "web of fellowship" was thought of in worldwide terms—and, as we shall note, thrill drawn from the contemplation of its scope and possibilities—the sense of

<sup>23</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

fellowship was felt most strongly among the comparatively small local groups and particularly in the traveling teams. These groups, described as "proliferating cells," were the nuclei of the Oxford Group movement. It was within them that the social actions of participants were most fully and characteristically circumscribed. It was within them that various disciplines of the Group movement operated with their maximum effectiveness, and it was within them that sharing, guidance, mutual confession, and conservation were practiced in their most clearly organized and regular manner.

Veteran associates of Frank Buchman and others selected to serve as full-time life-changers, traveling team leaders, took responsibility for the work of co-ordinating the activities of the scattered groups;<sup>25</sup> others served as volunteer central communications teams and so on. But most participants in the Oxford Group movement, apart from special assignments to which they were invited on the basis of guidance, found their activities centered in local circles to which they gave support and into which they sought to draw others before, during, and after conversion of the latter.

Entrance into the activities of the movement and into positions of responsibility was, like the process of Soul Surgery itself, not achieved in a single step but was a process involving training and discipline in different degrees as various pressures of the Group were brought to bear upon the newcomer. Both Group life-changers and their patients were aware of the "dangers" of backsliding, of overzealousness, and other sins that might beset the recent convert. "I feared that I should lose this new life before it could take firm hold . . .," wrote one convert. "Unwillingness to share

<sup>25</sup> In Group circles, however, the co-ordinating was thought to be done entirely by the Holy Spirit working in the lives of many different individuals.

my spiritual experience was . . . [one] stumbling block; that such things are too sacred to share was an excuse. . . . Sharing is not only a way of discipline, but a way of growth," he added.<sup>26</sup> "There is always the danger that a certain type of man may become obsessed with religious work," one elder associate of Frank Buchman explained. "Teamwork is . . . the proper check."<sup>27</sup>

It was to help meet these as well as other reactions to the experience of conversion such as the "spiritual dryness which is the peculiar trial of those who have come through great religious experiences"<sup>28</sup> that various Group disciplines and "life which is lived *within* the laws of self-denial, fellowship and obedience" were urged.<sup>29</sup>

The comments of Henry P. Van Dusen on this matter are trenchant and certainly, for many local groups, accurate:

The function of "the Group" is threefold. It is the school for effective training of those newly come into the Movement. It is the means for the continuous discipline and nurture of every member, experienced and novitiate alike. It is the organ of strategy through which all the Movement's work of public propaganda is done.

The Groups have no formal membership and no fixed conditions for admission. But their fellowship far surpasses in intimacy, in frankness, in mutual understanding and devotion, in unshakable loyalty, any other communities of which I know—the Salvation Army, a social fraternity, a secret cult, a monastic order of the most exacting requirements.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Foot, *Life Began Yesterday* (New York, 1935), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Canon L. W. Grensted, Oriel Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, Oxford, in a statement to Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>28</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 69. In the words of another participant, "The members believe in sharing because they realize man's infinite powers of self-deception."

<sup>30</sup> Van Dusen, "The Oxford Group Movement," p. 245.

*Intra-Group Disciplines within the Oxford Group  
Movement*

While most participants in the Oxford Group movement would not have thought of themselves as belonging separately in two fellowships, that of the movement as a whole and that of their local groups, there is some value in distinguishing these in order to analyze some of the personal-social interactions that occurred. In these local groups, for example, pressures could be—and were—brought to bear on individuals to lead them to make public testimonies or, in some cases, public confessions where guidance indicated that these were necessary or desirable. Moreover, participants could be drawn into deeper commitment to the work of the movement, instructed in their life-changing responsibilities, urged to surrender other sins and faults, and encouraged to live to the "four moral absolutes." In every case "loyalty" and deference to the more experienced life-changers were insisted upon although, in theory, it was to their superiority as disciplined instruments for receiving guidance rather than to their seniority in the service of the movement that such deference was to be made.<sup>31</sup>

Although the vocabulary of Frank Buchman and some of his closer associates seemed to emphasize unquestioning obedience to leaders within the Group, it would be a mistake to identify the movement as arbitrary or overbearing in any external sense. Whatever disciplines operated upon participants operated upon them because the participants wanted it to be so.

In its simplest form, perhaps, the structure of the Oxford Group may be thought of as a series of concentric cir-

<sup>31</sup> A. J. Russell reports having been told that loyalty was particularly necessary toward those "more experienced in Christian living" and added that it would be sheer presumption for a newcomer outspokenly to condemn a glaring fault in a veteran member without having "earned the right [to criticize] by loving, solicitous fellowship" (*op. cit.*, p. 32).

cles extending outward from the leader and his associates to the undetermined number of individuals who drifted more or less casually into and out of the movement or some part of it. The kinds of disciplines which operated within the movement appear to have followed roughly the same pattern. At any rate, more and other commitments, sacrifices, and achievements were expected of those who had advanced further into the movement than were expected of those who were taking their first steps into its fellowship.

For some newcomers the discipline seemed so light that they might be disposed to think that none existed. Generally this might consist only of giving enough of their confidence to the life-changer to enable him to locate a problem and encourage full "confession and surrender" to God. Whatever disciplines were felt could be generally identified as part of the logic of personal evangelism and not as a demand on the part of anyone in the movement. Numerous witnesses attest to the extreme patience and lack of high-pressure which they noted among some of the more experienced life-changers. Once an initial confession had been made, however, it was quite common practice within the Group to suggest, and in some cases to urge, that the newcomer make some public statement of his experience in order possibly to help to reach others and also to help him "drive stakes" against the danger of his own backsliding. Sometimes the pressure was very mild, but in some groups it might be very insistent. Whatever was done was always to be done on guidance or at the instigation of God. Aware of the criticism directed against the movement for its allegedly "high pressure" tactics, H. A. Walter and others took care to explain that no individual within the fellowship should be coerced into making a public confession unless or until there was clear guidance for him to do so.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Or, as one informant explained, citing *Soul Surgery* as his authority, "Only God can show a man when and where he must confess."

Among older participants other sorts of disciplines operated; these included the practices of sharing of possessions, receiving guidance in small groups, mutual confession, and so on. The practice of praying over individuals who were growing lax in their faith or zeal served to induce some members to conform in order not to be humiliated within Group circles. A. J. Russell found that they "encouraged 'checking' faults among themselves though the 'checking' must always be seemly and expressed in the spirit of loving fellowship, and not allowed to degenerate into the sin of faultfinding."<sup>33</sup>

Partly because of the desire to make certain that guidance that was received by various individuals was "right" by having it "checked" with other Group members and partly for the sake of maintaining maximum *esprit de corps* in the task of life-changing, intra-group sharing was particularly stressed among members of traveling teams.<sup>34</sup>

Although it was felt necessary, for a number of reasons, that guided intra-group disciplines be encouraged, it was regarded as crucial for effective life-changing that participants work in teams. "No lone-wolfing" was a motto which Frank Buchman had very early adopted—and "Teamwork" was erected into a "principle" of the Group along with surrender, guidance, sharing, fellowship, life-changing, "faith and prayer," love, honesty, purity, and unselfishness, restitution, "fearless dealing with sin," and loyalty.

Before participants were asked to join traveling teams or assume other responsible positions in the activities of the Group, guidance had to be very clear and the preparation

<sup>33</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> "If there is one thing absolutely certain," wrote one participant following a trip with such a team, "it is that the Oxford Group is not a mutual admiration society. . . . Very quietly, but quite firmly, this kind person [a fellow team member] began to discuss some of the things that I had said at the meeting in the afternoon; the process was kindly, ruthless and effective" (Foot, *op. cit.*, p. 17). Intra-team criticism extended to matters of personal dress.

for the tasks as thorough as the Group could make it. There were many participants in the movement, of course, who were not themselves guided, or invited as a result of guidance, to travel as representatives of the Group. "My part was and is as yet undefined," wrote one such peripheral participant. "I am sure I shall be guided from time to time to become a . . . unit of that dynamic movement."<sup>85</sup> Others found themselves with varying degrees of responsibility in the movement, and this was accepted as strictly in accord with Divine Will provided they were living "surrendered lives." The extent of participation of each member in the Oxford Group movement was partly a matter of the extent to which he could or would commit himself, although other factors were felt by the Group to determine what his actual role would be.

#### *Leadership in the Oxford Group Movement*

Concerning the role of Frank Buchman himself there exists considerable confusion among critics of the movement, although this matter does not appear to have concerned his own followers greatly. Many of the former insisted that he maintained autocratic, though disguised, control of the movement and criticized the program severely on this account. One critic declared:

He alone has supreme authority wherever he is. Only a personal contact with him can reveal the subtle influences which together make possible the well-nigh incredible sway that he exercises. There is something almost hypnotic about it. Men and women will do anything for him. They abandon their wills to his, with eager consent. They count it a privilege to do the humblest tasks for him. They cheerfully give up all they possess—money, time, and abilities to his direction. They do not think of it thus; they think they are free agents. How then are they misled in this delusion? Their reasoning is, Frank has been

<sup>85</sup> Ruth St. Denis, *An Unfinished Life* (New York, 1939), p. 384.

mightily used by God to begin the greatest spiritual revival in history. He is more surrendered to Christ than any other man. He has greater vision than any one else in the Group. He has given up his life to the movement which he founded, working with almost superhuman energy. . . . His spiritual power is proved beyond all doubt by his unequalled success as a life-changer.<sup>36</sup>

"By any possible calculus, Dr. Frank N. D. Buchman is a man of very remarkable powers," was the comment of a more objective observer.<sup>37</sup> A thoughtful analysis of the personality of Dr. Buchman has been made by Walter H. Clark, who concludes that

his personality is open to several interpretations, which explains why he is a schemer to one man, a naive child to another, and a saint to still another. . . . Van Dusen has probably put his finger on Buchman's guiding genius when he ascribes his power to his unreserved dedication to what he feels to be God's Will. This is strongly conditioned by his will to power over people, his personal ambition, and his genuine love of others.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever his personal feelings and ambitions may have been, it seems clear that the position accorded Frank Buchman by his followers rested upon other grounds than sheer personal attractiveness and popularity.<sup>39</sup> First impressions of the man reported by individuals whom he later helped in ways which they regarded as miraculous were not always enthusiastically favorable. Some were hostile.

Speaking to Begbie, one early convert said:

He made no impression upon me . . . neither one way nor the other. It never occurred to me to think of him as an out-of-the-way sort of person. He seemed perfectly natural, not particularly

<sup>36</sup> M. Kiddle, letter quoted in Henson, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>37</sup> Van Dusen, "Apostle to the Twentieth Century," p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> "Frank's guidance always seems to be so right" was the comment of one informant.

interesting, and certainly not in the least striking. But after he had left me I was conscious of a very curious feeling about him. I wanted to see him again.<sup>40</sup>

After a second talk with Frank Buchman the same informant thought "he was still an average person . . . yet he left behind him . . . the distinct impression that he could help."<sup>41</sup> Another had reported as his immediate feeling the conviction that "here was a man of understanding sympathy, one who wouldn't be shocked, one who could help . . . there was no professionalism about him . . . I had the feeling that in this man there was plenty of time. Nothing suggested commercial bustle."<sup>42</sup> Another early patient said,

F.B. never pursued me. But I couldn't shake the thought of him out of my mind. I got no line from him, never heard a word about him, never met him [in the interval following his first meeting]. Yet from the moment of our first meeting, he was hardly ever out of my thoughts. I've talked to other fellows since about their first impressions of F.B., and I find that he took many of them as he took me. It was a strange strong feeling that he really knew about one, and could help one; that he had the right medicine and could effect a real cure.<sup>43</sup>

"'A horrid, bumptious American,' was my inward comment when he came into my room, with an introduction from J—," recalled a young man at Oxford University.<sup>44</sup> "At first I liked Frank very much," reported a later convert, "then not so much, until I began to understand him thoroughly. Afterwards I discovered my experience was similar to that of many of his firmest friends."

Among those outside the movement and not subsequently associated with Frank Buchman, impressions were even more diverse, some favorable and others disparaging. In 1923 Harold Begbie had found him:

<sup>40</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

A young-looking man of middle life, tall, upright, stoutish, clean-shaven, spectacled, with that mien of scrupulous, shampooed and almost medical cleanness, or freshness, which is so characteristic of the hygienic American.

His carriage and his gestures are distinguished by an invariable alertness. He never droops, he never slouches. You find him in the small hours of the morning with the same quickness of eye and the same athletic erectness . . . which seem to bring a breeze into the breakfast room. Few men so quiet and restrained exhale a spirit of such contagious well-being.

A slight American accent marks his speech. . . . The voice is low but vigorous, with a sincere ring of friendliness and good humour. . . . He strikes one on a first meeting as a warm-hearted and very happy man, who can never know what it is to be either physically tired or mentally bored. I am tempted to think that if Mr. Pickwick had given birth to a son, and that son had emigrated in boyhood to America, he would have been not unlike this amiable and friendly surgeon of souls.<sup>45</sup>

Rom Landau's description of him in 1936 reported him to be:

short, stoutish, and benevolent-looking, with a smile on his thin but firm lips and with a pair of extremely bright, keen eyes that were always watching something from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. The only thing he did not suggest was religion. He might have been a bank manager or a successful American impresario. This discrepancy between his looks and his vocation only increased my desire to meet him.<sup>46</sup>

Where impressions were hostile, the explanation for this which participants in the movement offered both for their own reactions and for those of nonparticipants was that sin was blinding them from a true understanding of the way

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21. "The impressive thing in F.B. is that a man so unimpressive can work miracles—miracles which would seem to demand extraordinary qualities of mind" (p. 20).

<sup>46</sup> Landau, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

in which the Holy Spirit could use people. One associate of Frank Buchman explained the irritation shown against the leader of the movement very simply: "It is like this. You go to a doctor and he gives you medicine. You don't like the medicine, but it is none the less good for you."

That Frank Buchman had any personal desire for the power or prestige of leadership was firmly denied by his associates, and some went so far as to deny that there was any leadership evident in the movement, except that provided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>47</sup> In answer to the charges of dictatorial rule within the movement on the part of Frank Buchman and of abject obedience to him on the part of his followers and associates many statements were made by participants in the movement.

He is a long way from the domineering character who carries everyone with him by sheer force. Pleasant, suave, obliging, eternally merry, active, strong-willed, if you like. But not an overwhelming force breaking down all obstacles by the ruthless drive of the leader born. . . .

The shouts, the tempers, the pique, the postures, the vanity, the overdone censure and the overdone praise—these concomitants of dictatorship are missing when Frank is on the job—he gets his work done . . . without these infirmities of the unsurrendered great.

A point that his friends stress about Frank is the utter selflessness of the man, the absolute identification of his own personality with the intangible development of the body of Christ on earth. He is perfectly willing to be out of the picture, to be humiliated,

<sup>47</sup> "Frank does not attempt to dominate meetings or houseparties or people," wrote A. J. Russell in 1932. "He uses meetings as means for training his young men to become leaders and to carry on the work when he has gone.

"Because the Holy Spirit was the real head of this Fellowship, 'Frank' did not arrogate to himself full control. When guided, he would leave the leadership to another. Sometimes he would be seen at the back of the room listening to his colleagues whom he was training for leadership, occasionally breaking in with a quick, clarifying phrase when a difficult question came up" (*op. cit.*, pp. 121, 32).

scandalised, or, if necessary, to assume and exert all authority. . . .

*Frank is a child listening to God and obeying Him implicitly, and getting all those around him to do the same. And no one will ever understand this movement who does not accept this as a working hypothesis, whether he believes it or not at the start.*<sup>48</sup>

In answer to a question concerning Dr. Buchman's role in the Group, one informant explained to me that "Where God's will is the source of all our action, He may choose one leader one day for one job and another the next day for another,"<sup>49</sup> and cited a statement in one of the printed testimonies:

God knows not only which leader is best qualified to carry out that task or meet that need but which one, at that time, is in the best spiritual condition to do so, or which one will thereby find greatest spiritual growth.<sup>50</sup>

To the extent that Frank Buchman demonstrated a "surrendered life" and continued to induce changes in the lives of others, and presumably only to that extent, was his claim to leadership within the movement to be sustained. There was evidently little question, however, in the minds of those who worked most closely with him of his right to his position. "I have never seen a man so completely surrendered to God as Frank," declared one leading associate. "He is the most disciplined personality I know. Everything he has is absolutely given up to God. He allows himself to be just carried along without effort on a wave of the Holy Spirit."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125, 134, 135, 199.

<sup>49</sup> R.H., personal interview. Data in author's files.

<sup>50</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> S.S. in statement given to A. J. Russell, in 1932. This informant added: "He never seems to tire. His life is entirely without conflict or worry, except when deeply concerned over someone else's problem. Occasionally he gets pained with sin, and can deal drastically with insincerity and compromise. He has amazing patience in the face of the incredible, persistent and blind stupidity of persons who consult him while unwilling to take his advice and surrender the sin which prevents them from fulfilling their destiny" (Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 138).

Many later followers were inclined to be extravagant at times in their estimate of the leader. One wrote of him as "the man whose influence has been wider than any other in the last twenty years."

While many of his most severe critics were prepared to grant that he was an extraordinary religious leader, the qualities which they recognized were expressed in entirely different terms and against quite different structures of meaning and interpretation. To these, his unorthodox methods of evangelical activity were particularly impressive, though there were other aspects of his leadership and of the conduct of his followers that called for interpretation and frequently for attack by nonparticipants.

Up to this point little or no reference has been made to the question of the sources and administration of funds for Oxford Group activities. For funds to maintain any of the activities of those who were selected to represent the Group in the capacity of full-time life-changers, participants looked to Frank Buchman himself, who seems to have taken a constant and direct hand in making necessary financial arrangements for his associates who were living "on faith and prayer." He himself purported to live on the principle that "where God guides, God provides," and it was no doubt partly to lend force to this theory that neither he nor his associates felt it necessary to reveal the sources of their income or to render public account of the disposition of funds received.

No formal soliciting of funds among participants occurred. Frank Buchman was, as we have seen, adept in suggesting to those whom he regarded as having the means to give, projects that they might underwrite; and he was not reticent about calling the attention of persons of wealth to the worth of these enterprises. From various accounts given by participants in the movement, one is led to con-

clude that most of those who were active paid their own way or were helped in various informal ways by fellow members of their local groups. Owing to the ease with which life-changers seemed to be financed, there is some danger in assuming that the expense to the organization was very much greater than it actually was. Where participants in the movement were not able to pay their own way, Frank Buchman succeeded in finding means to help them. Often no more was required than a compelling account of some undertaking told with such enthusiasm that donors were glad to give. Sometimes Dr. Buchman was reported to have used other means to meet expenses. Landau tells of an occasion when, upon being told by the manager of a large Canadian hotel that the rate for rooms would be twelve dollars a day per person, Dr. Buchman replied in straightforward confidence that "God had told" him not to pay more than three dollars and a half a day.<sup>52</sup>

Estimates of the number of life-changers who traveled for the movement with all expenses paid varied from a dozen to several score. "At least thirty-five of them have been living without an assured income for several years," reported A. J. Russell. "All have piquant stories to tell of their faith being tested to the last penny and the last minute; though none has ever gone hungry save through voluntary fasting. . . ."<sup>53</sup>

Many, including Frank Buchman himself, regarded this appearance of informality in the financing of the movement as both accurate and necessary—accurate as a description of the way in which funds for "God's enterprises" came and necessary in order that it might be an object lesson to

<sup>52</sup> Landau, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>53</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 119. On this point a number of participants with whom I raised this question were most vague. From this I assume that the rank and file of membership was not clearly informed as to who within the movement was living "on faith and prayer" and who was not.

the "hard-headed" skeptic on what faith and prayer could accomplish. One participant wrote:

It is a striking fact in an age of banks and commerce that a world-wide fellowship can operate without endowments or financial backing of any kind. Some people, unable or unwilling to believe in a supernatural explanation, have suggested that there are rich men behind the Groups. These mythical millionaires have not yet put in an appearance, and their fat cheques have evidently got lost in the post. Very few of those in this fellowship . . . have much of this world's goods. The hundred and sixty or so on "full time" work who have no human security whatever never ask or hint for money.<sup>54</sup>

In the handling of finances, as in other aspects of the Group's program, definite efforts seem to have been made to utilize the situation in such a way as to point out a lesson or to present evidence that could be regarded as further manifestation of the truth of the Group's message.

Having considered various aspects of the organization of the Oxford Group, its composition, disciplines, and leadership, we come now to the methods that were used for attracting participants and some of the general principles underlying these methods. Since the Group was not organized formally, it would be inaccurate to speak of it as "recruiting members." Much attention and care was given, however, to the problem of mobilizing participants, appealing to converts and like-minded adherents, and activating them in the crusade.

#### *Methods for Attracting Participants*

The essential stratagems for accomplishing these purposes grew out of, and were closely related to, the techniques for life-changing, some of which were mentioned in the opening chapter. At the risk of some repetition, these

<sup>54</sup> Reginald A. E. Holme, *The Oxford Group: Its Progress and Principles* (London, 1934), pp. 19-20.

techniques and some of the principles on which they were based may be reviewed here briefly.

The basic principles of Frank Buchman's evangelism, in the opinion of H. A. Walter, who wrote the Oxford Group manual, *Soul Surgery*, were that it was work with individuals, not with masses as in the "old-time hit or miss revival," that it was fitted to the needs of each individual, and that it was intimate, thorough, and personal.<sup>55</sup> He liked to think of it as similar, in certain respects, to the modern scientific and professional technique of the physician or the surgeon, though other analogies were also used to suggest the technical preparation for life-changing and the concentration of approach upon one individual at a time.<sup>56</sup>

Underlying these methods was the assumption that any individual who was not evangelically active was "sin-sick" and in need of spiritual operation in order to be restored to spiritual health. The problem, therefore, was one of assiduously winning the confidence of the sinner (whether the latter regarded himself as a sinner or not), arousing him to a sense of sinfulness, leading him to confess and surrender some specific attitude or practice designated as the offending sin, and helping him to conserve and strengthen his hold on the new life by means of guidance, restitution, sharing, witnessing, and helping to change others in turn. The task was greatly facilitated if the soul surgeon could discover, through intimate acquaintance, the areas of insecurity, guilt, anxiety, unhappiness, or "defeat" in the life of the prospective convert and persuade him to interpret these as the consequences of specific sins which would have to be surrendered and replaced by other practices if security, inward peace, self-confidence, happiness, assurance, and salvation were to be attained. The process of soul surgery

<sup>55</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

was thus thought of as a process of "wooing and winning" individuals from a natural condition of sinfulness, a condition which might seem pleasant and satisfying to them but which could not be ultimately satisfying because it was contrary to the will of God and which, unquestionably, must result sooner or later in personal unhappiness, conflict within the self and with others, insecurity, defeat, and so on. The task of changing lives by soul surgery involved more than denunciation of sin; it aimed to convince sinners that greater happiness, more lasting satisfactions, and in fact the only "true" satisfactions in living, lay in the spiritual quality of a life lived in accordance with the "four moral absolutes" of purity, honesty, unselfishness, and love and maintained by other specific practices which Frank Buchman and his associates indicated.

