

THE SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT FROM THE WEST

The spiritual movement from the West

An essay and two talks by
Grigory Pomerants

Translated by Peter Thwaites

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Translator's introduction

Grigory Pomerants has been a witness of the history of his country, Russia, throughout its Soviet period and up to the present day.

Born four months after the Bolshevik Revolution, he lived through the civil war period, the Stalin purges of the 30s, four years' war service from Stalingrad to Berlin as a Red Army infantryman, arrest and imprisonment during the persecutions of Stalin's last years, and the three decades of varying degrees of state oppression and intimidation which followed, less extreme than Stalin's but still fearsome for its victims.

Pomerants' writings blend scholarship with the testimony of an individual soul on its journey through that dramatic historical and social landscape. Two themes in his work are the conquest of fear, and the freedom of the individual conscience. His weapons in achieving that conquest and that freedom have been inner contemplation, and the gift of expressing and communicating his reflections. He has been classed as a religious writer; this is true, but not in any dogmatic sense. For Pomerants, religion is integral to life. Religion in this sense is not concerned with definition, any more than a man can see and define God. God has to be continually sought, experienced and served, He cannot be controlled. This challenge to the human mind gives Pomerants' *writings* a sparkle and an authenticity which is still attractive in his

80s, particularly to young readers and listeners.

Pomerants' originality and independence of mind brought him rejection by the conformist Soviet academic system. As a student he was barred from post-graduate studies after his thesis on Dostoyevsky was judged 'anti-Marxist'. It is an irony that he found his 'academic freedom' first amongst fellow prisoners arrested for 'anti-Soviet agitation', and later when he occupied a humble post at the Main Library of Social Sciences which gave him the opportunity to do research in his own time. His decision not to take up Communist Party membership after his release from prison in 1953 meant that he was not permitted to teach at tertiary level. Another doctoral thesis in 1968 was never admitted to examination, after he had signed a petition on behalf of four arrested dissident intellectuals. It was in the unofficial world of underground scholarship and debate that Pomerants became well known, though officially he was a non-person. Andrei Sakharov, the physicist and Nobel Peace laureate, wrote of Pomerants in his *Memoirs*: 'I was astounded by his erudition, his broad perspective, his sardonic humour and his academic approach... Pomerants is a man of rare independence, integrity and intensity who has not let material poverty cramp his rich, if underrated, contribution to our intellectual life.'*

In post-Soviet Russia Pomerants is freer to step forward in public discussion. Belated public recognition has followed the decades of patient survival, and fortune has blessed him with continuing powers of scholarship, observation and reflection into his 70s and 80s. His original and authentic style, whether in writings, media appearances or occasional lectures, is popular in particular with young Russians. His first book to be published in Moscow

* Andrei Sakharov: *Memoirs*. Hutchinson 1990. p. 306

appeared in 1990, based on the Dostoyevsky thesis that cut short his academic career 50 years earlier. Since then many more books and articles have appeared.*

The text offered here is significant in several ways. Fifteen years have flashed by since the dismantling of the Iron Curtain and the rejoining of East and West Europe. A generation is already approaching maturity that remembers nothing of the Cold War that defined international relations for forty years. *The spiritual movement from the West* is a document of that moment when the tide of history in Europe had just turned. It tells of Pomerants' first visit to the West since his days as a young officer in the Soviet occupation of Berlin. In 1992, just months after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Pomerants had been invited to Caux, in Switzerland, the world conference centre of Initiatives of Change (then still Moral Re-Armament), as one of a group of prominent scholars for a conference on 'moral lessons of Soviet history'. There he met not only his colleagues from many countries but a spiritual movement that fascinated him both for what was new to him and what was unexpectedly familiar. Certain ideas that had developed in his mind over years of spiritual reflection and academic study, he observed at Caux applied in practice. In the following years he revisited Caux with his wife, the poet Zinaida

* Pomerants' books (all in Russian) include: *Neopublikovannoe* ('Unpublished'), Munich 1972; *Sny zemli* ('Dreams of the earth'), Paris 1989, 2nd revised edition due 2004; *Otkrytost' bezdne: Vstrechi s Dostoevskim* ('Open to the abyss: Encounters with Dostoyevsky'), Moscow 1990, 2nd revised edition 2003; *Sobiranie sebya* ('Collection'), Moscow 1993; *Vykhod iz transa* ('Out of the trance'), Moscow 1995; with Z. Mirkina: *Velikie religii mira* ('The world's great religions'), Moscow 1995; *Strastnaya odносторонnost' i besstrastie dukha* ('Passionate one-sidedness and passionlessness of the spirit'), Moscow 1998; *Zapiski gadkogo utenka* ('Notes of an ugly duckling'), Moscow 1998, 2nd revised edition 2003.

Mirkina, who also responded deeply to the atmosphere and experienced an outpouring of new poetry during the time she spent there.

The title of Pomerants' essay is wryly humorous from a Russian point of view – in the Russian stereotype Western Europe has always lacked spiritual depth, rather as in the Western stereotype there is a mysterious Russian 'soul'. Having caught his readers' attention with this irony, he goes on to explain the basic approach, ideas and practices of the MRA movement and the Caux meetings, frequently referring back to the experience 40 years earlier of Gabriel Marcel, the French Catholic philosopher who had similarly 'discovered' Caux and described it with the sensitivity and precision of an acute Gallic mind. The 40-year gap is not by chance: that is how long the Cold War and the division of Europe had lasted. This first section ends with some fascinating observations by Pomerants about the traumatised society of his homeland, grappling with new post-Soviet realities, the turbulence it is passing through, and the urgency of finding a new positive direction not only for Russia but for a crisis-ridden world.