A fortiori the gospel of the movement could be demonstrated by the testimony of individuals who could say that they had been changed from complacent, unhappy, insecure, aimless, or otherwise sinful and undesirable personalities to strong, purposeful, joyous, and creative participants in the new fellowship. Nor was the testimony to be confined to personal experience of the speaker, for whether he had personally undergone the conversion himself or had seen it or heard about it in the case of others, with his spiritual vision and understanding he could discern the self-willed from the God-controlled, the sinful from the surrendered life, and contrast the two. Similarly, of course, individuals who were not participants in the movement might also be led to condemn, in general terms, all that was selfish and to endorse what Group members identified as right and good.

In social psychological terms what the Group sought to do was to get every individual to identify all that he regarded as undesirable, harmful, or evil in individuals and in society with *sin in the individual* and to identify all that

was pleasant, desirable, and "right" with the absence of sin in the individual. The dissatisfactions, unhappiness, the problems, and the evil of unchanged lives were dramatically juxtaposed against the satisfactions, the security, the joy, and the good that came with change.

Having persuaded the individual to identify personal happiness and unhappiness as well as abstract good and evil with the presence or absence of sin in the individual, the next step was to get the sinner to *want* the desirable, "God-control way of life" badly enough to take the necessary steps.

These steps might be presented as hard and exacting or as comparatively quick and easy, depending somewhat upon the need of the sinner as the life-changer saw it. If the proselyte appeared to be suffering from strong feelings of guilt, then the soul surgeon might urge complete confession, full restitution, public witness, and so on. On other occasions or for other persons, however, he might present the process as a very simple experiment—"as easy as listening to your radio." Frank Buchman himself appears to have been unequalled within the movement in his ability to put his finger upon a particular trait or habit which the convert would recognize and avow as his major sin and to adopt the appropriate attitude toward the sinner. "In nine cases out of ten," Begbie declared in 1923, "the diagnosis is true, for he is now so great a master in . . . soul surgery that he knows the facial indication of almost every sin which men think they can keep to themselves."<sup>57</sup> There was no standard formula for the treatment of every sin, much less of every sinner.

What was at first deft appeal to the individual sinner at the spot where his need was felt most acutely came later on in the course of the movement to be increasingly a broadside appeal with few of the "rapier-like thrusts" that

<sup>57</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

had characterized life-changing in the earlier period. Underlying both the earlier and the later methods was the general principle that "lure is more effective than logic." Asked what he regarded as the greatest mistake made by evangelists, one of the Group leaders answered: "The neglect to intrigue the man's imagination before moving in on his will. . . . I am never worried about a man who seems interested."<sup>58</sup> This principle, in addition to the desire not to alienate anyone, at least in the early stages of his contact with the movement, led to many of the practices which hostile critics, particularly those with different religious values, found most objectionable.

To this end life-changers were urged to "win the confidence" of sinners; and to this end also were public testimony and witness, as well as all the subsequent publicity of Moral Rearmament, the slogans, proclamations, and endorsements, to be pointed. "Religious work in these urgent days," one participant explained, "has got to be, not sentimental or haphazard, but strategic." And the strategy, at least during the later period of the Oxford Group movement, took the form of presenting the messages and practices of the Group in as varied, thorough, attractive, and convincing form as guidance would suggest or as the ingenuity of participants could devise.

In *Soul Surgery*, the directions for implementing the new evangelism were comparatively simple and direct. Having gained the confidence of the sinner by sharing his own faults and, as nearly as possible, his tastes, and having discovered the sin to be surrendered or extracted, the life-changer was urged to speak frankly without regard to the

<sup>58</sup> S.S., in statement given to Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 181. Russell, himself a journalist, saw other techniques in operation in Oxford Group evangelism: "Whether intentionally or not, I quickly saw they were working on the lines of true journalism; for one thing they unerringly sensed the value of the very oldest and the very newest. Yet they were amazingly orthodox, holding sometimes by paradox even the interest of the heterodox" (*ibid.*, p. 20).

customary "barriers of pride." He was not to show any hesitancy in his "fearless dealing with sin"; he was to avoid morbid probing, yet insist on complete confession. He was to rid himself of feelings of self-righteousness, show "no appearance of shocked surprise" at what he learned, betray no confidence, and throughout the whole process remain humble and receptive to divine guidance. In his work he was cautioned to "take nothing for granted," to overlook no one, to be persistent, enthusiastic, loving, and relentless. And he was to be willing to be "a fool for Christ's sake."<sup>59</sup>

"Often" it was suggested for use in the early stages of the process, "the unconventional way, introducing an element of surprise as well as a revelation of love, may take another unaware, and cause him to look at religious matters from a new angle." Sometimes it would be necessary to "take the patient off his guard" in order to get him to recognize or acknowledge his sin. Particular care was to be taken to avoid "striking" at the wrong time, for by such "misdirected spiritual effort . . . we not only do not gain the individual but spoil the chances of his being gained afterwards."<sup>60</sup>

While the consequences of surrendered living, of guidance in the fellowship of others who had been changed, and of helping to change the lives of others were to be presented as desirable in every way and available to anyone who chose to strive for them, they were not to be gained without cost. The price was the surrender of whatever sin the sinner or the soul surgeon could specify. In order that the change be felt to be genuine and satisfying, it was necessary that it be preceded by some such recognized form of sin as pride to be humiliated, selfishness to be surrendered, impurity or dishonesty to be confessed and at least partially or symbolically atoned for through restitution. In some

<sup>59</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-39.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-43.

instances the confession might have to be made publicly, the restitution at considerable expense, the sharing at considerable sacrifice. In other words, the action, whatever it might be according to guidance, would quite often have to be difficult or "hard" in order to be felt by the sinner himself and by onlookers as genuine and as evidence of effective and complete surrender. "The effectiveness of the Oxford Group," thought one convert, "is in no small measure due to the drastic process of confronting men and women with an 'absolute' standard," though it may not be necessary in every case that the response of the sinner be "hard" for him or that it be dramatic.

Because it was felt that individuals whose consciences had been "stung" would usually resist the Oxford Group cure by arguing, as well as for other reasons which we shall note, it became a rule among life-changers never to argue: "Lives that have been led to Christ are the positive answer."<sup>61</sup>

Whatever could be done by direct and undisguised methods was to be done. But there were many hardened "modern" sinners, as life-changers found, who had to be approached in more indirect fashion, in terms which they would understand and respond to, and by means which would impress the Group message most thoroughly, and, later, most widely and most rapidly as well. In effect this meant that the testimonies to the rising tide of the new spirit, to the need for moral rearmament, and to the consequences of God-control, as well as every other activity of Oxford Group participants should be made as joyful, happy, and attractive as possible.

The reliance upon appearance which had figured at first only in private personal relationships between the soul surgeon and his patient became more marked as the movement

<sup>61</sup> See chap. vi, pp. 163 ff., below.

emerged into wider social circles and undertook its more ambitious community, national, and international campaigns. While it sought to keep its evangelism on the personal level, organize its full-time workers and others into small, close-knit, yet diversified teams, and maintain itself in active little local groups, the Oxford Group movement gave increasing attention to the manner in which its appeals, direct and indirect, were being made. Devices that had been implicit in the preliminary task of winning confidence were made explicit, and many participants in the movement, partly as a result of criticism perhaps, but partly because of their enthusiasm for what they were doing, became conscious of their techniques and the effect which different stratagems might have. The required steps for conversion remained the same, but it was in the initial stages leading up to the point where individual sinners were ready to confess their sins and seek the solution recommended by the Group that the skilfully planned, comprehensive, and impressive pattern of Moral Rearmament appeals was developed. Although life-changing remained, in Group thinking, superhumanly guided and directed, every talent and ingenuity among team members and participants was welcomed and encouraged.

Thus far we have not taken note of one very important fact in connection with Oxford Group life-changing practices, and that is that they seldom if ever took place apart from some Group-planned or Group-sponsored social situation. "No lone-wolfing" was a Buchman dictum that was taken very seriously, and representatives of the Group made a point of not appearing before any gathering alone.

At every step in the life-changing process both life-changer and convert were either part of, or not far from, a larger group of some sort. Often the social situation was one created by the Group as a suitable setting for the varied

range of activities that were carried forward. The houseparty, for example, served admirably to bring together in an informal situation all types or participants as well as individuals who had not yet taken even the first steps. That Group leaders were aware of the importance of maintaining the right atmosphere in the houseparties for effective life-changing is very evident in some of their comments about it. Some seemed particularly concerned that the atmosphere of these gatherings be such as to convey to prospective converts the idea that many others like themselves were interested or were trying the program out.

Through the houseparty, as well as through the public gatherings in smart hotels and later the giant public rallies, other characteristic ideas of the group about the nature of religion and of religious experience were conveyed. The idea that evangelical religion was not exclusively for the "down and out" was one of these. So was the idea that religion need not be staid, gloomy, morbid, or Sunday-schoolish.

As the movement grew, other types of social situations, notably the mass rally, were used to acquaint outsiders with the program and message of the Group. Although the same general lines of appeal were used, stratagems tended to become somewhat more standardized, and in certain respects at least the Moral Rearmament crusade took on the aspect of a large-scale publicity and sales promotion campaign.

In this program the Group leaders give the definite impression of attempting to become all things to all people. One of the devices used in connection with the large rallies was to juxtapose and present on the same program recognized leaders in various types of social activities not commonly thought of as congenial. This device served several purposes, one of which was to demonstrate dramatically to skeptics and critics that the message of the movement was a

universal one, that it was valid for all classes, needed by all, and available to anyone who was willing to accept it. More specifically it could be used also to refute the charges of some critics that the movement was, as Bates said, "an opiate of the classes." By putting a labor leader on the same platform with the manager of a large corporation or a titled noblewoman with a former Communist and letting each testify to the truth of the same message, the Group sought not only to attract large numbers of sinners but also to give irrefutable answer to "petty-minded charges" that were being made against it.

The general principle of appealing to various classes of individuals through the use of leaders or "representatives" in the hope that sinners from each group or class would be "reached" and stirred to further interest and activity in the movement was applied from very early in the history of the Oxford Group. Along with it, other stratagems such as the use of words that would be most meaningful to the various types of individuals approached were used. Another obvious example of the latter-day effort on the part of the movement to pitch its message to a wide variety of classes and personalities is found in the different types of stories which were recounted. That the entire emphasis of the Oxford Group movement was upon the upper-middle classes, as some observers have claimed, is open to question.

Thus by direct statement, by inference, and by appearance, Moral Rearmament strategists and participants endeavored to interpret and "sell" the Buchman gospel.<sup>62</sup> Although various media were used to convey the message of the movement and the testimonies and witness of its participants as well as the endorsers of sponsors, the devices of appeal were the same. These included the familiar propa-

<sup>62</sup> Leaders of local groups meeting in New York in Dec., 1938, were told that there was in America at that time "the lowest state of sales resistance to MRA" of any time (Oxford Group newsletter, Dec. 21, 1938, p. 1).

ganda devices of presenting Moral Rearmament in very general terms as the adequate and only answer to every problem, a simple, workable solution for everyone regardless of his background or position, a program upon which everyone could agree and in which no one could lose. Ideas and experiences implicated in Oxford Group participation were conveyed by assertion and repetition, together with the adroit use of prestige-bearing names, titles, or other noteworthy credentials of speakers, participants, or sponsors. In line with its principle of addressing its evangelical message to the sinner in terms which he himself would most readily understand and to which he would most readily respond, group leaders urged businessmen to speak to businessmen, sportsmen to speak to sportsmen, laborers to laborers, housewives to housewives, and each to all others.

It is not within the scope of this study to consider in any further detail the numerous other principles and the psychological interpretations of group strategy which might be helpful, nor does it seem possible to consider what it was in the personalities of those who heard the message that enabled them to respond to it or prevented them from accepting it. For further discussion of these matters the reader is referred to the brief interpretation of Oxford Group strategy and the reasons for its success found in Cantril's *The Psychology of Social Movements*.

In this chapter we have discussed various aspects of the structure and organization of the Oxford Group including some of the methods and principles used for attracting participants. In the chapter which follows we shall be interested in examining the various kinds of religious experience which participants in the movement appear to have enjoyed.

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V

## *Varieties of Oxford Group Religious Experience*

IN THE OXFORD Group movement no more than in any other religious movement is it possible to point to any single sort of religious experience and confidently identify it as typical of the group or as the common or like experience of every individual in the group. If any generalization may be made about the varieties of religious experience within the Oxford Group movement one might be that in virtually every case the religious experience was felt to be immediately and acutely an *individual* experience and that in most cases it was reported to be an intensely thrilling one. Other observations will be made in connection with various case accounts that follow, but it should be recognized at the outset that there is much about religious experience and its nature that this analysis may not succeed in uncovering or in interpreting correctly.

### *Personal Evangelism and Religious Thrill*

Frank Buchman in his own conversion had experienced something akin to an ecstatic vision, and the experience of this and of what followed had moved him profoundly.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> This had occurred, it will be recalled, in 1908 while he sat listening to a Pentecostalist woman preacher in a small church in Keswick, England. "I had entered the little church," he recalled in the account which he gave A. J. Russell, "with a divided will, nursing pride, selfishness, ill-will, which prevented me from functioning as a Christian minister should. The woman's simple talk personalized the Cross for me that day, and suddenly I had a poignant vision of the Crucified.

"There was infinite suffering on the face of the Master, and I realized for the first time the great abyss separating myself from Him. That was all. But it produced in me a vibrant feeling, as though a strong current of life had sud-

was convinced that here indeed was *the* religious experience, an experience beside which all others paled, and that it was not merely his privilege but his duty to bring this experience and its gospel home to everyone whom he personally could reach.<sup>2</sup> Impelled by this conviction and at the same time adroit in the art of changing lives, Frank Buchman succeeded in conveying thrilling religious experience to others who not only varied widely from himself in respect to background and temperament but who also differed considerably among themselves. Nearly everyone, he discovered, had some personal problem creating anxiety or insecurity, some unpleasant doubts about living, or some desire to know a deeper religious experience, and for these all he believed he had the answer.

His general program of personal evangelism and the patterns of activity it involved have been described briefly above as an amalgam of demands and rewards which could be made as rigorous as the sinfulness or the stubbornness of

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denly been poured into me, and afterwards a dazed sense of a great spiritual shaking up. There was no longer this feeling of a divided will, no sense of calculation and argument, of oppression and helplessness; a wave of strong emotion, following the will to surrender, rose up within me from the depths of an estranged spiritual life, and seemed to lift my soul from its anchorage of selfishness, bearing it across that great sundering abyss to the foot of the Cross.

"With this deeper experience of how the love of God in Christ had bridged the chasm dividing me from Him, and the new sense of buoyant life that had come, I returned to the house feeling a powerful urge to share my experience . . ." (*For Sinners Only*, p. 43).

To another person Frank Buchman had reported earlier: "I remember one sensation very distinctly; it was a vibrant feeling up and down the spine as if a strong current of life had suddenly been poured into me. Then followed my surrender. No; it came at the same time" (Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men*, p. 25).

<sup>2</sup> "This experience," he is reported to have said, "had a decisive effect on my life. It taught me that it is impossible for a proud heart—no matter how virtuous it may be—to enter the kingdom of love, that all is sin that separates us from God or from a fellow human being, and that it is not sufficient for removing sin to hate it or to forsake it and make restitution. I had undergone a change and could become the instrument to lead others to this change. To this task shall my life be dedicated" (Laun, *op. cit.*, p. 192).

the sinner required it to be, or as attractive and satisfying as he desired. If the sinner were already conscious of his sinfulness and oppressed by a sense of guilt, much less was required of the soul surgeon, as we have seen, than if the person were, for instance, admittedly unhappy but stubborn. In any case the surrender to God was regarded as a matter of the will, and in every case the experience was expected to be an emotionally satisfying and often very highly exciting one.

The thrills of Frank Buchman's converts, however, were by no means limited to the emotional responses accompanying or directly attendant upon conversion itself. There were many exciting experiences both in the processes leading up to the "operation" and in the activities which followed. In addition to the essential religious thrills and the mental satisfactions which came with the feelings of assured salvation, relaxation into the hands of a beneficent personal God, regained sense of direction, unity of purpose, and cleared conscience, there were, as we shall see, thrills of fellowship among the converted to be gained from sharing experiences with each other and with others who had not yet been redeemed, seeking group guidance in early morning quiet times, converting or witnessing the conversion of others, recounting all of these experiences before public gatherings, participating in a cause which was assuredly God's own, having a simple and convincing answer to the problems of a complex and confusing world, following a leader, and feeling a sense of political power and social prominence. These and many other responses are found in the annals of Oxford Group testimony. Not least among the thrills reported by participants in the movement were some which must be regarded as thrills in the contemplation of the skill and ingenuity with which God's purposes were being carried out within the movement and apparently successfully, in due season, in the world.

*Some Specific Thrill Responses in Soul Surgery*

The initial emotional responses which Frank Buchman evoked were as likely to be the shock of surprise (or in some instances embarrassment followed by indignant protest) as they were to be the joyful embracing of a new gospel, for, in the beginning of his activity, he was often exceedingly blunt and direct in what he regarded as "fearless dealing with sin." This had meant, in some instances, direct and forthright probing into inner thoughts and feelings of individuals with whom he came in contact, sometimes only casually. Moreover, as Walter's manual for life-changers, *Soul Surgery*, made quite plain, no one, ministers and religious workers included, was to be regarded as exempt from the necessity of being converted if, by his failure to change the lives of others, he was thus patently demonstrating his own sinful blindness to his Christian obligation and his failure to understand what was regarded as the "most genuine" religious experience—surrender to the will and to the control of God.

Many individuals strenuously resisted this interpretation of Christian imperatives and refused to be operated upon. Some thought Frank Buchman "crude"; others were prepared to write off his "direct invasions of privacy" as bad manners; many were angry thus to be accosted and accused of ineffectiveness because of sin. But many who were intrigued acknowledged what Frank Buchman charged to be true. "I realized," wrote one leading Anglican churchman in China, "that I was shirking the application of the absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love in my own life."<sup>3</sup>

Those who surrendered forthwith began to find emotional satisfactions ranging from great relief at having

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Logan T. Roots's recollection of meeting Frank Buchman in China in 1918, *New Witness*, IV, No. 46 (Nov. 15, 1939), 7.

cleared some secret and troublesome sins from their consciences to quiet satisfaction in the recovery of a new sense of God in their lives.

The case of a young American whom Frank Buchman had encountered in China and whom he had angered by what had been taken as an insinuating taunt of spiritual ineffectiveness was recorded by Harold Begbie in his early report of the movement:

One day we got to business. I told him, in spite of myself, my temptations and my sins. They came out almost before I knew it. For the first time they were outside of myself, in words, words that startled and shamed. He understood. We got it all out into the open. The position became absolutely clear. I saw at once what was keeping me from power. There was no overflow because there was no inflow, and no inflow because sin was walling out the power of God.<sup>4</sup>

The joy which this young man testified to following his decision to surrender his will to God was great.

Another who described himself as a "divided personality" ("There were two of me; no unity") reported after his first meeting with Buchman, "I felt extraordinarily happy, just as if the fight was over."<sup>5</sup>

Somewhat more vivid was the experience of another of Frank Buchman's earliest disciples. This occurred during a houseparty which the young man was attending:

I was absorbed in a new experience. I felt as if I was living upon a mountain-top right up against the sky. . . . And there was nothing left but the claims of God and of the other man standing there before God. And I saw that it was the sins of our own choosing, the fear and shame with which we tie ourselves about, which prevent us from living always thus simply and nobly. I saw also that it was all these things which debar

<sup>4</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, "The Virginian," p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, "Persona Grata," pp. 92, 94.

us from a living *faith* in God . . . that only this faith in the tireless working of God in our lives could let loose our buried energies, could bring us to take risks with our wealth and reputation. "Sin blinds; sin binds"; it could hardly be put better than in this catchword of F.B.'s—Christianity not as imprisonment, but as a Liberation of the soul . . . ! It was a particular individual experience which I have had but few times in my life, and perhaps never with the same intensity—the experience I have described above as "standing before God." Whatever I may subsequently think of F.B. cannot alter my conviction on this subject.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of effecting personal evangelism on the college and university campus was somewhat different from what it had been at the mission station or in the theological seminary, where, owing to their familiarity with the concepts and vocabulary of sin and redemption, individuals might be more apt to identify themselves as sinners. The personal problems were of the same nature, and Frank Buchman found the same sense of confusion, purposelessness, and anxiety if not the moral guilt of the "theologs." He uncovered a fairly wide variety of problems, and he approached, or was approached by, many types of persons who felt that he could help them out. Here again were many who resisted, but Frank Buchman had learned also to wait for results and to let stories of his operations travel ahead of him. He had found it particularly effective to convert campus leaders, and it had become apparent that much could be gained by other means than the direct frontal assault upon sin with which he had begun.<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult to determine whether the converts that Frank Buchman began to make on the campus following his successful soul surgery at Cambridge and Oxford were primarily thrilled by the feelings of relief from anxiety

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, "Greats," pp. 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *The Oxford Group Movement*, pp. 44-45.

which they enjoyed or by some more mystical experience of God which all professed to have. Strong feelings of thrill were present in almost every case recorded, and these were usually directly associated with the conversion experience which undergraduates had at the hands of the Soul Surgeon, or the "Human Engineer" as Frank Buchman was also called.

Undoubtedly the sins which lay heaviest upon the minds and consciences of Buchman's first campus converts were moral infractions—sex aberrations, petty thievery, or cheating on examinations—but there were many other sins of pride and vanity which Buchman charged and which were avowed by their "victims."

The least difficult cases which Frank Buchman encountered on the campus or in the theological seminaries, though not necessarily the most thrilling in terms of results, were, apparently, those in whom anxiety or a strong sense of guilt were already present. Sometimes this was only general uneasiness, a feeling that "something was wrong," but often the trouble seems to have been very specific in the mind of the sinner or could be made so through suggestion by the soul surgeon.

M— is an example of one such case of specific difficulty. Described as "dogged by a vice" (a sex perversion which, in published testimonies, was never referred to explicitly) "picked up at boarding school" and carried by the young man through his wartime experience in the army, this young man had returned to Oxford following the war, discouraged and distressed, yet speaking to no one of his state of mind. Casually in conversation with a friend, he first learned of Frank Buchman and expressed curiosity in what the latter was doing. Shortly afterwards, he recalled, "F.B. put in a brisk, smiling and quietly cheerful" appearance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, "A Young Soldier," pp. 130-131.

In recording this case, Begbie was able also to secure Frank Buchman's recollection of the problem:

I knew . . . directly I saw him what his trouble was. We just talked of ordinary things. I didn't bother to know whether he liked me or not; all I knew was that for certain he would one day ask me to help him. That day came. He didn't find it easy to tell me the whole story. He got as far, with great difficulty, as telling me that he wasn't as happy as he wanted to be, and that he thought I might possibly be able to help him. I helped him right there at that very moment. I helped him by telling him what his trouble was. It hit him like a blow from a hammer. After that it was easy for him, easy for me, easy for God. . . . Directly the trouble was out in the open he really hated it. With this hatred was a longing for all that a good man means by the Name of God.<sup>9</sup>

For another man also undergoing temptations of a specific order which he did not name, the experience was intensely thrilling. "I had the distinct sensation that one gets in dropping a heavy load from the shoulders—a feeling of expansion and lightness."<sup>10</sup>

For some of Buchman's early converts, the operation had not been so direct or immediate; frequently sinners underwent long periods of struggle within themselves in attempting to overcome their intellectual doubts, their pride, or other hindrances to their surrender.<sup>11</sup>

The thrills of surrender appear to have been considerably enhanced if the sins which had to be confessed or the manner in which they were to be confessed were felt by the sinner to be difficult or trying. "A costly confession may be the price of power," was one of Buchman's principles.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, "A Rugger Blue," p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Some of the sins which were publicly confessed were undoubtedly very difficult to avow. On one occasion at Princeton University a young man confessed to an all-male group that he had had sexual intercourse with an aunt (F.I., informant, April, 1940).

The surrender had to be absolute, i.e., unconditional, and it had to entail willingness to do "whatever called upon by the Spirit to do." This latter, it was suggested, might include approaching a complete stranger in an effort to open the new life to him; it might mean making public confession of one's sin in addition to private confession of it; it might mean speaking freely about one's self to an audience of unregenerated sinners. "Frankness about one's faults was . . . good witness to the world, for when Christians confess, Pagans believe."<sup>12</sup> The more difficult the task in any case, whether it be voluntary confession or restitution or any of the innumerable hurdles which "changed" disciples of Frank Buchman found it necessary to set for themselves, the greater the victory.

For the help which it might give sinners in defining Christian standards of conduct Frank Buchman had suggested the four absolutes. What each of these implied was left entirely to the conscience of the individual sinner when applied to his own life. But a few minimum requirements for an abundant and healthy spiritual life were insisted upon as essential; these included, as we have noted elsewhere, the inescapable obligation to change, or help to change, the lives of sinners around one, and "complete surrender" of the individual will to the Will of God. We have already noted the mixed feelings with which converts surrendered their secret sins. For many it was even more difficult to speak publicly, as they were urged to do, concerning themselves.

"I felt as nervous as a cat," reported one early convert when called upon to speak to a group of scholars at Oxford concerning his own change.<sup>13</sup> Much more thrilling, according to some reports, were the feelings of converts who

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, "Persona Grata," p. 82.

overcame their pride and "faced up" to other challenges. To those who were able effectively to change lives, although the skill was not an easy one to acquire even with Buchman's expert advice, aiding in the conversion of others afforded additional thrills.<sup>14</sup>

Some converts, quite independent of Buchman's injunctions, were eager to spread the experience which they themselves had had. It was not by solitary evangelical action, however, that the personal evangelism of Buchman's followers was to be carried forward. His converts, Buchman found, worked more confidently and more effectively in teams. It was not only to improve the effectiveness of their life-changing that group activity was urged. There were satisfactions in group gatherings and team activity which brought thrills additional to those which accompanied the experience of being converted or of converting another man.

#### *Thrill Responses in Oxford Group Fellowship Practices*

Groups which formed among "patients," converts, and followers of Frank Buchman were associated not only for the purpose of converting others but also for the mutual stimulation to spiritual activity which converts might provide for each other through sharing, through seeking group guidance, and through other practices, such as mutual confession, which, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, quickly became a part of the pattern of activities of the movement. Disciples were quick to find warm fellowship in association with others who had undergone similar experience or were seeking similar religious goals. "I have

<sup>14</sup> "Before I left Hartford," one of the earlier converts told Begbie, "I decided to try F.B.'s method. I went to a theological student who seemed to me to be troubled, to be suffering, and confessed to him my own secret sin—impurity. The feeling of relief was extraordinary. The student came to life, confessed his secret sin to me, and ended our talk by saying, 'Prayer is going to mean something now.' To both of us it seemed that religion had never been real to us before, never been alive, and that now it was the very biggest thing alive" (*op. cit.*, "Persona Grata," p. 95).

never known a group in which people *care* so much about each other outside of my family," one participant told me, "but even there it gets pretty hard to talk about some things you know."<sup>15</sup>

Later participants in the movement were increasingly thrilled at the spirit which seemed to bind together all those who had been changed. One participant in the First Century Christian Fellowship found "a very precious relationship." Another was pleased to find "a wonderful openness which welds people together." "The most astonishing group of people I shall ever meet," declared another. "The closest bond and the most thrilling evidence of fellowship in the new spirit were felt to be found in the traveling teams. Although "there probably were not more than ten of these people who—on any human basis—I could or would have picked as friends," wrote another concerning a team with whom he traveled, "after but three days of sharing and fellowship in Christ I grew to know and love each one of the forty as I had not known or loved my own chosen clubmates during an intimacy of years."<sup>16</sup> One member wrote:

It is a remarkable fact that men and women of such diverse temperaments, pagan and pious backgrounds, of all denominations, classes and races should have learned to work and even travel together in perfect harmony. . . . There are no bottled-up dislikes, rivalries, or selfish ambitions, and consequently no barriers to obstruct the free flow of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> R.M., in personal interview. Data in author's files.

"There has been born among this group," wrote one of the subsequent leaders of Moral Rearmament, "a richness of spiritual fellowship which is the rarest thing I know" (Roots, "An Apostle to Youth," p. 808).

One of the individuals whose story was recorded by Begbie had said: "The gayest bunch I know is the group that swings around F.B. They are fellows who have found something worth finding. We never meet but what we have a good time. This is far from the professional mirth of certain sorts of religious people" (*op. cit.*, "The Virginian," p. 146).

<sup>16</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>17</sup> Holme, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

In the quiet times for seeking group guidance, in sharing in its various forms, including mutual confession and admonition, as well as in meetings of small groups to plan local strategies for advancing personal evangelism, many participants found not only rich and thrilling emotional satisfactions of human fellowship but wonderful evidences of enhanced spiritual power. One member marveled at the operation of group guidance in the problem of selecting a leader for a specific job:

With all minds open and surrendered to God, there is certain agreement. . . . God brings the same name to the minds of all present. Or He brings it to enough to assure the certainty of that selection while to others He brings other details of the project He has on foot. I have seen all members present at such times receive *different* words of guidance. Yet all fit together, like the pieces of a picture puzzle, to form a perfect whole. . . . I have played and watched a good deal of football, but I have never seen teamwork . . . so perfectly worked out as under the co-ordinating directorship of God.<sup>18</sup>

The thrills and emotional satisfactions which stood out most prominently in the testimony and witness of earlier converts were those which they experienced in connection with their conversion, with the converting of others, and in the fellowship which they enjoyed. While many of these thrills continued to be duplicated in greater or less degree throughout the history of the movement and for every participant who associated in it, new, and in some respects quite different satisfactions began to enter into Oxford Group participation during the First Century Christian Fellowship period.

<sup>18</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

"It was remarkable," Russell wrote also, "how the guidance received by different persons in the Group when pieced together made one perfect pattern, showing that the Master Mind of the Spirit was actively at work behind the scenes" (*op. cit.*, p. 31).

*New Thrills in First Century Christian Fellowship  
and Rising Tide*

Whereas personal evangelism, or soul surgery, had been an ardent, relatively uninstitutionalized and unpublicized endeavor, the program for personal evangelism of the First Century Christian Fellowship and of the groups that traveled out from Oxford to South Africa and elsewhere became increasingly self-conscious, "modern," aggressive, and publicity-conscious. Response was most enthusiastic among those who reported themselves incapable of finding meaning or help in the message and methods of "old fashioned" evangelism but who found in the new presentation of the gospel exciting answers for their personal problems and anxieties and a kind of appeal to which they could respond. "No sack cloth and ashes here," wrote one participant, "no pious psalm-singing. But a breeze and a gaiety and a sureness of direction [among the changed] which outlived, outlaughed, outloved their own crowd."<sup>19</sup>

"Religion in the ballroom of a fashionable hotel, clothed in tuxedo coats and evening gowns, accompanied by bursts of laughter!" exclaimed another individual following the appearance of a traveling team at a smart gathering in Montreal:

<sup>19</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

"From the various speakers who took the platform we judged they seemed to be enjoying what they all described as a 'new quality of life,'" Kitchen wrote, recalling his response to one of the first meetings he attended. "In fact, they *did* seem to have some unusual quality. There was that straightforward clarity of eye that I had noticed. There was a fellowship that was not of the backslapping order. There was a spontaneous sparkle and zest—not of social banter nor of alcohol-stimulated wit—but of genuine joy that seemed to well up from inside. They seemed to possess some inner wine, and of the stimulants I knew they had no need indeed" (*op. cit.*, p. 53).

Reporting his first experience of a Buchman houseparty during his junior year at Harvard (1923-24), J. M. Roots, Jr., wrote: "Two characteristics of that group particularly impressed me. One was its difference from much I had previously associated with religion—the people were happy without being professional, the leaders were sympathetic without being solicitous, and there was no formality or programme. The other point was the transparent honesty of the atmosphere" (*op. cit.*, p. 808).

The Oxford Group has brought religion out of the cloister and into the drawing room and social areas of life. It has stripped off the theological and ecclesiastical vestment and arrayed religion in the garments of ordinary life. It has revealed religion as the most radiant force in human experience instead of the solemn, sober, sad-eyed thing that most people have thought it.<sup>20</sup>

Neither the sins nor the ways in which they were extracted were quite like what they had been during the soul surgery phase of the movement earlier. Perhaps this change was due in part to the fact that First Century Christian Fellowship participants tended to be older and more reserved than the campus followers, in part also, perhaps, to the fact that the movement itself had lost some of its initial vigor. Sinners, nevertheless, were thrilled at the victories in their lives which they achieved through surrender, seeking guidance, and sharing or witnessing or otherwise participating in the activities of the growing Groups. The author of a book-length testimonial, *Life Began Yesterday*, wrote:

For me this new life has meant a new freedom, a new victory, a new courage, a new hope, a new confidence, a new joy, a new power, a new peace.

When I was a boy I suffered greatly from shyness and self-consciousness. . . . I was shy even in our own family circle. . . . My only solution was to act a part. . . . I never entered on a conversation without that same feeling of anxiety as to what impression I was making. . . . The whole business was a result of fear, mainly fear of inadequacy. . . .

I began to lose that fear the day I made the surrender of my will to the Divine purpose.<sup>21</sup>

In making his confession this man had found that:

by being honest with another man I had faced humiliation, and through this, God gave victory over pride. I had now registered

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from a letter printed in Henson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Foot, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 29-30.

a definite cold-blooded, calculated decision that there was going to be a change in my life. The relief was indescribable, and I began at once to get victory in areas of my life where previously I had always been defeated.<sup>22</sup>

"I can say," wrote another later participant in some of the Group activities concerning her experience of God-control, "that this is the most wonderful experience I have had both of mind and of body, of body because with a new mind there is also a new strength and freedom of body."<sup>23</sup>

Neither these nor the participants with whom I spoke or whose testimony I heard had the same oppressive sense of guilt that theological students and undergraduates in the soul surgery period had had. They nevertheless enjoyed, in some instances, experiences as ecstatic as Buchman's own had been during his surrender.

A. J. Russell's own experience, described in his book about the Oxford Group, affords a striking example:

There suddenly crossed my ordinary, tumbled human thoughts one of another order which seemed to possess a strong luminous glow, differing sharply from the rest. To describe a particular thought apart from what it expressed is well-nigh impossible. But I know that it had colour, shape, feeling, and luminosity. It told me to do something that I had purposely never done, had no wish to do and, if I had previously thought of doing, I should have humanly rejected as useless and absurd. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Shortly afterwards, he recalls, he was again in his room, when suddenly I felt an amazing exaltation, an unspeakable rapture, accompanied by a delightful glowing sensation throughout my left side. The ecstasy of this experience is untellable. It outshone all human joy just as a searchlight outshines the light of a candle. It was daylight; I was fully dressed and quite con-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> R.S.D., in "Rising Tide" column, *New Witness*, IV, No. 34 (Aug. 23, 1939), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

scious of everything about me. But the transport of joy which accompanied this beatific experience was so wonderful, so celestial, so vibrantly effulgent, so transcending everything that happens as a consequence of the average good deed of the Boy Scout order that I sank quite naturally to my knees in an ecstasy of inspired prayer. And then as this extraordinary trance-state continued I seemed to be raised out of myself into a sunlit region where I could observe humanity struggling blindly in shadow and lovingly sympathetic with all because of the shadow preventing them from seeing the glorious future which was their destiny and into which I had been so marvelously drawn. Exactly what happened that day I never quite knew, but I shall always believe that the Creator allowed me to pass a full half-hour on the fringe of Paradise. . . .<sup>25</sup>

While few participants in the movement laid claims, in their testimonies, to an experience of equal intensity, others undoubtedly approached it. The pleasures experienced following change were sometimes described in quite different terms, depending somewhat upon the persons to whom the testimony was being addressed. At one of the semipublic gatherings of the movement in a New York hotel, one of the speakers explained that, for her, participation in the fellowship was "more fun" than going to cocktail parties, while another spoke of it as "taking a spiritual bath."

More significant than this, latter-day Oxford Group converts began to find in the message and practices of personal evangelism the answer not merely to their own inward personal conflicts and defeats but to the conflicts and problems in the social order which were becoming increasingly acute following the stock market crash in 1929. To surrender to God was found to bring personal salvation, spiritual health, and happiness and also to contribute in what was alleged to be the only way in which individuals could contribute to social betterment, i.e., through changing themselves volun-

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

tarily and surrendering in the Oxford Group manner to the Will of God. In this action an individual could feel that he was not only finding personal security and salvation but that he was also contributing to the solution of the problem. Suddenly personal evangelism became a social responsibility as well as a personal obligation. As the Rising Tide became a dramatic crusade which all should undertake. For each person God had a plan, and for all there was a total plan and pattern which could be known in due season if the Group practices were observed. For many men and women the answer to a confusing and chaotic social order suddenly became direct, simple, and incontrovertible; and the thrill was very great.

Both the problems and the sins that beset converts to the Rising Tide (and to some extent the same may be said for First Century Christian Fellowship converts) differed from those which Buchman's earlier followers had had to face up to and overcome. Where sexual impurity and petty dishonesties in money matters had apparently set the leitmotif for much of the early testimony, the victories of Group participants were now over sins of narrowness, irresponsibility, petty vanity, and other obstacles which stood in the way of what was felt to be more effective shouldering of personal social obligations.<sup>26</sup>

I wanted to be an all-round success—to be attractive, responsible. It was just as though I were living in one of those rooms that is all mirrors [explained one young lady, who at one time had

<sup>26</sup> Sins which were mentioned in the public meetings which I attended included such offenses as indifference toward God; irresponsibility and thoughtlessness toward other persons; cheating on time out of the office or away from the business; assuming overbearing attitudes toward subordinates; failures to repay old, but small, debts of various kinds; cheating on examinations; failure to return borrowed books and other objects; harboring grudges for long periods of time; "borrowing" stamps from the office supply; feelings of race prejudice; insecurity and fear; lack of interest in the problems and feelings of other members of the family; overcharging customers or clients.

been the youngest president of a Junior League in the country]. Imagine how tiresome! Everywhere I turned I saw myself, how I was doing. . . . It was live and let live. . . . I excused myself from taking responsibility for anyone else by calling it meddling in other people's business. In the meantime, I had some very good friends and a large number of acquaintances. I was a brutal snob to anyone I considered unattractive.

My responsibility for the city always took the form of action without really caring for its problems or those of the nation. When I took on a Community Chest Team it was always successful. I could get people to work . . . but no fundamental problem of the city became different for all my efficiency.

When I met these people . . . the first thing I said was, "They are the realest people I know." Beside them I saw that I was superficial. Moreover, I realized that the only way to solve problems in the community and nation was to change the selfishness and dishonesty in human natures that created them. Because I saw these things cured in myself I knew they could be in other people. In contrast to perfecting myself and putting through my own plan I saw that God has a plan, and everyone a part.<sup>27</sup>

"At the time . . . that I first met the Oxford Group," another young participant who became associated with the movement during the Rising Tide confessed:

I had four great passions but no purpose in life. The passions were: (1) watching and travelling in railway trains, (2) predicting the weather and photographing the clouds, (3) a tremendous love for the English countryside, (4) the music of George Frederick Handel. . . . The music of Handel at its highest, as in the Messiah, had the effect of creating a desire to eradicate from my life discordant elements more compatible with twentieth century chaos than with Handel's music. But it was not till I met the Oxford Group that I saw how this could happen.

I first met them my first year in Oxford in the room of a bosom friend. I was having afternoon tea with him and, as

<sup>27</sup> J.B., in *New Witness*, IV, No. 40 (Oct. 4, 1939), 6.

usual, we were discussing trains, when in came a guy—"Coming to the meeting tonight?" he says to my friend. "What meeting?" I ask.

"It's a group of people who live continuously in touch with God" was his reply—which arrested me. Moses did it; ditto Abraham; ditto Jeremiah; ditto Saint Paul; but until that moment it had never dawned on me that it was possible in Twentieth Century Oxford. . . . From this group men have gone out all over the world, bringing a new spirit, and a new mental climate to nations.

Through the Oxford Group I have found a dominating purpose in life.<sup>28</sup>

In every area of community activity in church, in school,<sup>29</sup> in factory plant and office, and among individuals from a wide variety of occupations and professions evidences of "the rise of the new spirit" were found and reported. Stories of competitors who became business friends,<sup>30</sup> settle-

<sup>28</sup> P.P., in *ibid.*, V, No. 11 (March 13, 1940), 6.

<sup>29</sup> An article, "Democracy in School," in the April 24, 1940, issue of the *New Witness*, presented the testimonies of several teachers in the public schools regarding their experiments with Moral Rearmament in school: "Acting on guidance, we [four teachers] told all our classes that we listened to God and that they could too, if they wanted. We told them of Christ's four rules for living—absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Some of the girls were interested, and those of one class came to one of us a few days later and announced that they would like to become a 'band of Christians.' Following that we met once a week after school with a nucleus of about half-a-dozen girls with whom we had Quiet Times. . . . One sensitive, rather nervous girl, who had been unhappy at home since the recent death of her mother, found release in her Quiet Times, and faced up to the fact that she could do something about her home by listening to and obeying God's voice in the light of the four standards" (V, No. 17, 8).

<sup>30</sup> A large number of testimonies to the thrilling consequences of the "new spirit" in industry and business were told at Oxford Group meetings and rallies and printed in Group publications. The following story is typical:

"An internationally known leather manufacturer was recently operating at full capacity, with orders sufficient for weeks ahead. Still more orders kept coming in. In the same town was another firm, engaged in the same type of production, but on the point of closing down because the successful company had the advantage of several patent processes. The successful manufacturer saw that here was an opportunity of unemployment. He passed on some of his

ments of accounts long overdue,<sup>31</sup> press feuds and other animosities settled,<sup>32</sup> race and labor union prejudices overcome,<sup>33</sup> co-operation instead of conflict or suspicion and distrust among members of office staffs,<sup>34</sup> between foremen and

orders to the other man so that he could remain in production and keep his men employed.

"To ensure similar quality of product he further decided to allow his competitor to use his patented processes. The second manufacturer accepted this offer and sent some of his staff over to be trained and then the first man sent his extra customers to him. In this way both firms kept on full production, with both staffs working on full time, instead of one overworked and the other idle. Their customers benefitted from a steady supply of finished goods and a stable price, and the two firms have since worked closely together" (*New Witness*, V, No. 18 [May 1, 1940], 8).

<sup>31</sup> "I am amazed," reported the owner of a sporting goods store. "Just last week some chap came in and wanted to pay me two bucks for a couple of ties he'd swiped from the store two years ago!" (*ibid.*, V, No. 13 [March 27, 1940], 4).

<sup>32</sup> Thus: "A C.I.O. leader from Bethlehem told how . . . this new spirit . . . enabled him to be faithful and steadfast in his love for the editor of a local newspaper, a man who is also a fellow member of his church, while the editor was using his name maliciously in the columns of his newspaper. . . . The editor now finds his attitude changed from malice to friendship" (James W. Young, "Pennsylvania Team Meets and Shares," *ibid.*, V, No. 14 [April 3, 1940], 2).

<sup>33</sup> It will be recalled that one of the early attempts to apply personal evangelism and soul surgery to a social problem had been the visit of a team—"a group from Oxford"—to South Africa in 1928. The campaign was frequently cited thereafter as a thrilling demonstration of the "practical value" of guidance in problems of race relations. One observer wrote for *Rising Tide*: "The Black races are asking what we have to give them. Anyone who says he has a solution for the native problem is very daring. Through the Oxford Group I have found a solution for the native problem. I have found it in my personal life and I find it works" (Edgar H. Brooks, chairman of the South Africa Institute of Race Relations, *op. cit.*, p. 13).

This statement was paired with another statement made by a Boer leader who observed: "I see in their message the only possible solution of the racial feud which has been going on in South Africa for over 100 years, and I have since seen in that message the only possible foundation on which the future can be built" (Professor Arthur Norval, Dutch member of the South African Board of Trade and Industry, *ibid.*, p. 13).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the following story in the *New Witness* for March 27, 1940: "In a broker's office, friction had developed between the staff and the department head, due to the latter's overbearing attitude. The junior members were so bitter about it that they were going to chuck their jobs or else complain to the head of the firm and get him to take some action. One of the staff . . .

workmen,<sup>35</sup> between labor and capital,<sup>36</sup> between rival unions,<sup>37</sup> between a government bureau and a trade association—thrilled speakers and sympathetic listeners alike with what had been or what could be accomplished “when man listens.”

was in the habit of asking for the direction of God every morning for the day ahead. This guidance came; he was to face his own resentment in the office and talk it out. That day he spent 15 minutes with the department head, apologized to him for his bitterness and said he wanted to cooperate. You can imagine the effect on the staff. ‘It’s like paradise,’ says one of them” (Loring Swaim, Jr., “Pioneering on the Pacific,” V, No. 13, 4).