Section two starts with a series of examples of the effective application of the Caux approach to past crises: post-World War II reconciliation; the peaceful de-colonisation of several countries; and alternatives to class war in industry. Then Pomerants attempts to grasp the essence of the legacy left by Frank Buchman, the initiator of Moral Re-Armament, and finds it in the quality of 'openness' – a fundamental principle in Pomerants' own thinking. With particular reference to the writings of Martin Buber this theme is explored over several pages. After remarking on a few concepts encountered at Caux with which he differs, Pomerants ends his second section by returning to his main theme: the destiny of such a place and such a movement is to be a meeting place beyond creeds and dogmas, where

there is a dialogue of hearts open to the 'spirit blowing everywhere'.

The third and final section seeks to point the reader to a way beyond human rationalism and organisation in the search for wholeness. Pomerants uses the circle and then the round dance (the *khorovod* of Russian folk culture) as symbols of a deeper unity underlying apparent diversity, and of the role of a community in approaching a central truth which we can sense but never see. He sees a similar image in the Christian Trinity and finds here a path to bridge the apparent chasm between the monotheistic and the Eastern religions. Returning to Europe, he writes of the interplay between the visible and worldly wisdom of the Greeks and the 'audible' and other-worldly wisdom of the Jews, which have been seen as opposites but finally together have formed the basis of European civilisation. Finally he returns to Martin Buber's focus on the 'I-Thou' relationship as the foundation of a new common journey for today, where God will appear less in dogma and more in community. Such a community was created, wittingly or unwittingly, by Buchman and Pomerants found it alive at Mountain House in Caux.

This is an essay rich in philosophical ideas and allusions, not always easy to understand, sometimes only hinting at possible answers. But it is bold in its sweep and in its confidence that there is (as cosmologists might say) a 'theory of everything', albeit beyond the grasp of the human intellect. We must finally rely on the heart more than the mind.

The author is deeply concerned at the dehumanising effects of the scientific and economic 'development' that advanced societies have gone through. In Russian the word *razvitie* ('development') has also the sense of an 'unraveling', a loss of integrity and wholeness. In a later essay (not printed here, but part of the same train of thought) Pomerants writes of the 'contemplative pause' that needs to be

reintroduced into the rhythm of societies that have sacrificed too much for the creation of material wealth. The spiritual balance of human societies can and must be restored, and this, he believes, requires movements like the international community that he found himself part of at Caux.

Peter Thwaites, Sydney, April 2004

THE SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT FROM THE WEST

[I]

A spiritual movement from the West, and started by an American – this alone is enough to make a Russian reader smile. As we all know, ‘law is from the West, but light is from the East’... But then, there were plenty of ironical remarks in Europe too. Even the building where the association for Moral Re-Armament holds its conferences drew ridicule. Gabriel Marcel after joining the movement was obliged to explain that the huge hotel in Caux (somewhat reminiscent of a gingerbread house or an illustration for a children’s fairy-tale) had been due for demolition and was bought at a bargain price, with funds collected by a hundred Swiss families. There simply would not have been the money to build something else.

Russian original: *Dukhovnoe dvizhenie s zapada*, in: Grigory Pomerants, Theophil Spoerri, Leif Hovelsen: *Pospet’ za Bogom: teoria i praktika Moral’nogo Perevooruzhenia* (Running to keep up with God: the theory and practice of Moral Re-Armament). Prov-Press, Moscow 1997. Besides the Pomerants essay the book contains abbreviated translations of Spoerri: *Dynamic out of Silence*, and Hovelsen: *Out of the Evil Night*.

Marcel's introduction to the book *Fresh Hope for the World*¹ is written in the form of a response to three friends. 'Each of you has written independently to me to tell me how surprised and how sad you are to hear that I have thrown in my lot with Moral Re-Armament', writes the French thinker. 'He is getting old; a little *passé*.' That is the unexpressed thought which I have sensed behind all you say. So I feel that I should reply to the three of you together.²

Although the free-thinker, the Catholic and the protestant had each raised different objections.

Marcel admits that the ideology of the Oxford Group (out of which the association grew) had seemed naïve to him as well. When he met the Group in 1933 he found nothing new in the four principles: 'absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love'. I must add that I also see nothing new in these words. The spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, from which the principles were derived, cannot be reduced just to these or to any other principles. The words of Christ as he said them speak to the heart, and the personality of Christ is still more compelling. That personality of Christ is the word that was with God. I always recall in this connection Dostoyevsky's paradoxical creed: 'If someone proved to me that Christ was outside truth, and it was actually so that truth was outside Christ, then it would be better for me to remain with Christ outside truth than with truth outside Christ' (the word 'truth' here could be replaced with 'principle', '*system of ideas*').

1 Gabriel Marcel: *Un Changement d'Espérance à la Rencontre du Réarmement Moral*, Plon, Paris, 1958.

2 Gabriel Marcel (ed.): *Fresh Hope for the World: Moral Re-Armament in Action*. Translated from the French by Helen Hardinge. Longmans, London 1960, p.1. All quotes taken from this edition.