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the following paired testimonies offered by an anonymous “boiler room engineer” and a colored member of his crew: “The turning point in my life,” said the engineer, “came when I faced myself honestly for the first time. I could see it meant rebuilding my life on a sure foundation. Being at the head of a boiler room in a 103,000 k.w. power generating plant, with all kinds of orders, is a job. We have among others, Spaniards, Mexicans, Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans, and both white and colored. Now we talk things over together with a new confidence in each other. A number of them have found this new life and are in turn passing it on to their friends. I can see, too, what a revolution this sort of thing will make in industry as a whole. . . . For the past five years since I made God the boss in my life, we’ve had a record of no one fired, disciplined or seriously hurt.”

“The boss treats us much better than he did,” was the comment of the Negro crew member. “The men are getting along together fine and this God-control has made a big difference in the boiler room” (*Rising Tide*, p. 34).

<sup>36</sup> Stories told of labor-management controversies said to have been settled through application of the principles of the Oxford Group were presented as among the most dramatic demonstrations of the power of the “new spirit.” The following testimony, which may be taken as typical of accounts circulated among Group participants and those whom they sought to convert, was given by “the operating head of one of America’s large shipping fleets”:

“Three years ago there had been a great labor conflict. Our sailors struck in five ports simultaneously. I was afraid—financially and physically—and hired a bodyguard. The fleet was crippled, with great losses on both sides.

“Later, when I let God take over my life, my fears went. I recognized my own selfishness and lack of consideration for the men. I had to put certain things right. Further results were new higher loyalty which the men sensed in the management, and the practical by-products of increased wages and better working conditions.

“In the nation-wide strike last year I asked some of the men what the real cause of the trouble was. ‘It’s fear,’ they said. ‘We’ve got no complaints about wages or working conditions.’ They felt they could trust my motives. Not a ship was tied up. So the fleet emerged with a higher morale and no lost time. Neither side had gone through the folly and bitterness of a fight” (*ibid.*, p. 35).

<sup>37</sup> See pp. 147 and 148 and chap. vi, pp. 190-191, below.

So successful did the formulas for social change seem to participants in the home and in the community that enthusiastic applications of the same ideas to larger groups and institutions were soon being made. In an interview with a newsmen on the West Coast, Frank Buchman declared, "Here is the ground where labor and capital unite. . . . It is what people want. Leaders are all that is necessary. It is amazing how the people wait for leadership. If we could banish hate, fear and greed just think what would happen to the world!"<sup>88</sup>

Other Oxford Group leaders caught the vision. In a brochure published in 1940, the Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr., wrote:

Can you imagine what kind of homes we should have, if every parent, child, servant, guest, began the day with listening to God? Can you imagine what kind of business we should have if partners or competitors talked together in frankness, prayed to God for his Plan, and obeyed what He told them? Can you see what would happen to the budget if everyone cared enough and everyone shared enough, because everyone was in touch with God? Where would unemployment go to? Where would corruption in government go to? What would happen to taxes? What would happen to industrial strife? Would a nation like this throw off the subversive germs? And if we got the war out of America, is it possible we might get the war out of the world?

God alone, Who is One, holds the secret to human unity. No human mind, and no sum of them, can be the final authority. Events today are too complex to be understood by anyone but God Himself. If each of us were willing to let Him tell us what space we could fit in the puzzle of life, would He not work it out through us? If instead of trying to force our own will, or trusting overmuch any human judgment, all of us stopped to

<sup>88</sup> Frank Buchman, in interview with Stephen A. Stone, *New Witness*, IV, No. 38 (Sept. 20, 1939), 8.

"apply humbly to the Father of Lights," should we not find the answer to our problems?<sup>39</sup>

And the implications of the "Rising Tide of the New Spirit" and of the "New Bridges from Man to Man"<sup>40</sup> that it was building, or could build, were carried directly into the witness and testimony of Group members and into the endorsements which they sought or received from sponsors.

Oxford Group leaders and participants alike derived additional satisfactions from seeing presented on the same program individuals who normally would be found on opposing sides of an issue or whose paths might otherwise never have crossed—society matron and socialist, truck driver and danseuse, finance capitalist and boiler room engineer. Similarly rival business competitors and rival trade union leaders who were opponents in industrial strikes were juxtaposed in dramatic evidence of reconciliations achieved. The *New Witness* announced:

Among those who sat down together [at a later series of Pacific Coast luncheons designed to publicize the results of change] were many who have been on opposite sides in recent West Coast labor disputes. Messages were read to the luncheon from James B. Carey, national secretary of the C. I. O. and George M. Harrison, Grand President of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks and vice-president of the A. F. of L.<sup>41</sup>

"An unusual spectacle," wrote another young member of the Group regarding a demonstration in Seattle in March, 1940:

Let me describe for you the scene of the Ballroom of Seattle's Olympic Hotel as 500 guests crowded in and overflowed into the

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Title of a regular column in the *New Witness* devoted to recounting stories of successful or remarkable guidance.

<sup>41</sup> "Business and Labor Meet at Pacific Coast Luncheons," V, No. 8 (Feb. 21, 1940), 1.

balconies. As you entered, your eye was caught by one of those giant billboard posters, hung on canvas stretching between two large American flags behind the head table.

Below the poster, at the head table, the speaker of the Washington House of Representatives, with the Bishop of Olympia, Rabbi K— and several judges of the Superior Court. There also was S— C—, last year's American Legion Commander, with D— B— of the Teamsters' Union. There was the Secretary of State for Washington and the editor of the Seattle Star. The very fact that these people, ordinarily of opposite backgrounds, had gotten together to sponsor this luncheon is enough to prove that all conflicting parties on the West Coast can actually work together. . . .<sup>42</sup>

The evidence was regarded both as more convincing and as more challenging if it came from individuals and from representatives of business and labor, government and education, church and family who were from foreign countries. It was felt significant to show that Swedish labor leaders or Japanese industrialists or Dutch government leaders or British mayors or Canadian housewives or Norwegian students confessed to the same sins as their fellows everywhere and found the same solutions to their problems and anxieties.<sup>43</sup> The international character of the movement, its

<sup>42</sup> Loring T. Swaim, Jr., in the *New Witness*, V, No. 13 (March 27, 1940), 5.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the following story of an Oxford Group gathering held at Kauizawa, Japan, in August, 1939, and attended by "more than three hundred Japanese and foreigners":

"One man engaged in the management of a large import-export company told how there had been three aims in his business life—service, popularity, and success—but that 'change' meant for him changing his ideal of service from 'The customer is always right' to 'Accurate and detailed information concerning all commodities.' With regard to popularity he came to friendly and honest advice toward all his colleagues instead of false humility toward his superiors and contempt for his inferiors. His ambition, he said, had been changed to vision of what God could do through his business.

"Another business man sent the necessary telegrams and letter to disband a 40,000-yen questionable sideline of his business that he had become convinced was wrong.

"A nearly equal number of workers from all kinds of positions were present" (quoted from the *Japan Advertiser*, in *New Witness*, IV, No. 40 [Oct. 4, 1939], 2).

breadth of appeal and of applicability were, of course, featured from very early in its history.

Businessmen reported themselves to be greatly impressed by evidence of change which they saw in their fellow businessmen and in their erstwhile opponents alike. The more unexpected or the more prominent the source of testimony, the more impressive the witness seemed to become.<sup>44</sup>

### *Moral Rearmament Thrills*

The climax of latter-day Oxford Group thrills in the contemplation of achievements and possibilities was no doubt reached in its large-scale campaign for the Moral Re-armament of nations through the regeneration of individuals in a "race against chaos and the forces of greed, fear and hate." This was launched, it will be recalled, by Frank Buchman in Europe in May, 1938, as "God's answer to international conflict" in the "only hope for international peace":

Moral Re-Armament—M.R.A.—is God's supreme offer to this generation. We in this generation may bring in the Golden Age, the new civilization built here and now on enduring foundations. It will come not with our own wisdom, but by an obedient cooperation with God in the task of Moral Re-Armament.<sup>45</sup>

Young leaders of the Group had caught up the cry and elaborated the thrilling challenge they saw in it. "It will be an age of happy homes and laughing children," the statement continued:

<sup>44</sup> This, of course, was not uniformly true for all individuals who heard or read the testimonies and endorsements. One critical observer, after attending the MRA rally in Washington, wrote: "The world needs some kind of Moral Re-Armament—but the meeting here with thousands of eager people in the audience was to me a colossal flop. Instead of offering some definite basic principle upon which one could build, this meeting contented itself with a waving of big names—a look-who-we-are sort of thing—and lost a golden opportunity" (Personal letter of L.L.M., dated June 24, 1939).

<sup>45</sup> *The Golden Age of MRA*, p. 2.

an age from which fear has been lifted like the smoke-pall from an industrial city, when we shall look for care-worn faces and find none.

It will be an age in which mothers will not fear that the children they are rearing will be killed in the next war, and husbands will not fear that next week there may be no pay envelope for them to take home to their wives.

It will be an age of peace, lasting peace in heart, home and between nations—a peace which will be not alone the absence of war, but the liberation of all our energies to build a new world.

It will be a world from which the drab misery of poverty and unemployment will be wiped away . . . .

A world in which society has no enemies because society makes no enemies.

A fear-free, hate-free, greed-free world. . . .

Have we the right to dream these dreams? We have the right to dream them, if we have the will to make them real.

M.R.A. points the way. It is God's answer for this generation.

It is on the way. It is within our grasp. It must come.

The Golden Age, the new civilization can dawn in myself today, in my home tonight, and in the place where I work, tomorrow. It can dawn in my country when all who read this begin to re-arm morally, and in the world when my nation is ready to give a lead.

For thousands who have tried it, the world over, it has already begun.

For them it has made all things new.

It will mean self-sacrifice? So did the last war; so would the next. The self-sacrifice of this generation in the cause of M.R.A. will mean the salvation of the next. . . .<sup>46</sup>

For many who had not previously associated with the Oxford Group movement this came as a ringing challenge to which they could respond. In England the Munich crisis in the fall of 1938 prepared many persons for reception of

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

the gospel of a God-controlled world.<sup>47</sup> Scores of prominent British statesmen and others wrote open letters to the London *Times* affirming that:

The real need of the day is . . . moral and spiritual rearmament. . . . God's Living Spirit calls each nation, like each individual, to its highest destiny, and breaks down the barriers of fear and greed, of suspicion and hatred. This same Spirit can transcend conflicting political systems, can reconcile order and freedom, can rekindle true patriotism, can unite all citizens in the service of the nation, and all nations in the service of mankind. . . .<sup>48</sup>

Although the response was never so enthusiastic in the United States as in Great Britain, Oxford Group members and others interested were stirred to action in the form of large public rallies beginning with the Citizens' Meeting for Moral Rearmament in Madison Square Garden, May 14, 1939. At this meeting Dr. Buchman declared:

Moral Re-Armament is a national necessity if we are to win the war against chaos. It is a race with time to remake men and nations. It must move with lightning speed.

MRA is the people's mandate for a change of heart in every land. It is a message for every nation, by every nation, to every nation.

MRA is the new thinking, the new patriotism, the new leadership that everybody wants. . . .

As our own Secretary of State has so truly said in his message, which came this morning: "The time is ripe, and the need is urgent."

Paul Revere must ride again.

What we need today are Minute-Men, with the spirit of '76—men of the Plattsburg type, who are willing to train for Moral

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the testimony of H. W. "Bunny" Austin, in *Moral Rearmament: The Battle for Peace*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>48</sup> Open letter to the London *Times*, Sept. 10, 1938, reprinted in Austin, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

Re-Armament, and take this message to every city, village and farm, for America to be up and to arm.<sup>49</sup>

It was not only the message which the leader of the movement proclaimed and the evidences of change which he and his associates cited either as accomplished facts or as glowing possibilities that thrilled participants in the Oxford Group. They were thrilled also at the rapidity with which the idea seemed to spread across the country, at the apparent variety of persons who responded to it, at the prominence of the political, industrial, and other leaders who endorsed it, at the skill and showmanship with which local campaigns were organized and carried through, and at the breadth of vision of their own leaders. One of the local leaders from Louisville wrote:

It was thrilling to have a part in assemblies that were making history. At the first one in Madison Square Garden in New York on May 14th, we succeeded in getting the family spirit into a meeting of twelve thousand. . . . The same spirit was caught at Constitution Hall in the Nation's capital on June 4th. Five Cabinet members were among the sponsors as well as majority and minority leaders. Nine foreign parliaments sent messages and two hundred and forty members of the British Parliament . . . [also sent greetings].<sup>50</sup>

In Hollywood the general public response was reported to be even more gratifying and heartening. "30,000 Jam Hollywood Bowl at MRA 'Call to Nations'" was the headline for a news release written by James E. Bassett in the *Los Angeles Times*:

They came in limousines. They arrived in jalopies that barely chugged along the traffic-jammed roads leading to Hollywood Bowl; they came afoot, in wheel chairs, in busses, taxicabs. One

<sup>49</sup> Mimeographed copy of address by Dr. Buchman at Citizens' Meeting for Moral Rearmament, Madison Square Garden, New York, May 14, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Statement of J.B., Sept., 1939. Data in author's files.

and all, they came marvelling. Because in the great amphitheatre beneath the stars last night, blase Hollywood and Los Angeles were treated to a sight rarely seen—30,000 men, women and children to listen to a new presentation of an old gospel of brotherly love and world friendship embraced in the term "Moral Re-Armament". . . .

That tells only part of the astonishing story.

From all over the Southland [of California] the thousands gathered to hear of "Moral Re-Armament" from those who started the movement. Men like Dr. Frank N. Buchman, founder of the Oxford Group; H. W. (Bunny) Austin, the diminutive, fiery British tennis star, and gnarled Tod Sloan, who preached labor discontent under London's docks until he embraced the movement.

The Bowl rally climaxed two weeks of intensive preparation in Los Angeles by M.R.A. delegates from 30 nations.

It marked the end of community luncheons and breakfast club chats where moral re-armament was explained and re-described. It brought together for the first time all the strength of the vast movement—leaders from Burma, London, East Africa, Australia, China and Japan—and showed 30,000 persons how it might work.

Four giant searchlights stabbed the blue-black night with their white fingers.

Flashing from the rear of the acoustical shell of the Bowl they signified M.R.A.'s four guiding principles: absolute honesty, unselfishness, purity and love. And above the half-dome itself shone the legend: "New Men—New Nations—a New World!"

Down dimmed the blazing lights.

To the tune of bagpipes played by 15 Scottish highlanders and the California Pipers Association, M.R.A. went on the march. They strode, chins high, behind the massed flags of their nations. Four hundred Canadians; Scandinavians in native dress; Chinese in long, white gowns; kilted Scotsmen.

To crystallize what M.R.A. means, George Eastman, leader of the movement in Los Angeles and past president of the Chamber

of Commerce, declared: "We do not need to wait until war is at our doors; until guns are rattling and our boys are marching off to the front. Why not do the thing now that you and I can do in a constructive way?"

This was moral rearmament.

So was the warm handclasp that slim Stephen Nakata of Kobe, Japan, gave Phyllis Teng of Shanghai.

So were the friendly glances exchanged by George Copperman, Imperial Valley Teamsters' Union treasurer, and G. G. Bennett, president of the Imperial Valley Associated Farmers. Once enemies—admittedly—these men said they now understand each other.

Miles Phillimore, Cambridge, England, graduate and son of a British peer, told how he had sought the friendship of rock-hard Bill Rowell, the leader of 420,000 of East London's bitterest unemployed. And Rowell corroborated his story. . . .

Five minutes later Dr. Buchman himself was telling the 30,000 how it could be accomplished.

"Tonight," he said slowly, "you shall witness a preview of a new world order. It is a world in which we are yet green. . . ."<sup>51</sup>

"Surprising what happens according to some of the stories of those men and women in the Hollywood Bowl who knew that things did happen," wrote a Group member reporting his own impressions of the effectiveness of the big rally.

The thing that impressed one man was the fact that the people who spoke came from all classes of society and from many nations. . . . Another gasped at the tales of broken homes united, a third got goggle-eyed at the story of a business run on the basis of absolute unselfishness and love. . . .<sup>52</sup>

"This moral awakening," a Los Angeles official was quoted as saying, "is the most promising thing that exists in this

<sup>51</sup> Reprinted from July 20, 1939, issue of the Los Angeles *Times* in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 30 (July 26, 1939), 8.

<sup>52</sup> J.R., personal letter, July 24, 1939.

dark world. Hollywood's talents must be used to dramatize and reach the multitudes with MRA."<sup>53</sup>

Both in the local MRA campaigns and in the large rallies and in the state and regional campaigns participants found occasion to thrill at what was being accomplished. "There were 2,000 people there from all over the world," wrote one member concerning the Second World Assembly for Moral Rearmament held in California in July, following the Hollywood Bowl demonstration:

The thrilling thing was that these people had come a total of 5,000,000 miles at their own expense, or through the sacrificial giving of friends in their own countries, to plan with us the best way to make this cure available to the world.<sup>54</sup>

"Businessmen are carrying this spirit across the city and state boundaries," another Oxford Group member reported with evident enthusiasm.

The largest advertising company on the Coast offered 500 billboards for MRA. A pulp company gave several tons of paper. Another gave the ink, another firm offered its printing press. The result was 500 twenty-foot billboards from the Canadian to the Mexican border, calling you to "Enlist for a fear-free, hate-free, greed-free America!" . . .

A chain store grocery recently put out 40,000 leaflets, one in every customer's package, advertising books about MRA which were available at other stores. . . . Something must be afoot when one store advertises another store's goods!<sup>55</sup>

The local drives during MRA week had aroused participants to similar expressions of satisfaction in the progress of the cause as they saw it spreading. In the MRA crusade there was a place for all who cared to contribute

<sup>53</sup> Supervisor John A. Ford, quoted in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 31 (Aug. 2, 1939), 8.

<sup>54</sup> D.M., Sept., 1939. Data in author's files.

<sup>55</sup> L.T.S., Dec., 1939. Data in author's files.

their talents and energies and satisfactions for all who thus participated.

Although the war that many had hoped might be prevented broke out in September, 1939, MRA continued to thrive for some time after the outbreak of hostilities. And for some participants the war seemed to add only a different kind of thrill. Exclaimed one group member:

What terrible, wonderful days in which to be living! Days when a new civilization is coming into being, when out of the travail of the world's agony, a new type of man is waiting to be born. . . . Men are being wakened and they are seeing the havoc they have wrought and they are acknowledging and repenting of their sin against their Father, God, and against their brother, man.

What does this mean to each of us? Does it not mean that we are beginning to see that no man can truly live until he recognizes the Fatherhood and supremacy of God and takes his place in the family plan? What a discovery!

Most wonderful discovery! We are learning something of the marvels of prayer.<sup>56</sup>

Frank Buchman, himself, in a world-wide radio broadcast late in October, 1939, continued to find in Moral Re-armament a live challenge.<sup>57</sup>

"Our choice is clear," said a young man, then recently graduated from college and active in MRA; "we cannot drift; we will continue to be fodder for war, or we will

<sup>56</sup> L.E., Oct., 1939. Data in author's files. This statement was made by one of the women participants. The attitudes of some of the young men with whom I spoke were more restrained.

<sup>57</sup> "Nations must move beyond crisis to cure," he said. "A new world philosophy is needed, a world philosophy capable of creating a new era of constructive relationships between men and nations. A new statesmanship, a new leadership will ensue from this heightened quality of thinking and living . . ." (radio speech, broadcast Oct. 29, 1939, and printed with remarks of Senator Elbert D. Thomas in the *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, Second Session* [Senate, Oct. 31, 1939]; reprinted and circulated at Group expense).

become the fabric of a new world. We will be drafted to die for an older order of things, or we will enlist to live for a new one. . . ."<sup>58</sup>

Others less closely associated with the Oxford Group movement nevertheless shared in this hope and thrilled to the possibilities which they saw in it. The Earl of Athlone, uncle of the king, speaking over a world network broadcast, December 1, 1939, said:

Since its beginning here in Britain the call for Moral Re-Armament has encircled the world, and become a source of fresh hope to millions of men and women.

Heads of States, national, civic and industrial leaders of all classes, creeds and parties have welcomed it as the cure for that deep disease of the spirit from which civilization is suffering. . . ."<sup>59</sup>

"Many thousands of people around the world are trying it," said another speaker during the same week-end series of world-wide broadcasts:

Over this week-end millions more have been hearing how this experiment works for the ordinary man and woman. The message of Moral Re-Armament with its simple code of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love applied to everyday life, is spreading like wildfire the news that there is a cure for war.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> L.T.S., Oct., 1939. Data in author's files.

<sup>59</sup> Radio speech, broadcast by British Broadcasting Company (Empire network) and by the Mutual Broadcasting Company, Dec. 1, 1939.

<sup>60</sup> Mrs. Mina Edison Hughes, radio speech, broadcast from WRUL, Boston, December 2, 1939.

"A hundred million listening!" exclaimed Frank Buchman, speaking on the same program. "It seems almost beyond human ken to visualize and evaluate the worldwide significance of such a gathering.

"A hundred million people listening. Think of the far-flung network of listeners in this and every land. Statesmen, labor leaders, businessmen, sportsmen . . . men of vision, united in a common purpose for a common cause. Think what it may mean for world reconstruction—100,000,000 people united in the realization that human wisdom has failed and that human expediency must be supplemented by Divine guidance. . . ."

Comments upon Moral Rearmament made by news broadcasters and in press editorials indicated that something of the thrill which participants shared had radiated outward beyond the movement itself. "An unprecedented experiment in the application of moral strength to the mighty doors of Mars," the San Francisco *Chronicle* had termed the MRA activities in December, 1939.<sup>61</sup> "Like fire running through parched grass Moral Re-Armament spread last year," one leading news commentator summed up the events of the week end of December 1 to 3 and was reported to have said:

Speaking as a person long associated with the news, never have we watched an idea spread like this one. It was phenomenal. It found strange persons crying for it, persons whom we little suspected of thinking of anything Divine, reached out for Moral Re-Armament. This is a tough world, but the crusade seemed to prove all of us are not so tough after all. But it came too late. Or did it? You would not think so if you looked down on the vast army of earth's people who listened and applauded today to this—a unified world outcry.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly the emotional responses aroused in connection with Moral Rearmament were not confined to Oxford Group participants alone. They were accessible to all who were impressed by "change" that was reported to have occurred or who shared the hope in its possibilities and themselves experimented in "listening."

In the light of the foregoing evidence we cannot but conclude that the movement which we have been observing offered its participants, and many who did not regard themselves as participants but who were interested in it, a wide and increasing number of thrills, becoming itself, to some

<sup>61</sup> Reprinted in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 50 (Dec. 13, 1939), 4.

<sup>62</sup> Reported by C.S.W., Dec., 1939. Data in author's files.

extent, a vehicle for producing and amplifying religious experiences of this order. Although thrill responses which we have examined in this chapter occurred in connection with a wide variety of circumstances, they may roughly be classified as thrills which individuals experienced through their own personal participation in the practices of the movement and thrills which they experienced in seeing or hearing about change in other persons and in the groups and the society of which they were a part. Included within the first category is the sense of new opportunities, of new power, new purpose, new peace, and other feelings of joy arising from the release from fears, anxieties, and guilt which came with surrender and conversion and which may be interpreted partly in terms of emotional catharsis.<sup>63</sup> Many converts were particularly glad to have found a "modern" pattern of religious evangelicalism, one which seemed to them convincing and intellectually respectable. Others perhaps unconsciously responded to the appeal for quite different reasons but with essentially the same satisfaction in finding in surrender, confession, restitution, sharing, guidance, and in what they vaguely referred to simply as MRA, the answers to their various personal needs. In addition there were thrills which participants might achieve in helping to convert others, in sharing experience in intimate circles, in enjoying religious fellowship with other converts, in following a skilful leader, and in feeling themselves a part of a great and growing cause in which persons of all sorts and classes, especially prominent persons in each group, were also active.

Similarly, though less readily inferred from the evidence than the thrills that arose out of active participation in the movement, there were thrills which participants experienced

<sup>63</sup> For an interesting hypothesis on this point, see Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements* (New York, 1941), pp. 160-168.

in contemplating what they interpreted to be evidences of the power of God in the world working through their movement. The range of applicability of the Oxford Group program, its apparent universality, the variety of persons to whom it appeared to have meaning, the "unexpected" changes which MRA in particular was reported to have effected—all served to kindle enthusiasm and to add to the total number of what we have identified as thrill responses.

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## VI

### *Oxford Group Diagnoses of Personal and Social Problems*

IN THE PRECEDING chapters we have been interested chiefly in the organization and structure of the Oxford Group and in the kinds of religious experiences which it provided its participants. Significant as the latter undoubtedly were in drawing and holding members to the Group, it is no less important to consider along with them some of the other grounds upon which participants were attracted to the movement. For it was not solely on the basis of the kinds of religious experience which the movement offered to those who adopted its program but also upon the anticipated help in meeting and overcoming problems of every sort that part of the movement's appeal seemed to rest. "It works!" was one of the phrases most frequently heard in the testimonials and endorsements of the Group program and practices; change and a changed life were not only required of man by God, but for those who were changed, eventually for everyone, problems of every sort must melt away and disappear. Finding the answers to the most baffling personal and social problems was, in this view, simply part of all that would be added unto him who accepted and acted upon the Group pattern.

It is not easy, however, to identify specific applications of Group doctrine to problems of various sorts, partly, no doubt, because these underwent considerable revision and expansion between the early days of soul surgery and the later period of Moral Rearmament, and partly because

neither Buchman nor any of his followers apparently felt it necessary to give definite content or systematic form to their general social philosophy. This remained largely in the form of general diagnoses, the specific content of which was left up to the individual seeker, and the "answers" were expected to come directly from God through guidance.

There were certain general attitudes, premises, habits of thought, and modes of reasoning which appear to have been characteristic of the Group in its outlook on life; and it may be helpful to examine these briefly before proceeding to the analysis which is indicated by the title as our focus of interest in this chapter.

Emphasis in Oxford Group thinking and activity was formally directed by its leaders toward intimate and personal experience of an anthropomorphic Deity. Although converts were encouraged to voice their convictions and to describe as well as they could their spiritual experiences, critical treatment of these experiences as such was definitely and specifically discouraged.

Although participants differed greatly among themselves in the attitude which they took toward the intellectual who might strive to objectify his religious as well as his other insights and experience, argument of any sort was to be avoided, and no time or effort was to be lost in critical and therefore "inferior" thinking. Intellectual doubts, to Frank Buchman, were sins, not so vicious perhaps as sins on the "lowest physical level," but sins nevertheless. It was evident from the instructions which *Soul Surgery* offered as guides to prospective life-changers that attempts at objective treatment of religious experience were regarded as smoke screens thrown up by the sinner to divert attention from his sins and to avoid facing the issue of his own immediate personal guilt.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See H.A. Walter, *Soul Surgery*, pp. 45-46; J. M. Roots, Jr., "An Apostle to Youth," p. 817.

Not all participants in the Oxford Group movement were equally severe in their condemnation of the intellectual's detached approach. A university professor offered his opinion in a book entitled *The Venture of Belief*:

Faith in the power of human reason to solve all problems has always made it extremely difficult to understand and enjoy religious experience. I believe that normal, healthy religion demands quite as much good sense as any other experience. It is not an opiate. On the contrary, it stimulates all our faculties and makes one much more alert and sensitive. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The more common attitude was that the objective, intellectual approach toward religious experience in general or to one's own problems in particular was not to be trusted. "The mind will teach us to deceive ourselves," it was explained, "if the true reason is distasteful and destructive of mental peace," and the conclusion drawn was that reliance upon the direct guidance of God was the only safe alternative. "Men will try to turn the edge of the challenge by intellectual arguments," was reiterated both by individuals who had themselves used arguments for this purpose and by others. "I tried to bring up intellectual difficulties," recalled one early convert, referring to a talk he had had with Frank Buchman. "He refused to discuss them, would not even glance at them."<sup>3</sup> "Never argue" was a rule of thumb which later converts were given. "We don't argue," one Group life-changer explained. "We leave conviction to the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

While much of the Oxford Group distrust of the intellectualist approach to religious experience arose in the desire to avoid waste of time in converting argumentative

<sup>2</sup> Philip M. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> "The Virginian," in Harold Begbie, *More Twice-Born Men*, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 27. See also chap. iv, p. 120, above. One of Frank Buchman's early dicta had been "Look after the practice and the theory will look after itself."

sinner, it should be noted that not all of it did. Some participants found it difficult if not impossible to convey their experiences verbally. Nearly everyone who testified at any length spoke of the difficulty he experienced in finding words adequate to express his feelings. V. C. Kitchen observed:

It is difficult to describe such matters to those who have not yet gained spiritual insight, just as it would be difficult to explain colors to a man who is color blind. Moral blindness is much the same thing, and it is a blindness which clears away only when you become sensitive to the light of the spiritual realm.<sup>5</sup>

A main element in the Oxford Group attitude of hesitancy to consider religious experience critically was the conviction that religious experience generally, and Oxford Group interpretations of it specifically, simply could not be understood intellectually, or at least in other terms than those in which the leaders of the movement presented it. Without pressing for any more exact explanation of the experience, many participants were willing to accept the proposition stated in *Soul Surgery*: "God outside of us is a theory; God inside of us becomes a fact; God outside of us is an hypothesis; God inside of us is an experience."<sup>6</sup>

Within this loosely defined framework of assumptions increasingly specific stipulations for receiving the "genuine" religious experience of "God-control" were indicated. Surrender of one's self "without any mental reservations" was firmly insisted upon as a condition on which the receiving of "effectual guidance" depended, and as a prerequisite for sharing fellowship as well. Full instructions were circulated among local Group leaders and other participants in the following terms:

Be willing to listen to what SEEMS to be God's voice. Try to put out of mind everything that might distract your attention.

<sup>5</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

He makes His will known in the gift of an idea. (It is always best to record in a guidance book the highest thoughts that come.) Be willing to ACT on the message. You do not ooze into God's Will. You need to ACT.

Guidance is not always commands; God is not our taskmaster but our loving, understanding companion and guidance may be in the form of: Encouragement, a new sense of reality, a new thought about a situation or persons, an assurance about something.

Guidance is not all "do this" and "do that." Obey what is CLEAR however trifling and commit the rest to Him asking Him to make it plain. It is not some mysterious, mystical experience or some spooky trick, but simply constant reliance on the Holy Spirit PRESENT to teach us and speak to us as Christ said He would. We *do* have to learn to hear God's voice clearly and accurately above all the clamor of ourselves and others. God speaks to US AT THE PLACE WHERE WE ARE, in a WAY WE CAN UNDERSTAND if we have the WILLINGNESS and Faith to hear. Knowledge comes with willingness; Power comes with Obedience. God does not relieve us of the responsibility of knowing all the facts possible and of thinking a thing through. Guidance is no excuse for hard thinking, as someone puts it. Guidance must not be thought of as mechanical, but as becoming clear through: Reason, Evidence, Luminous Thinking.

God speaks to us in all the ways of our human understanding. Often God reveals only one step at a time. Sometimes we have to go ahead on what seems *probably* right, instead of acting on certainty. Very clear leadings come seldom to most people. Some of us are too stupid and sinful to be guided by revelation, so we must be by necessity and God is constantly using persons and events to direct us when our wills are at too great discord with His for us to be guided directly.

In Quiet Time we are not so much searching for information as ILLUMINATION. Do not primarily seek for guidance; "give me guidance" is the last reflection of the "gimmie" attitude. Come before the presence of the Holy God in reverence and love and worship, asking Him to make Himself known to our hearts.

We want to ask God simply to take over the direction of an active mind. . . . Guidance is meant to be obeyed, not to be proved. Guidance ultimately rests on a basis of Faith, and if we act sincerely on what God gives us "He never lets us down."<sup>7</sup>

Guidance in this form and the consequences attributed to it became, as we have seen, a major source of exaltation and of the varied feelings of joy and assurance that participants in the movement reported themselves as having experienced.

Whereas for some participants in the movement this faith in guidance amounted simply to a quiet, comforting reassurance that there was moral purpose and plan in the world and a personal Deity above and beyond human reason but not in opposition to it, for others it seemed obvious that human reason not only had failed but that it could not be trusted.<sup>8</sup> For some individuals, perplexed by the "orders" which they received through guidance, the solution seemed to lie not in the direction of more critical attitudes toward the practice but in the opposite direction, i.e., toward less critical acceptance and more abjectness in their surrender.<sup>9</sup>

Although Oxford Group leaders had cautioned their

<sup>7</sup> Mimeographed Oxford Group newsletter. Circulated in 1938.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, a statement subscribed to by "four prominent British statesmen" in *Rising Tide*: "Quite plainly human ingenuity and human intelligence have failed . . ." (*op. cit.*, p. 19). See, also, chap. v, n. 60, above.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the story, cited by a participant, of the mother of a young man in the Oxford Group movement. The young man had said that she was "very skeptical to start with, and still more so at the end of a couple of minutes, as the only thought that had come to her was the single word 'rubbish.' It certainly seemed rather baffling, but the son persuaded her to try again. 'No, it's no good,' she said at the end of a further period of quiet. 'The only words that come to me are "rubbish, rubbish, rubbish.'"

"'Perhaps that is the message,' replied the son. 'Let's see if God can show us what it means.'

"They started again and slowly it dawned on the mother that the reference was to a quantity of old stuff stored away upstairs. . . . It also came to her that she was storing away, in a spirit of false sentimental attachment, heaps of old toys. . . . The act of packing them up and sending them to . . . children who needed them, cleared out of her mind much that was causing her to go on living in the past" (Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 112).

converts and each other against undisciplined listening and unchecked guidance,<sup>10</sup> many of these caveats were lost sight of in the subsequent MRA "race against chaos," and in the drive for "One Hundred Million Listening." "Everybody can listen to God," urged an announcement of the December 1-2-3 (1939) broadcasts:

It does not matter who you are, where you are, or what your job is. You can listen anywhere at any time. . . .

Listening to God is the forgotten secret of power in human life. You can begin today.

You don't have to be very bright to listen, because God does the talking. If a foolish thought should cross your mind, don't worry; just remember that God must love foolish people, because He made so many of them.

It doesn't matter where you are. God can talk right down your alley. You may talk Chinese or you may talk Greek. But God can talk in any language. He might talk double-Dutch talk to you!<sup>11</sup>

Thus while some participants in the Oxford Group were aware of attitudes of primitive credulity which some of their activities might encourage and attempted to guard themselves against such attitudes, others were inclined to minimize the possibility and to disregard intellectual doubts and, to a large extent, formal theology as well.

In other respects than those noted up to this point Oxford Group responses toward experience depart from the more objective approach which intellectual rigor demands. Thus, for example, terms used to designate different experiences were not carefully delimited nor the precise referents sought. Although "absolute honesty," for instance, may have had

<sup>10</sup> "Of course, nobody pretends that all one's thoughts are guidance," Canon B. H. Streeter had told Russell (*op. cit.*, p. 242).

For various tests proposed to serve as tests of guidance, see Howard J. Rose, *The Quiet Time*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *One Hundred Million Listening*, p. 1.

an unequivocal meaning for individual participants, it was never invested with any reliable objective meaning for the Group as a whole. In fact any efforts in this direction were held to destroy the possibility of individual interpretation and application of the moral tests which Frank Buchman insisted upon. To some whose consciences were troubled by petty thievery, absolute honesty meant scrupulous handling of the property of others; to others it meant candor in facing one's own shortcomings. Others used the term to apply to other sorts of circumstances. Critics were prompt to point out that absolute honesty did not, on some occasions at least, seem to include the manner in which the movement advertised itself to the public.<sup>12</sup>

With each of the other moral absolutes about which Buchman and his followers spoke a similar vagueness of reference is to be noted. Absolute purity quite commonly referred to the absence of "evil thoughts" or conduct primarily related to sex, but it could be used by sinners in any other connection in which they saw fit to use it. Each participant was encouraged to write out his own bill of particulars and apply Christ's standards, as the four absolutes were called, to his own individual circumstances.

In other terms besides the four absolutes there was likewise a notable vagueness of reference. Thus, for example, the word "sharing" could, as one person in the Group pointed out, refer to any of at least four common practices within the movement: (1) "sharing material resources," (2) "sharing guidance, sins, etc., among changed people," (3) the initial confession of life-changer to sinner or of sinner to life-changer as a step in the process of conversion, or (4) public witness for the purpose of helping to change other

<sup>12</sup> Stories of Oxford Group "playing to appearances" are legion among its observers and critics. Among those who in print were most critical of what seemed to them dishonesty in the showmanlike presentation of the Group's gospel were Stanley High, R. H. S. Crossman, and Rom Landau.

people.<sup>13</sup> No distinction was made between confession of the sinner during the surrender of himself and his sins during the process of conversion and the subsequent confessions of present or former sinfulness among individuals who had already been changed. Some public testimonies were also to some extent in the nature of confession, especially if they were regarded by the speaker as necessary for the humiliation of his own pride.

In addition to this evident disregard for precise referents to terms in the Oxford Group vocabulary there was a tendency on the part of leader and participants alike to express ideas in the form of simple analogies, aphorisms, and colloquialisms. "PRAY: Powerful-Radiograms-Always-Yours," was cited by A. J. Russell as "one of the many forceful epigrams he [Frank Buchman] is constantly uttering, just as a pedagogue teaches easily remembered short cuts to education."<sup>14</sup> When the "I" of the sinful self is turned on its side it becomes a minus, the same writer suggested, to which the sinner can then add the "Big 'I' . . . of Christ . . . to turn that minus back into a mighty Cross."<sup>15</sup>

Toward the height of the Rising Tide and Moral Re-armament campaigns these sayings came to be put in the form of slogans, some of which were reported to have been given to the minds of participants as guidance during their quiet times. Thus it was suggested "MRA in personal life can stand for: MAKE RELIGION ADVENTUROUS" or again "MY REFORMATION ABSOLUTE." "M.R.A.—My Religion Active," was also suggested. "Time is God's gift for his children for His work," "True humility overcomes self-consciousness," and "Be spiritual radiators and not thermometers. Thermometers react to the atmosphere they are in," were other MRA thoughts.

<sup>13</sup> R. A. E. Holme, *The Oxford Group: Its Progress and Principles*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

It may be noted in this connection how very readily contemporary slang terms were introduced into the vocabulary of the movement. Campus colloquialisms were freely used by followers of Frank Buchman from the start. Sinners were urged to "face up" to their sins, to "come clean" or "wash out," and to "tune in to God," and later life-changers were told the conversion was a process of "wooing, winning and warning." Early converts spoke in terms of "tackling" other men, of "getting new bearings," of being "cleaned out," and of "getting the hang of it." Later participants spoke of how they had been "wised up,"<sup>16</sup> of "getting on the inside" of themselves to see how they "stacked up" beside the four absolute standards. One spoke of "getting on the beam" when he joined MRA.<sup>17</sup> Another had found that "a liberal education had scattered me over the lot."<sup>18</sup>

Although there are many other general Group attitudes toward experience to which attention may be called, only one further observation will be made here before we consider various Oxford Group responses to problems of personal and social adjustment. This is that many participants who felt it necessary to comment on their experience stressed what they took to be an emotionally detached, deliberative, and, in this sense, rational, attitude toward their activity in the movement. This was particularly noticeable in the

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the testimony of an unidentified movie theater owner concerning MRA: "There was nothing new about it—just a little different way of saying a lot of stuff they used to tell me when I was a kid. But there was something about the way they said it that made it sound like horse-sense. . . . I read the booklet on a world broadcast again. I've always admired Admiral Byrd and I think of all the slants on this thing I read, Admiral Byrd's stuck to my ribs the strongest. . . . There's a lot of other big-shots behind this that surprised me—President Roosevelt, New York's Mayor LaGuardia, Senator Harry S. Truman, Gen. Pershing, Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, Stanley Baldwin of England—I can't remember them all, but they made me think . . ." ("A Wise Guy Looks at MRA," *New Witness*, V, No. 16 [April 17, 1940], 8).

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of "an engineering student," *New Witness*, IV, No. 29 (July 19, 1939), 8.

<sup>18</sup> R.H., personal interview, July, 1939.

comments which some participants were led to make regarding their decisions to surrender. "Without a scrap of emotion, but with what I can only call a great heave of my will," one man had reported, "I knelt down to make my submission."<sup>19</sup>

"The important thing about a decision to surrender one's life," felt another, "is that it should be a real decision reached after facing all the implications and consequences, thought out calmly and reasonably, and then translated into action."<sup>20</sup>

With these several observations about Oxford Group responses to experience before us, we are now in a position to examine some of the formulations of problems and problem situations which the leaders and participants in the movement offered, and some of the attitudes toward those problems that are implicit in the formulations. It should be noted that we expect to do no more than to record Group responses taken at their face value. There is no place here for inferences concerning the motives of either Frank Buchman himself or his followers. Some of the conceptions of various problems and the steps thought to be appropriate for dealing with them have already been touched upon in connection with other aspects of the movement.

### *Soul Surgery Diagnoses and Prescriptions*

Problems for which Frank Buchman and his associates first sought to offer remedy, or for which their prospective converts sought the answers, had almost exclusively as their

<sup>19</sup> "The Virginian," reported in Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 143. "I found," wrote Begbie himself concerning Frank Buchman, "that he was able to do quite quietly, rationally, and unconventionally, a work among the educated and the refined which hitherto I had chiefly associated with a more exciting propaganda directed to the broken earthenware of our discordant civilisation" (*op. cit.*, p. v).

<sup>20</sup> Foot, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11. "One man drew up a legal document," it was explained by way of illustration, "since that was the most solemn and binding contract that he knew; another made his decision on the top of a bus; a business man sometimes expresses it in the language he knows best, 'I'll buy it.'"

focus the individual and some inwardly felt shortcoming.<sup>21</sup> Commonly the problem was one of inadequacy felt in dealing with other individuals, although in many instances the problems were first felt as purely private and egoistic ones. Frequently, as we have noted in the preceding chapter, these difficulties were tensions which had arisen within the personalities of religious workers, theological students, undergraduates, and others whom Buchman as a soul surgeon had encountered. In some instances the problems involved acute anxiety over vices and temptations to which the individuals reported they had succumbed, guilt-feelings over previous acts, a sense of hypocrisy, shame, or similar responses. In other instances, the individuals appeared to be suffering chiefly from intellectual doubts, from impatience with their weakness of will, from disappointment in seeking but not finding a personal God. Or again it was their avowed "superficiality," or their disinterest in other persons, or their sense of inability to help themselves or others to find purposeful and satisfying activities that constituted the problem. For the "afflicted disciples" (as those who were conscious of their difficulties were called) it made little or no difference in the diagnosis whether the occasion for their distress had been an overt act or a covert intent.

Not all of Buchman's earlier converts, it must be pointed out, presented problems to themselves in the sense that they were personally unhappy, guilt-ridden, or conscious of inner conflicts. Often the "victim" of sin was simply evangelically inactive or "lazy." Since this condition was felt to be as much a case of sin as those conditions which made for personal unhappiness, it was categorically assumed that the nonevangelically active Christian *must* have some personal problem of which he should be made aware.

<sup>21</sup> Van Dusen and others assert that the ideals of "Christian Revolution" and broad scale social regeneration through individual change were implicit in the movement from its beginnings (*op. cit.*, p. 1).

In every case, regardless of the specific affliction, the source of trouble was always sin in some form or another. However, in order to avoid alienating "pagans" to whom the vocabulary of revivalistic evangelicalism might be meaningless or repulsive, they were referred to as "patients" rather than as sinners and the conversion was an "operation" in soul surgery designed to restore spiritual health.

The processes by which the sin was to be ferreted out and treated were explicitly formulated in the manual by H. A. Walter on soul surgery and have already been discussed in another connection. While the author was careful to insist that there was no simple method "because every case is different, has its individual features," he was of the opinion that "if it is worth while for the salesman of a business house to study men in order that he may know how best to win them to a desire to purchase his wares, how much more important is that study for us who would win men to a new life of spiritual health and victory in Christ. . . ."<sup>22</sup> It was upon this basis as we have seen, that the early stratagems and techniques of personal evangelists in the Oxford Group movement were developed.

Although the analogy was felt to be admittedly weak, "since it stops short of the moral issue," and also since "the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men . . . follows, we know, certain higher, mysterious laws," it was suggested that "just as the doctor needs to know the whole subject of disease, so the soul-doctor must know sin" and that "we see at once how inevitably and necessarily personal, to a certain extent 'technical,' our work must be." With some frank doubts as to "the shibboleths of science" and the "scientific efficiency," the author declared: "It is a question of right and wrong methods of personal work—yes, let us dare to say, of a scientific and an unscientific way of carry-

<sup>22</sup> Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 30-31.

ing on this all-important work for the Master."<sup>23</sup> A large number of suggestions, both in general and for specific cases, followed:

The true physician only after careful scientific diagnosis administers a remedy, and then he follows the case through with conscientious care. . . .