Christ's rejoinders are improvisations, the response of profound wholeness to a question or a challenge. A new challenge – and new words emerge, with no concern about a system. That is how all the Sacred books are constructed – the Gospels, the Koran, the Vedic Hymns... The principles formulated by the Oxford Group could have ended up as one more system like a thousand others. But this did not happen. The factor preventing it was expressed – perhaps a little awkwardly – in the epithet 'absolute'. This epithet was the sign of movement, of action, of the inseparability of word and life, of the unthinkable of faith without works – i.e. the very essence of the Oxford Group's original impetus. From the very beginning the Group was not an ideology, not an organisation, but a movement – a movement of spiritual openness. What spiritual openness means may become clearer further on. Marcel felt a resonance between the practice of the Oxford Group meetings and one of the main themes of his own spiritual search and quotes the essay where this theme is best expressed. Inner recollection (*recueillement*), he wrote there,

“is essentially the process by which I realise myself as a single whole. The very word 'recollection' suggests this; but this realisation, this recapturing of oneself, has more of the character of a 'letting-go' or a surrender. It is a 'surrender to... ' or 'letting-go' without my being able to find any noun which can follow these prepositions.³ The road ceases at the threshold... In the heart of the stillness I face up to my life. In a sense, I stand back from it... and in this act of withdrawal, I take with me both what I am and possibly what my life is not. In this time of stillness the soul rests and waits. It does not look at or study any object. It is a time for inner refreshment and renewal... We are here in the presence of that paradox which is a mystery, for through it the

3 'propositions' in the Longmans edition is a misprint.

'P into which I withdraw, ceases to belong to itself alone.'

"I was entirely ready to accept [Marcel continues] that in a quiet time the voice to which we listen is no longer the voice of self. But that was not all. There was also another point where I found myself seeing *lived out in experience* [my emphasis – G.P.] something which was in line with my own quest and my own conviction. I mean the encounter, or to put it more precisely, the act by which one person's consciousness (for want of a better word) can open up in the presence of another person's consciousness...

"You who know my writings well will recognise at once that this opening up in response to another person is exactly that *intersubjectivity* which played such a central role in my later writings, though I do not think I had yet used this term at that period."⁴

The Marceles went on to hold small meetings of the Group in their Paris flat. Several things were unsatisfactory, however. Too many people came out of curiosity.

"Further, I blame myself for having often tried artificially to create opportunities for personal witness – even perhaps opportunities for reproaching myself... And besides, at that time people considered (quite wrongly) that everything said ought to be what was called 'positive' which meant that critical reflection as such was considered to be negative, and therefore suspect."⁵

The small meetings lost their charm. And their capacity to have any influence on political developments appeared to be nil.

In the 1950s Marcel's attitude changed as a result of conversations with statespeople who told him of the influence of Moral Re-Armament on political processes in Europe, Asia and Africa. It was still some time before he decided to go to Caux, fearing that minor features of the

4 *ibid.* p.2

5 *ibid.* p.3

day-to-day life would disenchant him as had happened before in Paris. But then he went, and found that his fears were groundless. The association had broken out of the chrysalis of the group format, its life had grown richer and broader and the spirit that reigned at Mountain House was captivating. My own experience forty years later confirms Marcel's impressions. The style of fellowship created by Buchman has been preserved. More on this later. We continue with the 'letter of personal reassurance':

"I must now answer your questions, especially the chief objection which, in somewhat different forms, appears in each of your three letters. What on earth could I be looking for in a movement like this? Or more specifically, how could a serious and exacting philosopher like myself so easily overlook the childishness which surely must be the hallmark of all this?

"My immediate reply is that we must draw a very careful distinction (even though this distinction may be difficult to discern in practice) between childishness and simplicity. To my mind simplicity is a positive quality – the value of which goes almost entirely unrecognised in a world like ours that is on the verge of losing itself in its own complexity. One ought, really, to think out carefully which are the spheres where complexity is inevitable and the price of any real progress – and where it is literally disastrous and could even be said to checkmate itself. Wherever technique is supreme – and I am thinking especially of the technique needed to help forward man's operations on nature – it is hard to see how one can avoid complexity; indeed complexity seems to be the only way to achieve the ever greater precision that is necessary. This complexity applies both to the calculations and to the instruments that are made possible and efficient by these calculations. But the extraordinary thing, which very few people realise, is that the moment you enter the realm of the *human* everything becomes different. It is, of course, true that the word 'human' is dangerously

ambiguous. If I think of a man as a machine or as a system of mechanisms, I am certainly made to recognise the extreme complexity of his 'motor-processes'. Only, it must be carefully noted that the moment we do this we are ceasing to think of him as a *man*. I cannot think of him in this way without forgetting the essential point, that as a human being he is capable of conceiving – I do not say creating – values and ends, and of acting in conformity with or in opposition to them.”⁶

There is a great deal one would like to put in here: about the philosophy of dialogue (we shall consider that below) or simply about the human being seen as a whole. But Marcel may be right to avoid this concept; its meaning is not clear to everybody. Only the people in *The Dream of a Ludicrous Man*⁷ understood intuitively what the Whole is. That is why *they had no churches*. But on our planet we need churches, sacred objects, values and ends.

“The moment you say this, however, [continues Marcel] you cease to think of a man as a machine. You will realise the importance of this if you recall that for my friends the fundamental experience is one of change, not just a subjective change, but a radical change of the personality...

“So, Roger, if you say to me: ‘There is nothing new in this’, I would ask you to pay special attention. Those of us who are of the reflective type often see ourselves, or assess ourselves, but without this insight making any difference; above all... if a man sees himself and assesses himself simply because he has acquired the habit of reflecting, he is still unable to enlighten others or to be what I should like to call ‘radio-active’.”

I find this metaphor of Marcel’s very apt. From our first meeting, Leif Hovelsen seemed to me such a ‘radio-active’ person. I could repeat Marcel’s words:

6 *ibid.* p.4-5

7 Story by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in: *Diary of a Writer* (1877)

“... these men and women whom I met at Caux have not just been changed; they have been endowed with a mysterious power, without their wills having any part in it. I am sorry to have to use the word ‘power’ as it almost always seems to invite misinterpretation. Perhaps a better phrase would be ‘an active presence’ – and you know what an important role this term ‘presence’ plays in my writings: a ‘presence’ which is a gift, a light, which acts almost without the person endowed with it being aware of it.”

Indeed, many people I talked with in Caux left me with this feeling of a ‘presence’. Not all the 500-600 people assembled in the dining room, of course, but very many. And these set the tone for everyone.

“Then there is the other objection – yours, Paul [Marcel continues]. My phrase ‘a new man’ is almost certain to shock you. For, to a believer, a new man is a man who has been renewed inwardly by Grace, isn’t he? Is not the most serious of your charges against Moral Re-Armament that it is a form of naturalism? You feel, do you not, that here we have created beings claiming to be invested with a power which belongs to God alone?

“It seems to me the right reply is this:

“First of all, what we are dealing with here is not a theology, even of the most rudimentary kind, and still less a philosophy; it is an experience. And let me add at once, in every case, whether with Muslims or with Christians, a basic humility is maintained, which amounts to saying that this experience is always referred to God – and to God alone... The extraordinary joy which radiates especially from all the young people at Caux is in my opinion due to the fact that.. they have given up the right to themselves. I know of no other place where you come into such clear touch with the only freedom which is worth while, the freedom of the children of God.

“But no doubt you, Terry, will take up the offensive at

this point: 'God', you will say. 'But what God? A rather flabby form of protestantism?' With complete certainty I reply, 'Absolutely not'... The fact is that there is no attempt at conversion, for the very simple reason that there is no question of this being a religion or a sect. And yet no doubt you will object that there is all the same something here which transcends mere morality. For everyone claims to hear in their quiet time that which, if I dare not call it the Word of God itself, at least comes to them as Commands divine in essence.

"At this point there are several observations which I think ought to be made. First, it is a fact that almost all those who, after meeting Buchman or one of his followers, have felt the need for a new level of thinking and living, even if they may have begun by interpreting this experience in terms of conscience only, have eventually come to recognise that they could not stop there; they have had to admit their dependence on a higher authority which they have called God. And those who have had a religious upbringing in their childhood have almost always gone back to their *own* Church, while the rest have chosen, I presume, the Church whose spirit most closely matched the new direction they had found for their lives. In any case they have considered their religious choice as following, or perhaps I should say crowning, their inner change. I feel it is essential to emphasise this point, to put an end once and for all to the false idea which makes this out to be a new religion or a sect."⁸

Buchman in fact had succeeded in creating something that required new words to describe it. This was a spiritual movement without sectarianism or any tendency in that direction (forty years have passed and there is no sectarianism today). It was a movement without statutes or written rules, an association without a bureaucracy, linked

8 Marcel, *Fresh Hope for the World*, p.5-7

only by a life-style which strikes one at conferences, when several hundred people assemble in Caux and become after one or two days a well organised community of several befriended 'families', bound together not by a creed but by the language of fellowship. After eight or ten days one shift departs and another arrives – white, black and coloured, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists – and again they are learning from each other and learning practical teamwork, whether cleaning vegetables or producing plays.

All this took shape gradually, without a pre-arranged plan. During the Second World War Frank Buchman and some of his friends withdrew to a secluded lakeside in the Sierra Nevada mountains. In the silence Buchman was trying to discern what should be done after war's end, what built from the debris. The house where they were had no domestic staff. A commune naturally took shape in which everybody did everything. In a smaller group this happens easily. But thanks to the spirit of openness which prevailed in the association the same pattern established itself in Mountain House too.

Communists who arrived from West Germany in the late 1940s were astounded. Without any class struggle the ideal about which Lenin wrote had been realised: a group of civilised people with no state and with no power creating a social order – an order based on spiritual closeness above creed. A team formed for a particular task is usually a spiritual family as well, where the Oxford Group traditions of spiritual openness continue. The hour from 11am-12noon is set aside for this. I took part in the activities of a German-speaking community and sometimes visited an English-speaking one. There was no trace of the artificiality which Marcel had noted in the Paris gatherings of the 1930s. I admired the tact of the leader of the German-speaking group, Heinz Krieg (whom, thank God, I had not met at Stalingrad in 1942 where he lost the use of one

hand). The Anglo-Russian group left us with the same impression; the spirit of openness was everywhere.

There are several kinds of interconfessional dialogue: at the level of the princes of the church with their concerns about dignity, protocol, and faithfulness to tradition; at the level of religious thinkers for whom all the flesh of belief is not very important: only the spirit is; and at the level of the simple heart, ready to unite with the Other and recognising that Other not by creed but by being caught up in the common cause of love. It was the third kind that Buchman created. How he did it is a mystery of personality not fully revealed in any of his public speeches. We learn most from the stories of his person-to-person encounters and individual remarks. Reading how he 'saw through' people and captured them reminds me of Prince Myshkin.⁹

One side of him was Myshkin; the other was the practical American whose friends included future leaders for a defeated Germany. Much was lost when he died. But the movement lives on (still without formal membership); only visits to Mountain House are regulated because accommodation is limited. As before, a self-organising human society inhabits the building. It is neither confessional nor ethnic, not even European. After the Second World War people of every continent became involved. I have scrubbed carrots with a Hindu, recalling passages from the Upanishads, and lunched with a priest from Zaire, comparing the problems of *his country* with those of Russia. I would say that this whole variegated, multi-lingual society could be called a society of spiritual encounter. And this spiritual encounter begins with the most commonplace things: when you meet in the corridor or the lift; there are no politely indifferent faces. There is a prevailing sympathy, a friendly helpfulness. If a more definite personal interest springs up you are at

9 The hero of Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Idiot*.

once invited for lunch or dinner, and after an hour or two you become friends.