Every case . . . must be dealt with by a method . . . which in each case will emerge not so much out of the Christian worker's past experience as out of his immediate communion with Christ, the Master Physician, who alone fully knows each individual human heart. . . ."

The physician of souls must know his patients intimately, or he cannot diagnose their troubles accurately. Some of the material for his diagnosis, in addition to that which arrives through the primary channel of spiritual apprehension . . . will arise out of a study of human nature as a whole. . . .<sup>24</sup>

In view of the danger of an incomplete cure by alienating the sinner through ineptness, the soul surgeon was urged to probe deep:

Every physician knows the importance of getting to the root of the trouble, to avoid the danger of false diagnosis and superficial or harmful treatment, which might even result fatally. Is it any less important for the soul-surgeon with a life-destiny at stake to make certain that he has reached the ultimate seat of the trouble before he seeks to administer the cure?<sup>25</sup>

Personality structure and the pathology of sin were then presented in brief and elementary terms:

Every man is in reality a *threefold* man . . . (e.g.) "The real John; known only to his Maker . . . John's ideal John: John, i.e., as he thinks himself; never the real John, and often very unlike him. Tom's ideal John, i.e., John as Tom thinks him:

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 23, 30. See also chap. iv, p. 115, above.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43. See chap. iv, p. 119, above.

never the real John: nor John's John, but often very unlike either. . . . From this it will be seen that the power of soul analysis is a hard thing to possess oneself of . . . the greatest difficulty (is) to introduce a man to himself."<sup>26</sup>

and further:

It is well . . . to remember that men are living their lives on four levels—spiritual, intellectual, social and physical—and that the diseased spot, the centre of infection that is spreading in all directions may be in any of the four. It may be either pride, dishonesty, selfishness, or impurity, corresponding roughly to the four levels enumerated. . . .

Those who must know the facts declare the ninety per cent of the ultimate sin around us is on the lowest physical level, to which we penetrate most rarely and with the greatest maladaptation in our personal work. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Numerous other suggestions indicative of the conception of early life-changers in the Oxford Group movement both of the nature of personality disorders and the proper means for effecting cure were also made in connection with soul surgery.

Although the problems which perplexed later converts to the movement were considerably more varied than those to which earlier followers sought solution, and although the later testimonies for the most part reveal less of the acute anxiety and guilt consciousness which upset many of the life-changers' first patients, they were all regarded as essentially of the same nature and subject to similar treatment. Strong guilt feelings and other emotional disturbances undoubtedly continued to be felt by, or could be induced in, later converts to the movement. Problems and sins more commonly mentioned in their testimonies dealt with selfishness in its various forms, the sense of spiritual poverty, intellectual confusion, irresponsibility, lassitude, and lack of

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

large purpose, in addition to dishonesties and other "moral defeats."<sup>28</sup> In some individuals there were, by their testimony, marked feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and fear; and an increasing number spoke of the difficulties and conflicts which they encountered with other members of their families and in their interpersonal relationships elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>

In their descriptions of the pathology of personality many members of the Group introduced terms from modern psychology.<sup>30</sup> Thus "martyr-complex," "sublimation," "ego," "repression," "libido" were found frequently in testimonies. Although terms were freely borrowed from the literature of psychoanalysis, they were set in a context quite different from the one in which they had been developed and were frequently trimmed to fit the requirements of the movement's major premises. "It is 'so correct,'" wrote A. J. Russell, "to call a thing 'inferiority complex,' when it is really a very simple but deadly form of pride."<sup>31</sup>

Some early converts to the movement showed marked

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the following testimonies:

"During my last year at school . . . I became disappointed with myself; I had got into a position of authority in the school but had no confidence in myself. I was afraid to do those things which I knew to be right because I was too shy and was always worrying about what the other boys would think . . ." (public testimony of an anonymous student, July 19, 1939).

"Business was dull and grim to me . . . I hated it. It was something I had to do, not something I wanted to do. But now, through Moral Rearmament, it has become an adventure in which I can demonstrate a new spirit to industry" (testimony of D.H., Aug. 16, 1939).

"I enjoyed my work immensely . . . but felt baffled by my inability to do anything about the problems which really bothered the boys under my charge" (testimony of J.C., June 5, 1940).

"I had always been the kind of person who meant well and did badly . . ." (testimony of F.B., Aug. 23, 1939).

"I had great social ambitions . . . and was always the best-dressed fellow. I wanted to make a good show. But one holiday I travelled abroad, and went on a cruise. When I returned home I was bored with everything; fed up with the things I'd lived for" (testimony of S.M., Aug. 16, 1939).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the story of "Bill and Mary—and How They Turned the Tide," in *Rising Tide*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> See Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 79 *et passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

distrust of psychoanalysis, and at least one apologist for the movement cast pointed, disparaging remarks at amateur psychoanalysis:

The mind of the amateur psychoanalyst is full of lurid little paragraphs from Jung and Krafft-Ebing concerning elderly governesses who have been removed to padded cells, shrieking texts from St. John, because they had not been afforded the dubious satisfaction of physical intercourse. The word "sublimation" conjures up for him a ghostly cohort of pale priests with furtive eyes and fumbling fingers, of frenzied evangelists with high blood pressure and inflamed imaginations, of silly little undergraduates, with no girl friends, and a crucifix over their mantel-pieces.<sup>32</sup>

General psychology also came in for Oxford Group criticism. "The non-religious psychologists," explained one interpretation, "have not yet recognized that the basic trouble of a good many neuroses is sin, unforgiven, and functioning deep in the unconscious."<sup>33</sup>

Although the problems which "patients" presented to the soul surgeons varied widely in the seriousness of their effects upon the personalities of the individuals involved, life-changers were taught to view them all alike as sin for which the sinner was to be held personally accountable in his own eyes but for which there was a simple and "professional" type of cure possible. This cure consisted, as we have seen, in confession in some form or degree, surrender, restitution, sharing, seeking guidance, and undertaking active participation in changing the lives of others. The differential or variable element in the diagnosis and the treatment of spiritual illness lay not so much in the nature

<sup>32</sup> Beverly Nichols, *The Fool Hath Said*, p. 181.

This distrust is reflected also in comments made by some of Frank Buchman's earliest converts. "He is a psycho-analyst," I said, 'although I didn't notice any of their tricks' " (Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 54).

<sup>33</sup> L.D.W. Data in author's files.

of the sin as in the available methods of treatment. Thus for certain sins complete humiliation through public confession was felt necessary; for others private admission of fault was sufficient.<sup>84</sup> In any case, however, the operation had to be rigorous and thoroughgoing and the surrender complete and uncompromising if the cure was to be effective:

Feather-dusters are not sufficient for purity, nor is it good enough to squirt a little rose-water into the atmosphere and hope for the best. . . . It is easier to live and deal superficially with people. But what would we think of a doctor who refused to make a drastic diagnosis of the disease from which we are suffering?<sup>85</sup>

If this required the heightening of guilt-consciousness and of anxiety, then this should be done as an essential step in the conversion process; it would be only temporary and would not leave any emotional traumas which subsequent activity could not eliminate.

Although no distinction was permitted between "big sins and little ones,"<sup>86</sup> it was affirmed by various leading life-changers in the movement that sex and money problems were the chief problems from which individuals were to be released.<sup>87</sup> The three young men who visited A. J. Russell to introduce him to the ideas of the movement were reported to have said this and also to have offered solutions for both:

What were the solutions? . . . My visitors recognized the sex-instinct to be God-given, and while they did not condone any

<sup>84</sup> See chap. iv, pp. 104, 120, above. <sup>85</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>86</sup> "Let us get rid of false distinctions right away. Most of us make an easy distinction between big sins and little ones. No such distinction exists in the Bible. . . . Sometimes we may excuse sin because it is occasional. . . . Then is it all right occasionally to commit murder?" (*ibid.*, p. 269).

<sup>87</sup> "Most people today are facing two problems, sex and money . . ." (Roots, *op. cit.*, p. 812).

perversion of thought or word or deed, they knew the real problem was not one of suppression, but sublimation.

"What exactly do you mean by sublimation?"

It was something which used sex energy for a higher purpose while producing complete satisfaction. . . . There was no sex problem, they affirmed, or indeed any problem, when it was surrendered to God. . . . This was psychologically explained as the expulsive power of a new affection.

Then we settled down to discuss the eternal problem of every household. How did the Group propose to solve this money problem? To relieve the anxiety of every housewife, dreading to open a letter which might be just another bill? The three . . . smiled their confidence for they were solving these problems every day.

"How?"

"By Faith and Prayer. . . ."

"What! Trust in God and do nothing else?"

Not at all. Laziness was a sin. The Group taught that God would guide and provide, but God did not guide healthy, active people to be lazy. Changed men did better work than before they were changed; they wasted less energy and they received extra power from the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Group did not urge everyone to live on the Faith and Prayer basis, though everyone might have to do so at some time.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to the recommendations we have noted thus far, various group pressures were brought to play upon the individual in bringing him to realize the seriousness of sin and the nature of his problem as the life-changers saw it; and the pressure was intended to be as strong as seemed necessary. The sins that were "secret" or those of which the individual was least conscious were likely to be the most serious. But no problem was beyond the possibility of cure. The responsibility for seeking his own spiritual health lay with the individual, but the conversion itself was a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>88</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

This, in short, was the general formula for the analysis and treatment of personal problems. In support of it were the testimonies of many hundreds of persons declaring that their personality problems had been met and solved in this way. According to the written testimony of one Group member:

I had not lived at all until I began that new quality of life. . . . It is then, and then only, that "a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy" according to the famous definition of William James. It is then and then only that the luminous vision, abundant life, integration of character, power of helpfulness and creativeness in living come to those who confess not merely their faith but their sins. . . .

What a difference all this made in the actual business of living. Instead of finding myself surfeited with stale delights and ever-deadening throwback of self-indulgence, I found myself open to and refreshed by the kind of fun you find in God's approval.<sup>39</sup>

One further testimony may be noted in this connection.

I became convinced of the existence of God as the Power of perfect goodness which shows us the evil in ourselves, but which can also change our nature and guide us to conduct in accordance with absolute principles of morality. My new philosophy was, however, powerless to produce any change in my life until I met the Oxford Group, which I did on July 8th, 1935. It was then that for the first time, I saw those truths which reason had forced me to recognize being taken literally and put into practice.

The following struck me: (1) the intimacy and reality with which people spoke about God; (2) the fact that God was a real power really coming into all the details of everyday life; (3) the self-knowledge and self-criticism in those who had found God;

<sup>39</sup> Kitchen, *op. cit.*, p. 69. "I could have sworn," this convert explained further, "that the 'sins' of my past life were not really bothering me. Though I was ashamed to let the rest of the world know my secret acts and desires, they were not, I thought, troubling my own conscience" (p. 66).

(4) the vast difference between people who had the power of God in them and those who merely aspired after Christian ideals. The effect of one meeting on me was to enable me to surrender my life to God. From that day a power came into my life which I had not known before and which produced revolutionary changes both in me and in others. What that power has meant to me . . . would require volumes. . . .<sup>40</sup>

To the testimonies of individuals who had been changed were added the endorsements of physicians and psychiatrists when these could be secured. Thus:

Those of us in the medical profession who have found through this rising tide of people a design for living which cuts at the roots of moral defeat and mental conflict, realize that a new day has dawned in our work, and look forward to the time when our profession will lead people to the only real health—that is a by-product of a life fully adjusted to meet every demand that the world makes.<sup>41</sup>

Some physicians and surgeons went even further in their statements. One wrote:

For some time I had been looking for a power which was capable of changing human nature. . . . I was none too proud of my own. I longed for harmony in a rather chaotic state of inner conflict, fear and resentment against life, which had been building up as the years went by. It never occurred to me that God was the answer, or that He could change me if I sincerely wished to be different. . . .

The experiment was simpler than many I tried in the laboratory. The requirements were definite. All I had to do was to subordinate my will to God's will. I tried it and it worked, for some time later my office nurse said to me, "I wish God would do for me what He has done for you. You have not lost your

<sup>40</sup> Philip Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage*, quoted in "A Thinker Moves from Protest to Power," *New Witness*, V, No. 22 (May 29, 1940), 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. J. F. Brook, Assistant Director of medical research, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, in *Rising Tide*, p. 41.

temper for six months. Now you are happy. You like people as you never did before. You are more considerate of me. I have decided to give God a chance in my life too."

When morally rearmed a patient actually has the remedy for fear in others. . . . Such a patient, instead of creating a destructive atmosphere of illness, self-pity and conflict at home, can remake a home, can restore harmony in relationships, and is able to bring a new security to a fear-ridden family. . . .

Every patient returned home is a liability until changed into an asset by Moral Rearmament. . . .<sup>42</sup>

It is not necessary to enter the heated argument which arose around the Oxford Group analysis and treatment of personal problems to point out that these responses were quite different in nature and in purpose from those which many competent, professionally trained students of personality disorders ordinarily make. Further general observations can be made after we have considered some of the other kinds of problems and problem situations which have been identified and diagnosed by Oxford Group leaders throughout the history of the movement.

Although it gave comparatively little direct attention in its early days to any of the larger social problems which came to the fore during the depression and war years, the Oxford Group was not insensitive to various conflict situations in society. The traveling team that had gone out to South Africa in 1928 had gone out with the expressed purpose of carrying the message of the movement into an area where race tensions and culture conflict were acute.

It was not until after the onset of world economic depression and the increasingly obvious deterioration in interna-

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Loring Swaim, Boston, Mass., in *New Witness* IV, No. 39 (Sept. 27, 1939), 5.

See also a statement from Dr. Frank J. Sladen, physician in chief, Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit, Michigan: "Each day adds to the clinical experience which convinces me that God-control leads to and is essential for health control and a rising tide of fitness in the nation" (*ibid.*, p. 41).

tional relations that the movement gave noticeable attention to problems beyond those of the personalities and immediate social relationships of participants, however broad the vision of its leader. By the mid-1930's it had become obvious to most of the members that the conditions of social breakdown which their leader had foretold and ascribed to "moral bankruptcy" had arrived in acute form and that the Group's evangelical operations would somehow have to be speeded up and enlarged.

One of the veteran members of the movement and a leader of the Group in the United States formulated the position clearly:

America may be facing the greatest emergency in her history . . . we have weathered a good many storms, and can probably weather this one.

But . . . a different situation confronts us from any that ever confronted us before. . . .

We . . . declare loudly that we want to preserve the "American way of life," but our policy is only one of drift. . . .

I think that America's greatest emergency at this time is her bland unawareness that there is an emergency, her unconsciousness that what she is and does now will determine whether she accepts or forfeits her unique role as the leader of the world in the paths of democracy and freedom; and that everything depends on whether she restores her own moral and spiritual foundations, or is herself swept by the materialistic epidemic that is sweeping the rest of the world.

One sure sign of our unawareness of the tremendous issues today is seen in our continued industrial disharmony and national disunity. . . . Individuals harassed by conflict and fear are at war with themselves. Families where there is disharmony and divorce are at war. Labor pitted against employers, and even against fellow-labor, is war, and very serious war for any country. Racial and minority groups fighting for their rights against discrimination and intolerance is not peace, it is war. America is . . . at war within herself. . . .<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr., *God and America*, pp. 1-3.

Some of the sins which he listed and discussed were "indulgence, laziness, materialism, irresponsibility, divisiveness, immorality," and some of the steps which were needed for "national rebirth" were "national repentance and renewal . . . , honest apology," efforts, under the direct guidance of God, to "get war out of our hearts, . . . homes, . . . industry, . . . politics. . . ." <sup>44</sup>

It is evident from this and other statements emanating from the leaders of the movement that the underlying premises used in diagnosing personal problems were also to be used in diagnosing larger problems of institutional and group relationships. "Selfishness in men and nations has brought the world where it is today" <sup>45</sup> was to remain the basic theme in the Group's diagnosis of virtually every problem to which attention was called. Forthwith, the movement became faced with the task of fitting a whole range of social problems from race conflict to civic corruption and from unemployment to war into a framework of personal moral terms and concepts of individual ethical conduct.

"There is enough for the need of all, but not enough for the greed of all" became one of the slogans of the Rising Tide, and in addition to the basic sins of selfishness, dishonesty, impurity, and lack of love for one's fellow, a triad of "Hate, Fear and Greed" was advanced to explain the existence of the most serious problems. In this respect the emphasis of the Oxford Group, as previously, was upon the moral shortcomings of individuals with little or no attention focused upon the institutional mechanisms and processes operative in the social order. And the corresponding belief was that with individual change would come direct solution of the problem, whatever it might be. "When everybody cares enough, and everybody shares enough," one

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-23, *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Buchman in speech, June 4, 1940, printed in *Calvary Evangel*, July, 1940, p. 207.

of the Group slogans explained, "then everybody will have enough."<sup>46</sup> "I believe," declared one participant, "that . . . the solution of all our social and economic problems is the acceptance by everyone everywhere of the challenge of Moral Rearmament."<sup>47</sup> "The real problems," another affirmed, "are selfishness, hate, greed. Once we get those solved we'll solve unemployment and all the rest. . . ."<sup>48</sup> Although neither of these statements came from leaders of the Group or were in any sense "official," there is reason to believe that they reflect essentially and fairly accurately the point of view of Buchman and his associates.

An important corollary to the position expressed in these statements appears to have been the feeling expressed by a prominent Group member: "We believe that almost *any* economic system will work if the men who work it are filled with the spirit of Christ. We also believe that almost *any* economic system will fail if the men who work it reject Christ."<sup>49</sup> And by inference if not by explicit statement the same view was held to apply equally well to the kind of political system or the kind of church organization in which one might find himself.<sup>50</sup> If the Oxford Group

<sup>46</sup> Buchman, *Remaking the World* (abridged ed.), p. 17 *et passim*.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. A.M.B., testimony, Dec. 13, 1939.

<sup>48</sup> Vice-chairman of the Single Homeless Men's Committee and social work secretary for Abbott House, Vancouver. Testimony printed in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 34 (Aug. 23, 1939), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

"Your security, the world's security, lies in God-control," declared an editor of *Rising Tide*. "No other social, political or economic program goes to the root of the disease in human nature. Only God-controlled men will make God-controlled nations to make a new world. In this adventure every man can find his vocation, every nation its destiny" (*Rising Tide*, p. 47).

<sup>50</sup> On at least one occasion Buchman asserted that social problems "could be solved within a God-controlled democracy, or perhaps I should say theocracy, and they could be solved through a God-controlled fascist dictatorship." Statements of this sort led Cantril, Clark, and others to conclude that the leader of the movement showed "little appreciation of the fact that the form of government can make any difference" (Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 114). See also Cantril, *Psychology of Social Movements*, p. 152.

Possibly some confusion resulted from the vocabulary used by Dr. Buchman in describing God-control: see p. 187, below, and Kitchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

movement was less critical of Adolf Hitler and of fascism than some of its observers might have wished it to be, at least part of the reason might be traced to this feeling that the individual rather than the system was important, the individual rather than the social order was at fault.

A possible exception to this tendency on the part of the Group and of its leaders to emphasize the individual rather than the groups or institutions of which he was a part was the recognition of the crucial role of the family and of the kinds of relationships which it was felt should prevail among the various members. Although this attention to the family was always in terms of individuals in their relations to each other and never in terms of the family in its institutional aspects, such statements as the following began to appear with the *Rising Tide*:

A nation's fate is decided over its breakfast tables. If there is strife and bitterness at home it will spread to the nation's life. If there is harmony in every family . . . it will make a nation truly great.

Out of a million homes in touch with God will come a nation's peace.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the various attitudes and assumptions that have already been noted in Oxford Group conceptions of social problems there is one other that might be mentioned briefly before we examine more of the diagnoses offered by Group leaders. One of these is the assumption, largely implicit in the diagnoses which follow, that conflict per se was bad, regardless of the issues involved. The Group did not customarily lead in arousing "moral indignation" at conditions of exploitation, corruption, or discrimination in specific situations, preferring, perhaps, to assume either that people were already aware of these or that these conditions would automatically right themselves following the change of a sufficient number of individuals or influential persons.

<sup>51</sup> *Rising Tide*, p. 45.

in the community at large.<sup>52</sup> Concomitant with this appears to have been the feeling that attempts to improve social relationships in other directions than those indicated in the Group diagnoses must fail since there *was* no place to begin, but with individuals. The editors of the *Rising Tide* suggested:

Everybody wants to see the other fellow changed. . . . But everybody is waiting for the other fellow to begin. . . .

If you want an answer for the world today, the best place to start is with yourself. . . .

This is the revolution which will end revolution by changing human nature and remaking men and nations. . . .

This is the dictatorship of the living Spirit of God, which gives every man the inner discipline he needs, and the inner liberty he desires. . . .<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Oxford Group emphasis upon leadership and the role of leaders has been cited before in connection with its evangelical strategy. In its general diagnoses of social processes there was also a heavy emphasis upon leadership and in "changing" leaders first. See, for example, such statements as the following: "That power (God-control) active in a minority can be the solvent of a whole country's problems. Leaders changed, a nation's thinking changed, a world at peace with itself" (Buchman, *Remaking the World*, p. 17).

Niebuhr in his *Christianity and Power Politics* quotes a newspaperman's interview with Frank Buchman in which the latter is reported to have said, "I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front-line defense against the anti-Christ of communism. . . . Of course I don't condone everything the Nazis do. . . . But think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to the control of God. . . . Through such a man God could control a nation overnight and solve every last bewildering problem" (p. 159).

"During one of the meetings I attended," reported Landau, "a titled German woman spoke of the wonderful results Buchman had produced in her country: peasants and landowners, soldiers and storm troopers, workmen and students were gathering together to exchange their spiritual experiences and to establish a common basis of a Christ-like life. 'What about the common basis and fellowship between the Nazis and the Jews?' someone in the audience shouted out. 'What about the understanding and lack of class distinction between Nazi-Buchmanites and former intellectuals, and socialists, and liberals, between Nazi Buchmanites and non-Nazis?'"

"The poor lady blushed violently and did not reply, but the inquisitive gentleman was more or less shouted down. When sceptical listeners made a similar inquiry at other meetings the result was the same—except that in most cases they were no longer allowed to finish their question" (Landau, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193).

<sup>53</sup> *Rising Tide*, p. 11.

The same theme began to recur again and again in statements of Buchman and his followers. It was increasingly emphasized during the Moral Rearmament crusade. "Without this new spirit," the leader declared in a speech delivered during a "world broadcast" October 29, 1939,

we shall pay heavily. . . . Strikes, labor difficulties and war are inevitable until we change our whole thought and quality of living. . . .

We need unitedly to recapture the world once again for a program of sanity and security. Events are focusing for us the only program of sane control—God-control. The only sane people in an insane world are those guided by God. . . . God has a plan, and the combined moral and spiritual forces of the nations can find that philosophy adequate for world crisis.<sup>54</sup>

Similar diagnoses were made by Group participants in relation to problems of crime, race relations, and class struggle:

"Will you join me and one hundred million others throughout the world—black, brown, yellow and white," urged a speaker during the world broadcasts for MRA on December 3, 1939, "in ushering in this awakening? . . . Moral Rearmament is no respecter of persons, or races, or classes, or creeds or ideologies. It applies to all. It appeals to all. It must be the common life of all."<sup>55</sup>

"It will bring a new relationship between teachers and students—the only answer to cheating and lying. . . . It will break down cliques between the privileged and the less privileged students, and barriers of class. . . ."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Buchman, "A World Philosophy Adequate for World Crisis," radio address, Oct. 29, 1939, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Mary M. Bethune, president, National Council of Women (colored division) in a speech broadcast over Columbia Broadcasting Company network, Dec. 3, 1939. Printed in *Rise of a New Spirit*, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, president of the Girls' Club in a Seattle high school, in the *New Witness*, V, No. 6 (Feb. 7, 1940), 6. "It will bring a new sense of values to a generation who have false ideas of happiness and success," the statement continued. "It will give a new sense of security to those who fear the uncertainty of the future."

"The objective of Moral Re-Armament," said Henry Ford in a statement issued during the December 1-3 week-end drive for one hundred million listeners,

is one in which I strongly believe. It stands for an attitude and an effort that is deeply needed in all the seats of public and private power today. There is enough good will in the people to overcome all war, all class dissension and all economic stagnation, when that good will shall be hitched to the affairs of men and nations. . . . A movement that translates our private moral convictions into our public policies appeals to all who would help the world forward to its next stage of progress. Moral Re-Armament gives me hope for the future of our country and the world, because of the results that are being achieved.<sup>57</sup>

In view of the concern which many members of the Oxford Group showed in the matter, and also in view of the charges of anti-labor sentiment leveled against the movement, the attitudes which participants in the Group took toward industrial conflict, especially between labor and management, are of particular interest. Although the movement aimed to reduce conflict of every sort—between staff members within the office, among workers on the plant floor and in the shop—the conflict between labor and capital was mentioned specifically as one of the more severe types of conflict calling for attention.<sup>58</sup>

The position expressed by the authors of the *Rising Tide* on the question was simple and direct in its conception of the problem and in the steps which were recommended<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Statement issued to the press in Detroit, Dec. 2, 1939, and printed in *The Rise of a New Spirit*, p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Thus, for example: "Industry and labor need a new code of morals that will solve industrial strikes and help build a just and lasting peace" was wired by two union executives to one of the West Coast planning conferences for MRA. Harvey McIntyre and Frank Farrands to Longview, Washington, conference, the *New Witness*, IV, No. 48 (Nov. 29, 1939), 2. See also Buchman, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18, and elsewhere.

<sup>59</sup> "The problem of industry is the problem of the men who compose it. Only as a new spirit comes to men can a true destiny come to industry. These

or reported as having been taken with successful consequences. And by such slogans as "there is enough for the need of all but not for the greed of all" the problem of organized labor activity, as well as that of any other bloc in the economy presumably, was further reduced to "moral" terms, attributes of Christian character.

In this diagnosis the Group leaders had the support, or at least the corroborating endorsement, of both labor men and their leaders or "representatives" and of employers, plant managers, and financial leaders.

Fear is the real problem of industry [was the opinion of the operating head of a large shipping fleet].<sup>60</sup>

The real danger to industry [wrote the head of an oil company] is spiritual deafness. When men and management together listen to God, they find a new relationship to each other and the personal factor returns to industry. Herein lies the secret for creative, responsible leadership so sorely needed in industry today.<sup>61</sup>

Labor [agreed the president of the United Automobile Workers of America, C.I.O.] must seek a spiritual solution for its problems. What we need is a new Magna Charta conceived by God and signed by everybody.<sup>62</sup>

As we struggle to overcome injustice in a world about ruined by dishonesty . . . [etc.] we must surely see [an A. F. of L. member of the International Association of Machinists wrote] that to change these conditions we must first change men.<sup>63</sup>

workers are part of a new industrial unity being forged throughout the world as Labor, Management and Capital become co-laborers under the guidance of God. They are now convinced that in God's plan is an answer to every problem that faces industry. This is the real industrial revolution" (*Rising Tide*, p. 33).

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous, *Rising Tide*, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> Homer Martin in a speech to a C.I.O. rally at Anderson, Indiana, Oct., 1938. Quoted by Lee Vrooman at national conference for young Oxford Group leaders in New York City, Dec. 10-11, 1938, and printed in Oxford Group newsletter summarizing the proceedings of the conference.

<sup>63</sup> James A. Duncan, in *The Rise of a New Spirit*, p. 16.

One further statement, a resolution adopted by the Railway Labor Executives Association on April 15, 1940, might be cited from among the large number of similar endorsements:

One of the most baffling questions before this Nation today is how to break the vicious circle of bitterness that commonly enters all negotiations between groups having conflicting interests. Our greatest need is for the rise of a new spirit that will replace that bitterness with creative planning for national unity.

For that change, Labor has a joint responsibility with all other groups of our citizens, and we are convinced that the time has come to face it squarely on the principles of Moral Re-Armament. . . .<sup>64</sup>

Oxford Group interest in the matter was not confined to the publication of endorsements and testimonies of this sort. Meetings were held everywhere that life-changers and rank and file participants could call them to discuss and to try out MRA principles. Here and at the larger public gatherings and rallies, stories of conflicts that had been settled or were being settled were recounted.

In one instance the manager of a chain of coffee shops in California was reported to have got together the employees and their families at his home, "feeling that more of the problems confronting them could be solved if they know each other better."<sup>65</sup> Both in larger companies and

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in a letter signed by George M. Harrison in the *New Witness*, V, No. 21 (May 22, 1940), 1.

<sup>65</sup> "Together they [i.e., the manager, employees, and their families] heard the latest news of Moral Re-Armament in action, of labor relations satisfactorily and equally adjusted, of individual problems answered. The essence of MRA, how each individual can find the constructive part he can play . . . was brought out.

"Through consistent contact with his employees on this new basis, the manager is beginning to work out this new attitude in terms, not only of his own relationship to his employees, but also to the public, and many of the employees are cooperating. That is a realistic example of the American ideal of opportunity and freedom, a freedom not of license but of the acceptance of responsibility by every one." Story told by DuBois Morris, Jr., in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 34 (Aug. 23, 1939), 7.

in smaller shops and businesses the Oxford Group and MRA patterns were reported to have worked successfully. Consequences which were cited in one instance were "new trust and co-operation between employees, customers and rivals, . . . higher wages and shorter hours. The Pressmen's Union, which was not strong enough to force recognition, was voluntarily recognized." Pay rate per hour was raised and the hours of work reduced from 48 to 44 with time-and-a-half for overtime. A further reduction in hours to 40 per week was reported.<sup>66</sup> Testimony was presented also by workers, one of whom reported, for instance, that "the boss treats us much better than he did. The men are getting along together fine and this God-control business has made a big difference in the boiler room."<sup>67</sup>

In each instance what was cited as the source of trouble was some personal shortcoming in every individual concerned, and what was offered as the starting point for "constructive" action was, in effect, a counsel of perfection addressed to individuals. It was not through sheer strength of numbers or thoroughness of organization that labor should expect to gain its ends or that capital on the other hand should expect to protect its interests.

And in this line of reasoning anything approaching faith in a "material revolution" or any radical secular program of social action stood condemned in the eyes of Group members not only as wrong but as futile.<sup>68</sup> From this followed

<sup>66</sup> D.H., part-owner of a printing firm in Brandford, Ontario. Testimony printed in the *New Witness*, V, No. 7 (Feb. 14, 1940), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Rising Tide*, p. 34. Cited also above, chap. v, n. 35.

<sup>68</sup> One veteran Group speaker, presented as a former communist, testified: "From quite an early age I linked myself up with the struggles of the unemployed . . . organizing the workers for the class struggle which I felt sure would one day come about. . . . I am still a revolutionary. . . . But two years ago I began to see a greater revolution. I found in Moral Rearmament a program of action which went right down to the hearts of people and solved the social problems at their source. Instead of fighting people, it meant fighting the selfishness in everyone, which is at the root cause of every social and economic evil

the conviction that it was the obligation of each worker to "set things right" within himself and within his own union before he should presume to attack the problems that concerned him on a larger scale. It followed also that the trouble never would be found to lie in the institutions comprising one or another "economic system" but must always be traced to a fault in human nature which individuals alone, with the help of the Holy Spirit, could remedy. "Since I gave my life to God," wrote one, "as a union official I now see that power without responsibility is dangerous. . . . Some of us in our union are beginning to realize our victories are harmful unless we put as much punch into giving as we did into getting."<sup>69</sup>

In presenting testimony to the general public, Oxford Group leaders took care to include witnesses from representatives or, if possible, from prominent leaders on both sides of each conflict situation that had been mitigated or in

. . ." (William Rowell, "Our Destiny Is to Unite in Building a New Nation," *New Witness*, IV, No. 48 [Nov. 29, 1939], 5).

In one statement Frank Buchman explained, "What you want are God-guided personalities which make God-guided nationalities to make a new world. All other ideas of economic adjustment are too small really to touch the centre of the evil" (Buchman, *Remaking the World* [unabridged ed.], p. 8).

In this feature of Moral Rearmament and of Oxford Group activity Hadley Cantril finds what he considers to be one of the chief reasons for its vogue: "Buchmanism has gathered momentum . . . essentially because it shows certain bewildered people a way to interpret their personal troubles and the larger social problems of their world without endangering their status. It provides a psychological mechanism whereby they can escape the responsibility of dealing directly with conditions which they realize are not right and just. It attracts to itself people who want to improve these conditions without injuring their own positions and who want to avoid any alignment with existing institutions or ideologies which assume that individual problems cannot be solved without collective action" (*op. cit.*, p. 168). Quoted by permission of John Wiley and Sons, publishers.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous testimony printed in *Rising Tide*, p. 34. These sentiments were echoed in England and elsewhere. One "very experienced diplomat, representing Sweden at the League of Nations Assembly, told me," wrote a team member from Geneva, "simply as a piece of objective fact, that the one effective check to the growth of Communism in Sweden was the work of the Groups" (quoted in the *New Witness*, V, No. 5 [Jan. 31, 1940], 8).

which violence had been averted. Particularly impressive demonstration of the adequacy of the new spirit was thought to exist in the juxtaposition on the MRA broadcast or on the platform of speakers who recently had been at odds but were now reconciled. In lieu of this, testimonies and friendly endorsements of individuals who were regarded as representatives of different blocs were presented. Third party testimony as, for instance, in the case of an arbitrator in a series of West Coast strikes, was also used.<sup>70</sup> In the solution to industrial conflict which was offered and in the stories of successful application of these Oxford Group practices, efforts were made to show how no one lost and everyone gained from God-control in all relationships.

In the enthusiasm which many Group members felt for the "golden age of M.R.A." and the other possibilities latent in the Oxford Group formulas, distinctions between what *had* taken place by report and what *could* take place if more individuals would change were sometimes lost. On frequent occasions the Group was charged with being more concerned with who testified than specifically with what was said.<sup>71</sup>

Although there were numerous stories of what Oxford Group action could accomplish in a strike situation, the instances in which traveling teams of life-changers entered into conflicts where the situation was acute appear to be infrequent. Every effort was made to get the message over before the conflict became overt. Where feeling had run high, the strategy called for an "honest apology" on the part of some responsible individual on each side. If there were no Group members directly involved, then the task became

<sup>70</sup> Louis K. Comstock, in the *New Witness*, V, No. 10 (March 6, 1940), 1. The statement which Mr. Comstock had sent to a San Francisco MRA luncheon held Feb. 6, 1940, read: "In a world racked with useless war, Moral Re-Armament is the only real antidote. It must begin with persons and spread to nations. I wish all success to your great West Coast meeting."

<sup>71</sup> See chap. v, n. 53, above.

one of urging individuals to make overtures "in the right spirit" in the assurance that these would evoke similar response from their opponents, and the process of "bridge building" would have been begun. That this procedure would work where all others must fail was the substance of the testimony. Persuasion by citing endorsements as well as by appeal to the weight of testimony and witness of changed men and women generally preceded whatever personal evangelism among individual employers or employees was to be done. Time and the magnitude of the job which MRA set for itself did not admit of the painstaking methods of soul surgery, but, as we have seen, the emphasis remained upon the individual, his sins, his obligation to change, and the thrill satisfactions which he would gain through listening.

While labor-management and other forms of industrial conflict were a source of uneasiness among large numbers of Oxford Group participants, the problems of international conflict and ultimately of war pressed for more and more attention.<sup>72</sup> Throughout Europe, and particularly at Geneva, Oxford Group teams were actively organizing rallies, changing lives, and assembling evidence of the successes of the Rising Tide in the field of international relations.

While it was not so easy to find instances of successfully completed applications of Oxford Group formulas in the

<sup>72</sup> "A nation's enemies," declared Buchman in an Easter gathering of his followers at Ollerup, Denmark, in 1936, "are those who oppose . . . God-control. The God-controlled nation will have at her command armies of life-changers. Her national defense will be the respect and gratitude of all her neighbors. Such a nation will demonstrate that spiritual power is the greatest force in the world" (quoted in *Rising Tide*, p. 16).

"The more I think of the Oxford Group the more important I consider its work in solving conflicts in individuals and between nations," declared Dr. William Brown, Wilde Reader of Mental Philosophy, Oxford University. "Why this method needs all the support we can give it is because it is succeeding in reaching thousands and hundred of thousands in all nations. Only in this way can we change the situation that is making for war" (*ibid.*, p. 41).

relations of nations, numerous isolated examples of the kind of "first steps in the right direction" were cited, as, for example, in the case of a Norwegian editor who "apologized publicly in Denmark for his part in a bitter press campaign against the Danes over territorial rights in Greenland." This action, it was said, "gave a lead to thousands in both countries promoting better relations between them than at any time in recent years."<sup>73</sup>

What was lacking in accomplished fact was to some extent compensated for by the witness on the same platform of representatives of countries at war. These individuals could, of course, freely concur in the ideals of MRA. Asked about the application of Oxford Group principles to the "Chinese-Japanese situation," one Japanese participant replied:

I have discussed frankly and openly with many Chinese and Japanese the question you have asked. We are all agreed that ultimately both of us will recognize the strength of the good points of each other and that such recognition will lead us to mutual understanding, respect and sympathy. . . .

We must change our country to make it not only a great nation, but a good nation. The force of circumstance, fate and destiny can make a great nation. But to make the people a great people and that nation a good nation, is not an easy matter. But it can be done through the spirit of MRA which will prove the salvation of mankind. This is a God-given mission to us.<sup>74</sup>

A Chinese delegate to the Second World Assembly for MRA in California in July, 1939, had said:

<sup>73</sup> *Rising Tide*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Takashi Akiyama in interview by Harry T. Brundige of the *St. Louis Star Times*, printed in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 44 (Nov. 1, 1939), 8.

Takasumi Mitsui, younger brother of the head of the financially powerful Mitsui family, said to the same reporter, "The only hope for a continuation of civilization rests on the moral and spiritual forces of mankind. . . . Only moral rearmament of nations will bring about international peace at this, the most important crisis in the history of civilization" (*ibid.*, p. 8).

The answer to the tremendous suffering in China . . . is for us to face our own sins on a national scale.

The spirit of Moral Re-Armament has manifested itself in uniting our country together. . . . Moral Re-Armament has manifested the only common ground upon which Japan and China can unite in building a new Far East and can be a demonstration of a new solution to war.<sup>75</sup>

Both Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek and Baron Ichiro Hiranuma, Premier of Japan, sent messages of endorsement to the MRA sessions in California in the summer of 1939.<sup>76</sup> Statements from other representatives of countries either at war or on the verge of war were freely quoted, and hope that further conflict might be prevented was drawn from them.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Z. H. Tong, in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 32 (Aug. 9, 1939), 2-4.

<sup>76</sup> "We respond whole-heartedly to your stirring call," the Chinese leader had wired. "Accept this expression of our unqualified support. The Movement for Moral Rearmament may, we believe, eventually override the influence of power politics by harnessing the innate goodness and goodwill of every nation and thinking individual.

"The hope of civilization lies in the moral and spiritual forces of mankind. I pray for the success of your Second World Conference and hope that moral rearmament of nations will bring international peace at this important period of world history," was the message from the Japanese Premier, Baron Ichiro Hiranuma, printed in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 31 (Aug. 2, 1939), p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> "Only by a personal change of heart through Moral Re-Armament can men and nations live together in harmony," was a message received from France and signed by different leaders there. "We are convinced that each of us, no matter what our color or race, can and must carry our full part in the building of a new world" (*New Witness*, IV, No. 32 [Aug. 9, 1939], 6).

"MRA is the most certain way of creating peace and goodwill among nations. It is the practical, effective and only basis of world-wide universal fellowship" (M.A. Aziz, former president, Assembly of the All-Indian Moslem League, message to Second World Assembly for MRA, July, 1939, in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 34 [Aug. 23, 1939], 4).

"Fresh insistence in thought and action on those principles of morality and faith which are fundamental . . . is the only source from which we may draw sure hope for peace . . . for a disturbed world," wrote Viscount Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary in a cable to the MRA assembly in California (*New Witness*, IV, No. 32 [Aug. 9, 1939], 1).

"Every nation will translate divine direction in its own way," commented the editor of *I Lavoro* (Genoa, Italy), "but all can carry it out, and thus all learn to understand one another" (*New Witness*, IV, No. 37 [Sept. 13, 1939], 3).

In the flood of statements and the surge of activity which followed the Munich crisis, first in England and later, to a comparatively lesser degree, in the United States, Group members and others agreed that Moral Rearmament was the only adequate answer to war:

We must face facts squarely. What has brought us to the brink of disaster? The fundamental causes of conflict lie in the hearts and minds of men. Where there are selfish motives, fear and prejudice in the lives of its citizens, a nation is likely to follow a wavering and short-sighted policy. No one nation is wholly free from blame in this respect, and Britain must have the courage to admit her full share of responsibility for the present situation.

But, further, there must be a widespread change of heart in this nation if there is to be an end to the causes which breed crises. . . .<sup>78</sup>

The immediate answer which the Oxford Group movement itself had made to the crisis was the rapidly expanded Moral Rearmament crusade. Large rallies and assemblies and local community drives, organized in varying degrees of thoroughness, overshadowed the houseparties and hotel gatherings and the smaller local meetings of the previous period in the United States. The analysis of the problems of international conflict was virtually identical with the analyses of other problems to which the Group had addressed itself. The causes of war were the sins of individuals, and the place to begin was with the ordinary citizen and with the statesman alike. Since some Group members were certain that *only* this approach would work, it was to be accomplished by advertising the gospel. Time would not permit painstaking personal evangelism; but the problem

<sup>78</sup> Letter from leaders of London Co-operative Society, Oct. 2, 1938, quoted by H. W. Austin, *Moral Rearmament: The Battle for Peace*, p. 19. The situation referred to was the Munich crisis of September, 1938.

still remained one of individual responsibilities, and the place to begin was at home.

In the "battle for peace," as the Moral Rearmament campaign was called, every sort of talent among Group participants was called upon in publicizing the program. And the principles and practices of the movement were reduced to simpler and even more general terms than they had been before. Guidance became listening and everyone could do it, not only those who had been convicted of sin and had confessed and surrendered under the soul surgery pattern. Sins most commonly mentioned were fear, greed, and hate; the personal goals of each individual were the four standards, sometimes called "principles" of absolute honesty, absolute love, absolute unselfishness, and absolute purity. Through billboard advertisements and other media, Moral Rearmament had become a campaign of slogans and its rallies recitals of endorsements from every type of person that those who planned the programs could include.<sup>79</sup>

As in the case of its analysis of industrial conflict, here again the Oxford Group welcomed endorsement and the sponsorship of prominent persons. The Group included what were often merely general statements agreeing to the importance of emphasizing moral and spiritual truths in the same program with full-fledged testimony of participants and the unqualified endorsements of specific Oxford Group practices.<sup>80</sup>

At the outbreak of World War II, September, 1939, no appreciable change in the outlook or activities of the Oxford

<sup>79</sup> "Man's Plan is A.R.M. God's Plan is M.R.A.," "MRA—a War not to Kill Men but to Change Men," "New Men, New Nations, A New World" were a few of the rallying cries.

<sup>80</sup> A very general statement from President Roosevelt might thus be offered as evidence of the truth of the Oxford Group program. Few political leaders, as one of them pointed out, could afford *not* to endorse "moral rearmament" whether they subscribed to the Oxford Group program or not. See chap. ii, pp. 52, 53, *passim*, above.

Group movement occurred or was immediately apparent. For many participants events only confirmed their convictions that the moral and spiritual shortcomings of individuals were to blame. "Because man would not listen to God's 'still, small voice,'" declared the *New Witness*, "he is now hearing the voice of the cannon."<sup>81</sup>

"Seeds of war are planted deep in all our hearts," was a later statement of Oxford Group thinking:

fear, selfishness, resentment. These are the real enemies—the only enemies with whom we can make no peace; the only enemies who must be destroyed. We can save the world—at a price; the price of our own moral and spiritual re-armament.<sup>82</sup>

Although participants in the movement varied widely in their estimates of the situation, some interpreting war as a divine judgment, others viewing it as a consequence of human selfishness and an effect of men's confidence in themselves instead of reliance upon the detailed guidance

<sup>81</sup> "The world powers, as scourges of God," the statement continued, "are punishing each other for their sins. How much punishment do we individually need, does our nation . . . need before we turn to God, determined to learn and do His Will? Every ounce of our disobedience to God is help and encouragement to the real enemy. To that extent we become the latter's allies and traitors within the camp of rightness. The battle fronts on either side of Germany are incidental to the main front within each soul. And the issue is Egoism vs. God" (front-page editorial in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 37 [Sept. 13, 1939]).