I do not know whether Buchman was thinking of a new form of ecumenism; but that is what he created. The participants in the movement are linked by the common cause of love – not a fantastic revival of the dead as put forward by Nikolai Fyodorovich Fyodorov,¹⁰ but a transformation of the living, a deliverance from the demons of technological civilisation, a return to simplicity which can counterbalance the complexity rushing towards chaos and disintegration. This is a movement with a religious ‘sub-text’ but without the things that normally accompany religion: dogmas and structure and rejection of those who are part of other structures and believe in other dogmas, or who belong to no structure at all; in Christian terms we could call it the fellowship of the Holy Spirit which blows everywhere,¹¹ an embodiment of the spirit of inter-religious dialogue proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council. That is more or less how Gabriel Marcel saw it (before the Council):

“... this should be considered in the perspective of a lived-out oecumenical experience and... this should be enough to cause us to welcome this idea gratefully. I am thinking again of our young Muslim from the Cameroons. His stay at Caux meant that for some days he *fraternised* with Christians. I am emphasising the word ‘fraternise’ because it is another of those many words which have been debased by usage and have lost their original meaning. Here it actually means sharing in the common experience of brotherhood being lived out. This is something far beyond what is ordinarily called tolerance... It is love. My young Muslim friend did not only feel ‘tolerated’ but understood and the quality of his own faith acknowledged.

10 Russian philosopher 1828-1903

11 cf. John 3.8

“I should like to make one further comment – mankind is now undergoing the most terrible crisis that it has faced throughout the length of recorded history. The greatest experts have not merely proved incapable of... establishing a peace worthy of the name; it even seems that they are incapable of realising how inconceivably serious the situation is. An English diplomat who came to Caux from Geneva told me how the conference on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy was bedevilled all the time by ulterior militaristic motives. Now, when orthodox medical methods fail one has a perfect right, one is even duty bound, to call in healers. And I would say that we have here a kind of rescue squad whose effectiveness cannot be ignored and must on no account be underestimated. And, just as all the best healers say that the strange power with which they have been endowed is a gift from on high, so you will find among all our friends that humility the secret of which has been lost to a world which is becoming daily more and more the slave of techniques. That loss is far from accidental. The word humility has no meaning in a world that is entirely obsessed by techniques and ‘know-how’. Granted, there certainly are surgeons, for instance, who pray before starting a particularly delicate and dangerous operation. But in so far as they do this, they cease to behave as pure technicians; in fact, they proclaim the inadequacy of technique alone.”¹²

This brings us back to the question: what is the character of the inspiration that sustains the association Buchman created? Could we consider it to be a kind of Divine worship? This is the question that Marcel sensed in Roger’s letter.

“‘Either’, he will say, ‘we have here an affirmation which comes short of being strictly religious – in which case we must not talk of guidance coming from God; or we insist

12 Marcel, *Fresh Hope for the World*, p.12-13

on claiming that a changed man acts under a super-human impulsion, and then no matter what you say, we are in the realms of religion and the question is, *which* religion?’

“It seems to me [Marcel answers:] that this dilemma depends on an assumption which is not valid... the experience in question... could only be explained on the basis of a natural religion, which could serve as a ‘common denominator’ for Christians, Muslims and no doubt also Buddhists, etc... but which stops short not only of the revealed religions but even of all organised religion. However, if you insist on my giving my personal views on this very serious matter, I would say that in my opinion – and I speak for myself alone – it is not absolutely necessary to take literally the idea that it is God Himself who speaks to us during a quiet time. I would like to quote, in this connection, the words spoken by one of my favourite characters, Arnaud, in my play *Hungry Hearts*. He is speaking to Evelyne, his father’s second wife, about a kind of pact he had made with a Being greater than himself in which he has promised not to try to probe the mystery which surrounds the death of his mother. ‘Who did you make this pact with?’ Evelyne asks. ‘I feel no need,’ he replies, ‘to give a name to my partner. I only know that I am aware of his presence – not a human presence, not someone I can talk about, and yet someone apart from me, by whom I am known. He is there. He keeps watch.’

“I think personally, that that kind of reserve, that learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*) is necessary here. When in a quiet time it is made clear to me, perhaps with the most gentle of promptings, that I ought to act in one way rather than in another, there is no doubt that *someone greater than I* has made this plain to me. But does the question, ‘*who* is it?’ have any meaning here? As far as I am concerned, I would say that in this context the word ‘God’ has primarily a very special negative sense: it stands for a refusal to put this question. Or rather, this refusal in itself

is only as it were, 'the dark side of the moon', the aspect of *unknowing*, of a positive assertion which cannot be made explicit without its true nature being distorted. I do not think I need to cite Jaspers' idea of cyphers in order to make it clear that what we are treating here is something beyond the categories of discourse, beyond this world of Who? and Which? The word 'transcendence' has been deplorably misused for years; but it would be in place here, because it exactly describes this 'going-beyondness' about which we have been speaking.

"At the same time it is only honest to add that very probably neither Frank Buchman nor his followers would themselves accept the reservations which I have just expressed. I have voiced them only because I felt I should make clear my own position; but I do not think that we should attach too much importance to such a divergence of views [I think that similar divergences in the choice of words also exist between me and Leif - G.P.]. It can easily be explained by the fact that I am a philosopher; and a concern for strict intellectual accuracy which is proper for me is not necessarily incumbent, I feel, on those people of whose unquestionably genuine stories I am... speaking.

"It should also be noted, on the other hand, that the absolute character of the four standards [honesty, purity, unselfishness and love - G.P.] depends on this same going-beyondness or transcendence, which is essential here. And it is worth while noticing that here is, in another form, that same simplicity which I spoke about at the beginning. No *doubt*, this simplicity is only open to those who have rediscovered that child-like frame of mind, the essence of which has been so marvellously expressed in our day by a writer like Péguy.

"You must surely have been struck by a remarkable feature of this point in history that we have reached: it is a moment when although in one sense the problems of the world are becoming infinitely complicated, in another and

more profound sense they are becoming extremely simple. For we are being brought ever more clearly face to face with a basic choice: a choice, not for individuals only, but for the whole of humanity: the choice between life and death. For the first time in human history wholesale suicide has become a real possibility. And the only way to decide against suicide is to decide to abide by a basic pact whose terms are rooted in the ultimate nature of man – a nature which, be it noted, reveals itself only to moralists and not to any kind of scientist whatsoever. The progress of the de-humanising techniques which are at work in the world today only blinds us to that true nature of man. Dr Frank Buchman's great merit, on the other hand, is that he has done everything to make that nature clear... This impact which he has had on countless people's lives... is the hallmark of his vocation.

“... In Moral Re-Armament there reigns an atmosphere of simplicity regained. Thanks to it, a number of leaders from the young countries of Asia and Africa are evidently rediscovering unity between morals and politics – whereas in our aged and palsied world this unity usually seems a will-o'-the-wisp, except when it re-appears in a perverted form produced by the ideologies of Marxism and National Socialism with their teachings that the end both justifies and allegedly sublimates the means.”¹³

Gabriel Marcel appears not to have known about the role which Buchman played in the renaissance of Germany and in the establishment of Franco-German concord. (This is recounted by Spoerri in *Dynamic out of Silence*, in the chapter ‘Linking the intimate and the global’.) Here we observe a watershed, not in space but in time. At the epoch when a new state is being *formed* (and post-war Germany was such a new state) a moral charge or moral shock is

13 Marcel, *Fresh Hope for the World*, p.7-10

necessary. Afterwards what Max Weber has called the 'routinisation of charisma'¹⁴ occurs; in routine politics the role of the moral impulse subsides, and together with it the role of Moral Re-Armament. The illusion grows that people have no need at all to change, that the wheels of civilisation are turning by themselves – until a new crisis grasps us by the throat.

Some of this is more easily seen from our Russian vantage point. Leaving aside special peculiarities, the main point (for the theme we are discussing) stands out: unless people are seized with a belief, an idea, a passion, changes for the better are hard to achieve. Such changes require an explosion of energy. They need a moral effort affirmed in the depths of the soul, grounded at the level where values and aims are born. In war time our population on the home front endured incomparably greater privations than today, but people were ready to endure, and not only because they were afraid of the Cheka. Stalin would not have won the war merely through a great fear campaign, without patriotism. I remember the moral numbness produced by the Great Terror up until 1939 and 1940. People were apathetic, carrying out their duties mechanically. Then the German attack broke these ties of fear; and the masses, left to themselves, readily surrendered. Those who did resist were those who were less afraid of Stalin, those whose passion for Russia was stronger than their fear of death. Then the mood of resistance seized the whole country. *People on the home front* worked up to 10-11 hours on an empty stomach – not just from fear. This was the mood that *Perestroika* failed to evoke – the sense of a struggle against chaos; the awareness that victory depended on everyone, that we needed to pay with our own skins for the mistakes

14 Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*, University of Chicago Press, 1968 (Chapter 6: The Nature of Charismatic Authority and its Routinization).

of the generals, and that there was no other way.

The architects of *Perestroika* decided not to tell (or simply did not understand) what the breaking of old forms of ownership and old work habits would cost everyone – from the director to the last worker. The ingrained Soviet belief in Kremlin decrees continued to operate. Boris Nemtsov reproached Yegor Gaidar for not explaining to the people why measures which hurt the interests of millions were necessary. Gaidar's excuse was that explaining was the job of the boss who had hired him as a technical director. And Yeltsin took a trip to the West, saw that the Americans lived well, and wanted to couple the Russian carriage to the Western train. Many supporters of reform were thinking on this level. Some hundreds of English words entered the Russian language; 'sponsor', 'speaker', 'sneakers' appeared. But these words had no magic power. They did not engender American efficiency. There was worse disorder than before, and the people began to listen to the opponents of reform.

This particular crisis, if we ponder it, reveals a common historical problem. Everything that we call progress has its downside. The more complex society is, the easier it is for a person to get lost in its complexity and become the plaything of demonic forces. Thus progress means a growth of spiritual and moral tasks. Empires presented humanity with harder tasks than tribal life or the life of ancient kingdoms had done. The answer was the world religions. Today we are again at a fatal threshold. The disaster at Chernobyl was not only a sign of Russian or Soviet laxity. To some extent it was a sign for other countries as well. All over the world the gap is growing between the technological and intellectual power which has fallen into human hands and our lagging sense of responsibility. If one simply drifts with the current, change leads to a loosening of moral norms and to moral decline. We must not only sail but be

concerned with reinforcing our little boat, mending its holes, repairing its oars and rudder.

Past political revolutions did not run up against the full extent of this problem. In America two hundred years ago the moral order did not change. An external hindrance was removed which had prevented the colonists from living their own lives. The new order matured fully in the bosom of the old. But in contemporary Russia there is no established world of private interests joined together by a common moral law or common rules of play. The communist dictatorship did not prepare for such a world. Meanwhile our reforms have encouraged only one thing: self-interest.

Far from providing civilised rules of play, they have given complete freedom to criminal groupings. The only private capital has been that associated with the criminal world and the 'shadow' economy. Nor has it been possible to transform directors into owners via legal, honest paths. All this has produced a universal shift towards the morality and practices of thieves. Vyacheslav Igrunov¹⁵ was right when he remarked (in *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 1996, No.10, p.9) that in place of the 'moral principles' of late communism (false, perverted, but still principles) 'one thing only was proposed: enrich yourself! How did not matter, the main thing was that capital should go to work and return a profit. Essentially this was an ideology that renounced moral values... The disintegration frightened people so much that a movement began in the other direction. And this unrecognised movement for the restoration of higher values also pushed a significant section of society towards the communists...'