"There will be peace in the world if and when you change human nature. . . . Peace of the home and peace of the nation as well as peace of the individual can be found when we follow God's Plan," was the conviction expressed by the Reverend Mr. Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr. "God," he said in a sermon, "Let Us Get Our Bearings," delivered Sunday, Sept. 17, 1939, "always vindicates Himself in history, whether man does good or does evil, keeps peace or makes war. . . . War is not His punishment of us, it is our own foolish refusal to take His way; it is the consequence of taking our own way. It ought to be a very direct proof to us all that we have taken the wrong way, and a very sharp reminder that there is another way, the way of God. It ought to be a very sure, if sad, proof to us that God is, and that He alone holds the key to a happy society . . ." (mimeographed copy of Mr. Shoemaker's sermon, distributed by Calvary Church, New York City). See also chap. ii, pp. 57-59, above.

<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Mina Edison Hughes in world broadcast from WRUL, Boston, Dec. 2, 1939.

of God, most accepted the situation and accommodated their thinking to it. One person whose country was at war declared, "Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of God."<sup>83</sup> Peace would be achieved, a Royal Air Force sergeant thought, "only . . . by fighting against hate and barbarism wherever we find it—in ourselves, our nation, our allies or our opponents."<sup>84</sup> "This war," said a group in South Africa, "is being fought . . . for a principle. . . . We must be prepared to live for that principle as well as fight for it."<sup>85</sup>

Pacifist conviction, at least to the extent of refusal to bear arms in conscientious objection to killing, was not strong. "The issue of whether I fight or do not fight is irrelevant and secondary to the far wider issue, 'Am I fighting for peace?'" thought one young man. "Remorse is not the answer. 'Change of heart' is."<sup>86</sup> Moral Rearmament, a speaker had told the delegates to the Second World Assembly for MRA, July, 1939, is "a new form of preparedness available either for peace or for war."<sup>87</sup> Although a few young men who had been participants in the Oxford Group movement chose to interpret absolute love as an injunction against killing, not many Group members in the United States chose prison or the IV-E status and alternative service offered under the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940; and none of the full-time life-changers who were denied occupational deferment to continue their evangelism in defense plants early in 1943 sought conscientious objector status as far as I have been able to determine.

In the attitudes and responses which the Oxford Group

<sup>83</sup> P.T., testimony, July 19, 1939. Data in author's files.

<sup>84</sup> Letter published unsigned in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 40 (Oct. 4, 1939), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Statement signed by Governor Sir Herbert J. Stanley of Rhodesia, South Africa, and others in the *Rhodesian Herald*, Sept. 6, 1939, and reprinted in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 45 (Nov. 8, 1939), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Anonymous statement published in the *New Witness*, IV, No. 45 (Nov. 8, 1939), 4.

<sup>87</sup> See chap. ii, p. 56, above.

made to the problems of international conflict there are many traces of the same or similar responses which it had made to industrial conflict problems and situations, as well as to the problems of personality adjustment which had been its earliest concern. The distinctions between problems in the personality and problems in the social order had, in fact, melted away in the thinking of many participants in the movement, since the source of trouble in every case was known in advance to be a sin. While the sin may lie in the human nature which everyone shared as well as in the specific aberrations, intentional or not, of individuals, it was only by the action of individuals in what they conceived to be the correct and only effective relationship to God that the sin could be rectified and the problem solved. Every problem was reduced to these terms, and some of the more ardent participants in the movement regarded it not only as futile but as sinful to approach a problem in any other terms.

In conveying its gospel, the Oxford Group movement placed heavy reliance upon the sheer weight of testimony and the prestige of its endorsers or speakers, and used these available resources for dramatic demonstrations of the truth of its formulations. As a result of this, the attention of participants tended to be drawn away from direct, objective consideration of the problems which they faced toward simplified dogmatic diagnoses and prescriptions, or else it was dissipated in wishful thinking and eclecticism.

In its attitudes toward social problems the Oxford Group showed no inclination to withdraw from society nor to erect, as its own utopian alternative, a rigid pattern of social conduct logically consistent with a fixed ideal. Although the Group was inclined to be dogmatic in its evangelistic premises, it preferred to accommodate its program and alter the application of those premises to changing circumstances. In this respect, of course, it was distinctly different from the sect.

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## VII

### *Conclusions*

NO FINAL EPISODE conveniently marks the end of the Oxford Group movement; in fact, as MRA, the movement remains alive and active. If any observation may be hazarded at this point about this aspect of the movement, it would be that it will disappear as it arose—gradually.

In the meantime a number of observations can be made on the basis of data assembled in this study. For purposes of distinguishing between conclusions that may be drawn about this movement specifically from those that may be made about new religious movements generally, as well as for convenience, these may be discussed under two headings: first, observations about the Oxford Group movement itself, and second, a theoretic formulation of cult patterns of conduct and other attributes as a configuration or combination of characteristics that appear to belong together and that may on occasion be found to be duplicated in other religious movements.

From the point of view of theoretical sociology it is the latter rather than the former that must be regarded as the more significant findings of a study of this sort. Insight into the specific factors operative in the Oxford Group movement and valid generalizations about it are no less important, and in the long run they may prove to be equally valuable, in the painstaking process of assembling accurate information about the nature and forms of social interaction among human beings.

There are many facts about the Oxford Group movement that make it a peculiarly difficult subject to analyze. Quite

apart from the fact that it has been a religious movement whose goals, as its leaders and members are convinced, are beyond adequate and accurate analysis in secular terms, the movement presents some apparent paradoxes or, in any case, interesting combinations of conduct, ideas, and structure. Sectarian in its ideological distinction between the changed and the unchanged, the movement was, nevertheless, not sectarian in its organization and structure. Although dogmatic, and in some respects Fundamentalist in its emphasis upon the absolute necessity of conversion, the movement achieved extreme flexibility in its application of its doctrines. Many of the emphases in the movement—e.g., its insistence upon absolute honesty and its apparent willingness to present itself in any guise that might be necessary to win the confidence of the prospective convert, its association of “good living” and “good Christianity,” or its ability to see in Hitler a possible agent for effecting “God’s Plan” in the world—appear as paradoxes. To view them as such may be regarded as a reflection of the bias of observers who were unaccustomed to the unusual and even dramatic juxtaposition of “smart living” and religion, of “the very oldest and the very newest,” of hilarity and piety, of boss and worker, charwoman and countess, luxurious accommodations and no apparent concern for raising money to pay for them. It does seem to be true, on the other hand, that deliberate efforts were made by the Group to present itself in such a way as to pique the curiosity of the outsider and to intrigue his imagination with the possibilities latent in the movement and its message. And this “principle” of attracting interest and attention in the movement undoubtedly gave rise to more than one genuine contradiction.

In its emphasis upon luring rather than frightening unconverted persons into surrender and in its use of various quasi-professional euphemisms such as “soul surgeon” in-

stead of "evangelist," "change" rather than "conversion" or "revival," and "pagan" rather than "sinner," the Oxford Group departed rather abruptly from other movements that have attempted to carry out a similar program based on similar assumptions about the nature of man and his relation to God. There are other respects, however, in which we have found Oxford Group practice differing from that of traditional evangelicalism. One of these is its special interest in leaders, in the prestige-bearing "up and out," and in the "key men" in any situation or community in which the Group anticipated spreading its program. Another is in the alacrity and the skill with which Frank Buchman and his associates caught up and utilized some of the concepts developed by applied psychology, psychoanalysis, social case work, and other disciplines.

Although this study has not attempted to answer the question why the Oxford Group movement came into existence, or why it came into existence when it did, nor has it attempted to discover what specific needs the movement fulfilled for its participants or what "effects" it had upon them, or why some individuals responded to it and others did not, it may not be inappropriate to suggest that the Group is a reflection of an apparently deep-seated, persistent need on the part of some members of contemporary society for patterns of religious response that will be emotionally satisfying to them. This appears to include needs for closer, more intimate fellowship with others and needs for more active rather than passive roles in organized religious activity. Although the movement was individualistic in the sense that it challenged individuals to change and each person, presumably, to discover what "God's Plan" for him was, it is a mistake to emphasize this aspect of the movement at the expense of the strongly group-centered interest and emphasis found in the movement.

In his brief analysis of the Oxford Group movement, Hadley Cantril has suggested that a major reason for its success and for its demonstrated popularity among the middle and upper classes is that it showed certain bewildered people a way to interpret their personal troubles and the larger social problems of their world without endangering their status, and provided a psychological mechanism whereby they could act and encourage others to act in a program which excused them from dealing directly with social conditions that were neither right nor just. Without examining this thesis in any detail, it is possible to point out that whatever the psychological mechanisms present in the responses of Group participants, it is true that during the slightly more than two decades of its existence the movement grew most rapidly and achieved its greatest strength in the periods of greatest crisis. In its totality, the Group presented a simple, logically self-sufficient, complete system of premises, diagnoses, and prescriptions—an ideology in the technical sense of the word—and it is possible that this reassuringly complete gospel could have an appeal to individuals on its own terms, regardless of their particular class position in society.

In view of the special sociological significance of the type of association found in new social movements, we turn our attention next to some conclusions that can be drawn about this aspect of the Oxford Group.

As a group, the movement has proved to be a relatively loosely knit association, so informal in its organization that many of its participants were led to believe that it had no "organization" at all and that it did not, in any case, exist as a "separate" group. This was felt to be true because no census of members was ever taken, no regular pledges or subscriptions of financial support were organized, and no distinctions were made between lay and clerical leaders as

life-changers. It was thought to be true also because there were no formal tests for membership in the Group and few of the regularities of ritual and other practice common to full-fledged membership in established churches, denominations, and to some extent in sects.

Part of the insistence that there was no formal organization reflected, as we have seen, a desire on the part of Group participants and leaders not to dissociate themselves from their church and denominational affiliations nor to antagonize the leaders of these groups; the Oxford Group preferred to think of itself as a movement to deepen the personal religious experiences of its participants and to lead others from sin into the same experience. Part of it also was intended to convey the idea that the Group was an unusually sensitive and responsive agent of the Holy Spirit and should not be fettered by human purposes and schemes of organization.

The Oxford Group clearly was not organized in the manner or to the degree that some other types of religious groups have been organized. The actual size of the membership not only appears to have varied considerably but was at no time known to the leader of the Group. No efforts were made to formulate a common, explicit creed of beliefs; and the work of co-ordinating the activities of scattered Groups and individuals was carried on almost entirely by volunteer communications teams and by traveling teams and others. Nothing approaching an ecclesiastical structure developed, nor did the Group aspire to perform any of the traditional sacraments of Christianity such as baptism and marriage.

The movement was not so vague or so amorphous, however, that it remained indistinguishable as a group. Both in the organization of its full-time program of evangelism and in the standardized practices of soul surgery and later

of sharing, seeking guidance, making restitution, and so on, the movement became sufficiently distinct so that it could be identified as a group. In the traveling teams of the movement and in local groups, moreover, disciplines that reflected a strong *esprit de corps* have been found.

While the social and economic backgrounds and the status of participants and financial supporters of the movement have not been precisely determined in this study, by inference and by the expressed intention of its leaders the movement sought to cater to the requirements of middle and also of upper class sinners and to leaders of every class and interest bloc. It did not ignore or exclude individuals drawn into the movement from other ranks and from other roles, and many of the socially or politically prominent persons whom the Group sought to identify with it and with its program were not actual participants but only sponsors. Frequently these latter individuals gave endorsements that were both very general and highly qualified. In its own terms the Moral Rearmament program offered a gospel open to all races, classes, and creeds, available to all who elected to follow its stereotyped practices, and "effective" for the solution of the problems of all.

Although the Oxford Group underwent several striking changes in the course of its development from a quiet, unpublicized program of personal evangelism to a spectacular crusade for Moral Rearmament, the basic premises and patterns of the movement remained substantially the same. The changes that did occur were reflected not only in the general composition of the Group but in its means of introducing its message, in its methods for life-changing, and in the problems for which it proposed the answer.

The Group and its leaders believed that the only vital religious experience was the experience of God-control or guidance. It was not only the Will of God that men be

guided in the details of their lives, but they must first surrender themselves and their sins, then they must seek to get others voluntarily, and as individuals, also to surrender. This was implicitly if not explicitly regarded as *the* path to salvation, a divinely instituted obligation which was at the same time the right way *and* the most pleasant and satisfying way, for Buchman taught that the greatest happiness and, in fact, the only genuine personal happiness came in the performance of duties which his movement prescribed. What was in effect grim necessity could and should be accepted as the supreme human good, a joyful and happy condition. Later it was urged that the program of activities and practices set by the Group offered not only the path to personal salvation and the sole solution for personal problems of every sort, but that it was the only solution for any problem of human relationship, no matter how complex.

In effect, the Oxford Group movement became a vehicle for the stimulation and satisfaction of a growing variety of emotional needs of its participants, offering release from guilt and personal anxiety about specific sins and also a sense of security and direction for individuals caught in the confusion of rapid social change. It combined a reaffirmation of a Fundamentalist theology with a restatement of an individualistic moral code and injected into both of these a vocabulary which it thought of as modern, attractive, and effective. Group responses to the rationalist and to the more sophisticated social-scientific, matter-of-fact attitudes toward problems and toward human experience generally varied from suspicion and distrust to antagonism and explicit denunciation.

While it was not sectarian and did not withdraw from social participation, the Oxford Group movement tended to isolate itself mentally within the confines of a comparatively few dogmatic assertions about the nature of human nature

and the right relation of man to God. Upon the basis of these, individuals were urged to make their own diagnostic applications to their personal conflicts and relationships and to draw their own inescapable deductions.

Although the Group disclaimed any specific program or philosophy of social action, the effect of its emphasis upon changing individuals one by one, upon individual responsibility, and upon minimizing or resolving conflict, regardless of the situation or the issues at stake, was clearly conservative. The focus of attention at the beginning of the movement and throughout the Rising Tide and Moral Re-armament was upon the individual and his feelings, experiences, and obligations. To criticize social institutions was regarded as futile, if not a way of dodging one's prime social responsibility, which was to surrender oneself to God. Groups, culture complexes, personality patterns, institutions were not considered as such, nor was understanding of their processes in other terms than those prescribed by the premises of the movement encouraged. To many participants it evidently did not occur that these processes and the concepts in which they are analyzed existed or were important.

We must conclude from this that, although considerable attention was given by the Oxford Group to problems of social conflict in industrial, racial, and international areas, the primary concern of participants throughout the history of the movement was for experiences in which they themselves figured centrally as individuals. Since emotional and other satisfactions were sought and cultivated in preference to attitudes of rational detachment and of logical induction, the Group diagnoses of problems tended toward oversimplification and incompleteness from the point of view of the social scientist.

Although the principles of the Group were felt to be anchored upon absolutes, no constant or consistent positions

toward specific social issues such as militarism versus pacifism were taken or maintained. Personal evangelism had had to be flexible enough to fit the needs of any individual and of any situation in which he might find himself; similarly throughout other activities of the Oxford Group any binding commitments which might deter reversals or alterations of program or policy in response to guidance were avoided or no interest was shown in them.

Individuals who were attracted to the Oxford Group movement on the basis of the emotional satisfaction which participation in it afforded accordingly were not encouraged to trace out a rigidly consistent philosophy or outlook embodying any single ideal; nor were they encouraged to rationalize their commitments with intellectual affirmations. Traces of eclecticism have been apparent in the affirmations of Group participants; and, although many individuals attempted to trace out the logical imperatives of their surrender for their own lives, the process was neither so explicit nor so formal as it quite generally has been found to be in the case of the sectarian convert. Within the limits of its evangelical premises and goals, the methods of life-changing and other practices of the Oxford Group were thoroughly rational.

Unlike the isolated sect, the Group did not demand that all aspects of the lives of its members be subject to the examination and control of the Group or disciplined in a manner consistent with some explicit, specific code. Participants chose to conform or not to conform, and they were free to confess as many or as few of their personal habits and activities as they chose. As a result participation in the Oxford Group *could* be segmental, representing only a fraction of the total pattern of religious patterns and group loyalties of the individual. Since he was not required to meet any given test of membership or to identify himself

with the Group through the affirmation of a creed or the habitual practice of any given sacraments, the participant could very readily lose interest in his association with the Group and withdraw. Participation in the Oxford Group does appear to have been comparatively shortlived except in a few cases; much of the interest of later converts appears to have been somewhat faddist in nature. Ultimately the temporary interest of participants in the Group and its pattern of activities reflected itself in the decline of the movement itself, following a comparatively short period of existence.

In the face of evident need for more pronounced emotional and spiritual satisfactions than those which they were able to find in their churches and denominations, Oxford Group leaders and participants developed and elaborated a program of activities for themselves and others which would combine obligations and rewards, lures and demands capable of producing maximum emotional satisfaction.

On the basis of the foregoing observations and conclusions about the Oxford Group movement as a specific movement we should be in a position now to formulate, albeit tentatively, a general statement about one of the possible ways in which new religious movements may be organized, together with other traits that may be found along with it—a theory of “the cult” as a probable combination of structural, ideological, and other characteristics that may be meaningfully related.

*A Theoretical Formulation of “the Cult” as a  
Sociological Configuration*

Thrill and the desire for thrill, whether it be the thrill of religious ecstasy or some less exalted emotional response, appear to be indispensable elements in the active cult. They constitute a basis upon which the participants are drawn together about a prophet leader, who, in order to maintain

his position, must remain pre-eminent in his power to generate thrill response. The emphasis which the cult gives to these responses appears to make them central and essential for the understanding of other aspects of this type of religious group. Without the thrill the conduct and many of the characteristic attitudes which comprise the cult would go uninterpreted and in this sense unexplained.

Although religious thrill, as we have seen, may be experienced in many forms and under a variety of circumstances, it is invariably a personal affair, an experience which, in the cult, heightens or plays upon the interest of persons in their "selves" and in what they conceive to be their relations both to God and to other people. By catering to needs that are largely personal and immediate, the cult tends to accentuate the uncritical and emotional responses of its participants to various situations and problems in which they find themselves. And this preoccupation of the cult with the more thrilling aspects of religious experience in turn precludes any highly scientific attitude toward problems, whatever their nature. To the extent that thrill response is by its nature inward and personal the cult group will underscore to some extent what we may call an egoistic or person-centered outlook.

At the same time, it should be noted that the thrill which the cult participant enjoys need not be confined to satisfactions in his own personal salvation (or in some other purely individual gain) but may include satisfaction in achieving new kinds of personal relationships with intimate friends and strangers alike. In fact, there seems to be a considerable range of circumstances from which the individual may derive strong emotional satisfactions. The point to be made here is simply that the emphasis of the cult is primarily upon the individual, and that it is on an emotional rather than an intellectual plane that participants are encouraged to

respond to their experiences. Social problems are almost never seen in terms of institutional breakdowns, cultural lags, or culture conflict by the cult participant.

The emotional responses which comprise much of the religious experience of the cult participant are not, and many individuals will feel cannot be, offered for objective examination. They are experiences which it is believed must be had rather than talked about in order to be known and appreciated. The cult has no formal creed, though various rites and practices may be carefully prescribed, and in some instances as in the case of the Oxford Group a considerable degree of dogmatism may develop.

Another characteristic of the cult which we have seen is a comparatively slight regard for the kind of logical consistency which the sect usually exhibits and which it demands in the conduct of its elected members. Each individual who chooses to associate himself with the cult is encouraged to decide for himself the extent of his commitment to the group and to its objectives and is free to trace out for himself, or to disregard, whatever logical imperatives may follow in different areas of his living as a result of the commitment he has chosen to make. While the sense of dedication and devotion may be very strong in individual participants in a cult, it is not uniform throughout the group nor does it often achieve the thoroughness of sectarian commitment. It is possible for him to combine experiences and activities which, to a sectarian mind, might be utterly incongruous.

The cult, as has perhaps now become apparent, is no challenger of the social order. In general it may be thought of as swinging free from other group structures in the society of which it is a part. If it takes cognizance of the social order at all, it tends to view problems there, as we have noted above, largely in personal, individual terms rather than as institutional breakdowns, cultural lags, and

so on. If it enters or finds itself in a conflict situation, the cult is apt to consider itself as an agent for reconciliation. This attitude, coupled with its comparative lack of interest in objective analyses of situations and its disinclination to commit itself to radical social action, frequently suffices to place the cult in a conservative or even reactionary position even though this may not be the deliberate intention of its leader or his followers.

When thrill becomes, as it seems to in the case of the cult, the central and almost sole basis upon which an association is formed, several consequences for the structure of such a group as well as for its collective and typical attitudes and responses appear. Such a group is not likely to be permanent, for instance. Since membership is usually attainable merely on the basis of desire for, and capacity to respond to, the thrill devices of the group or its leader, many drift easily into the cult but tend to fall away quickly as their interest in the thrill dies out or attaches itself to other activities, other leaders, or other groups. Thrill-seekers who are never totally committed to the cult are not dependable as members. Cult participants generally penetrate their group only in so far as their interest and their determination to enjoy what the cult has to offer may carry them. Usually since only adults are capable of experiencing the thrills of cult participation, the group will consist of adults only. Urban rather than rural residents will predominate. Finally, the desire for thrill generally means that the cult must have a very strong type of leadership, one that can satisfy consistently and over a period of time needs which it has itself helped to create or accentuate.

#### *The Cult Configuration as an Interpretive Hypothesis*

Some implications in the foregoing theory as it relates to the data of this study may be pointed out in conclusion. One of these is that the several aspects of the Oxford Group movement which we have examined in this study can be

interpreted as a complex of meaningfully related traits, a configuration which, in certain basic respects, may be found duplicated or approximated in other young religious movements.

This particular group has been found to be an association of persons seeking religious satisfactions that are personally satisfying and emotionally exhilarating; the group presents, in addition, a number of characteristics which appear to belong together and may thus be mutually related. In this view no single factor in the complex of phenomena which we have observed is itself regarded as an independent attribute but both explains, and in part is explained by, other attributes in the configuration. Thus, for example, we have seen how the emotional basis for the association of participants in a cult, while not the sole factor in the process, tends to reduce intellectual considerations to secondary place or irrelevance. To the extent that it exists without any of the formal statements of faith and practice which might serve as tests for membership, the cult tends to remain a loose association in which individuals themselves choose to participate and to which they adhere only so long as they maintain interest in the program of the group.

Conversely, in part because the cult has had no well-organized ecclesiastical or denominational structure and no traditional or other institutional devices for recruiting participants, it has been obliged to erect its own program of appeal, its methods for creating and satisfying a growing appetite for thrills in religious experience. With various attributes thus operating to reinforce each other, the cult pattern may be thought of as perpetuating itself. In this view each attribute in turn accentuates every other in the complex until some external or emergent factor appears on the scene to alter the processes. This is not a full explanation of the cult but it is plausible, and it may also become a useful and provocative hypothesis.

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