I quote an excerpt from a story by the talented young writer Margarita Shaparova. The story in the first person

15 At that time Member of the State Duma, Yabloko party

conveys the psychology of a romantically minded girl whose feelings find an outlet in communist ideas:

“Comrades! With this warm expression the members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation address you!

“Let the former Party cardholders, whose traitorous tongues do not dare to pronounce the simple and honest greeting ‘Comrade’, glorify themselves as ‘Mr’ and ‘Sir’! Under these pseudo-communists the Soviet Union was fitted with an ‘Iron Curtain’. Today, in a new guise, they are again at the helm and have turned Russia into a country of ‘iron doors’. Every honest home is suffering the fear, hurt and despair which are only absent behind the combination locks of the ‘new Russians’. Today these mafia ‘masters’, along with the anti-popular, mock-democratic regime, are blasphemously trampling on Russia. Their banner is the dollar. Their home is the market. Their power is speculation.

“Comrades! True communists call on you not to permit the squandering of Russia, the annihilation of its unique spirit and moral values, but to restore all the best that was achieved by the great Soviet period. Our banner is red. Our symbol is the hammer, the sickle and the book. Our motto is Russia, labour, people’s power, socialism!” (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 1996, No.10).

Most Russian Communist Party voters are pensioners who just cannot get used to the new. But there are also young romantics who have gone for socialist and nationalist rhetoric in their disgust at the brazen wealth. Were not the ‘Red Brigades’ in the West also like this? Is not the rebellion of western young people against the consumer society similar?

We had scarcely become used to the word ‘freedom’ before the lament arose about abuses of freedom – freedom for private individuals to settle scores, freedom for

robberies, murders and pogroms. Alas, are we the only ones to suffer this calamity? Isn't this plague spreading everywhere?

Freedom has a vital significance for a fairly narrow stratum of people. For me freedom is incontestable. I now have the freedom to publish, to give lectures, the freedom to receive invitations from abroad and to travel there; I have acquired new friends.

Alas, looking at things through the eyes of an ordinary pensioner I see nothing good. Through the eyes of a school pupil or a student I see no common idea, no great cause worth living for – neither a universal nor a national idea, though there is plenty of talk about national questions. But without a living moral idea, without a moral shake-up, how are we to move from the habits of lazy, cunning slaves to intelligent work, so as to create something new out of the debris of the Soviet Union? The economic incentive inspires people in different ways: some to work with honesty and initiative, others to rob, still others to care only about the next pint, to abandon work half-finished, to drink themselves into a stupor... Economic stimuli act differently in different moral environments. Russia is not the only example. In North and South America life is quite different.

By itself water can only flow downhill. To make a fountain gush up there must be a source higher up or the water must be pumped. But we have had no pump. The church has had the chance to lead a renaissance of the country, but there has been no powerful new thinking. As at the time of the revolution, the church's paralysis has opened the way for communism – only this time as 'used goods', patched and faded. Still, it was the communist parties that garnered the votes of the electors. Social Democracy has been unable to show what makes it better than the traditional party of Lenin and Stalin. And with the church's lack of support for

democracy, Christian Democracy has not been able to develop into a political force.

The point is not the ideological distinctions between communism, nazism or integrism (called fundamentalism by journalists). The point is their simplicity. The terrible over-simplifiers meet the expectations of the masses that the world should be made simple and understandable. People feel lost in the accelerating torrent of the new. They do not know how to avail themselves of the new good, or how to defend themselves against the new evil. They no longer understand what to pray to, what to read. They want to be protected, to be ensconced in a class, in a nation, in a few simple phrases about the class or ethnic struggle or the struggle of belief with unbelief. They chase after the pied piper – and for twelve years, or seventy, find their desired simplicity.

My friend Alexander Melikhov, commenting on Shaparova's story, has given a good description of the influences that draw people into mass totalitarian movements.

“The first thing is simple human loneliness, the cold that drives us to seek at least some warmth in a crowd. The second is a peculiar sense of honour that compels us to ‘carry on the work of our fathers’... And the third cause is a certain metaphysical hunger, an ‘existential vacuum’, the yearning for another existence...”

I think it was Abbé Duvergier who said that revolutionism is mysticism transferred from heaven to earth. Melikhov writes in the same vein:

“The person who ‘needs what does not exist on earth’ can seek to satisfy his undefined hunger by trying to become a co-participant in something grand and historic. For him politics is not simply a job, or a means to achieve concrete results, but an opportunity to have inspiring (even if tragic) experiences; that is why the rational arguments of all the

Hayeks, demonstrating that the socialist economic system inescapably brings universal slavery in its wake, make no greater impression on him than a lecture about the harm of heroin does on an addict, for he is seeking experiences, not results.

“Current liberal ideology is the direct opposite of what such a political ‘addict’ is wanting: it promises nothing grand but simply ‘normal life’ (the very life in which the addict cannot find his place). It does not promise to put an immediate end to all the world’s outrages, but rather counsels each person to organise his own affairs. It does not strive to unite the people towards a great universal goal, with the ‘backward’ section of the the population made subordinate to the ‘progressive’ one – all it does is to give a free hand to the creative minority, promising the passive majority [not very confidently – G.P.] gains in the distant future – and so on. All this deglobalisation is like an experience of drug withdrawal for those who thirst for ardour and for righteousness and to be in touch with something grand and dazzling.

“Fortunately there are never many of these ‘spiritual aristocrats’ who are driven by non-material motives of this kind towards the total and the totalitarian. Usually there are enough of them to act as a leaven ... while a much more simple public makes up the remaining mass... All the varieties of fascism in the broad meaning of that word – red, brown, white, green – can be defined as the rebellion of simplicity against the incomprehensible and unnecessary and, therefore, hostile (‘parasitical’) complexity of society. For the ‘simple’ person there is a dreadful number of superfluous people in the world – the well-off, the whiners, the bureaucrats, the journalists, the professors...

“If he operates a lathe, anyone who does not work at a bench may seem a parasite to him ... if he is a peasant, even the lathe operator may become a parasite... Fascism is the attempt by part of a complex whole to destroy the other

organs, or at best subject them to its own dictates... It could be that the advance of fascism is an inbuilt danger for any society where the broad masses have a serious part in deciding matters over which sages have never agreed. Perhaps this danger is even increasing, for the gap between complex reality and the chances of an average, or even outstanding, mind comprehending it is only becoming greater... A helpful inoculation against fascism could even be the idea that life is irreparably tragic, that there is simply no Evil to be cut off and thrown away but that it permeates everything, or, if one prefers, that Evil does not exist at all, only the hypertrophy of a necessary but particular good.” (*Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 1996, No.14, p.3).

The last sentence is a nod in my direction; but Augustine’s philosophy, which is near to mine, has a different meaning once it is viewed through a tragic personal perception of the world. Here Alexander Melikhov and I part company. I believe in the attainability of the kingdom *within ourselves*. He does not. But the problem of the oversimplifiers is one we have in common. Nor has the problem been solved in the West, where it is viewed with growing alarm. In Russia we are simply ‘leading the whole planet’, we are already up against a wall which we must either spring over or be crushed against. We need here and now a ‘creative minority’ which has found its own inner basis, its inner stability in the torrent of change, and which is capable of counterbalancing the destructive forces of development. Our future is patently not guaranteed. But nor is the future guaranteed for anyone, even those for whom today everything is fine. This is the basic difference between the challenge of the 21st Century and that of other centuries. We are facing the threat of a global catastrophe. In Russia more than elsewhere it is right before our eyes, but the threat is global. Only the greatest spiritual effort and the most powerful Divine assistance can work the

miracle and stop our warped world from going over the precipice.

One aspect of this task is to learn to live in a world of open questions: to learn to seek truth and a united spirit in a dialogue of prophecies and systems; and to deprive the devil of the leaven he throws into the dough, those intellectuals who act out their own inner chaos and turn popular rebellion into an organised force.

What does it mean to move into an open society? It means not to expect ready-made solutions. Ready-made solutions and prescribed roles belong to the past. An open society is a society of open questions, of ever new questions snowballing, and of a growing will to respond to the new challenge. Such at least is the ideal. The idea of the Crown, under which the West fought for and gained predominance in the world, was like that. Today in the West that idea has spent itself and most people are drifting with the current. That is impossible for us. We are already in the rapids and without a burst of energy we will capsize. But what today is for us, tomorrow will be for the West. When the ecological crisis deepens. When the gulf yawns wider between the 'golden billion' in the developed countries and the several billions struggling in the vicious circle of poverty. Today their despair shows its other face in terrorism. Tomorrow the whole world could be engulfed in explosions. Can the West lead a change of direction towards brotherhood? For that it will have to change very deeply. The association for Moral Re-Armament is facing an enormous new task, and only just beginning to set about it. And in thinking about this task, we must re-evaluate the experience of the past fifty years.

[II]

Buchman's legacy was not an orthodoxy, not a set of easily recited principles, but a practice or 'orthopraxis' found in dozens of scattered examples. There are principles formulated and stated in his speeches, but similar principles have often been advanced by others. What sticks in the memory and imprints itself on the mind is something else: the short phrase, just a few words, spoken in such a way that the person Buchman was talking to changed – and following that person the energy of change also infused others. In all this is the secret whereby a word, generated in a moment, transmits a spark from the depths of one personality to the depths of another. We cannot understand the event simply by pondering the words spoken – we have to live into the whole situation. Here are a few examples. They correspond in part to those described by Theophil Spoerri in his book *Dynamic out of Silence*.¹⁶ But I will view them slightly differently, using the text of the jubilee publication¹⁷ prepared for the 50th anniversary of the Caux conference centre.

During the Second World War Frank Buchman spent a long period in seclusion by one of the American lakes. In deep silence he reached a level of perception free from the hatred that dominated the warring countries. And his first question to his friends who had transformed the Caux Palace Hotel into Mountain House, a conference centre for

16 Theophil Spoerri, *Dynamic out of Silence: Frank Buchman's relevance today*, Grosvenor, London 1976

17 CAUX – *Healing the past – forging the future*, Caux Edition, 1996

the new association, caused a shock: 'Where are the Germans?' Sensing resistance, Buchman added: 'You will never rebuild Europe without the Germans.' According to one of the war veterans who were present: 'The effect was stunning. Shock, anger, outrage showed on many faces. Supper that night was a subdued meal and many were strangely silent.'

It was even harder for the French. For a long time Irène Laure had resisted the very idea of travelling to Caux. In the two decades between the world wars she had tried to work for Franco-German friendship and had German children to stay for holidays. When the panzer divisions invaded France she became an active member of the Resistance and risked her life on a daily basis. Her son Louis was tortured. As she said: 'They tried everything. He never talked. But the state we found him in! He was a wreck.' Upon finally arriving in Caux, and finding Germans there, she immediately got ready to leave. Their presence was intolerable. A chance meeting with Frank Buchman intervened. 'Madame Laure, you are a socialist,' said Buchman (she was an executive member of the Socialist Party). 'How can you expect to rebuild Europe if you reject the German people? What kind of unity do you want for Europe?'

'If he had pitied me or sympathised with me, I would have left', she said later. Buchman spoke 'as one having authority'.¹⁸ He was not a monk, nor a guru, and she was *not his* follower. But their relationship in that instant can be compared only to a religious encounter. Irène Laure returned to her room and passed three days and nights without sleep in agonising thought. Then she agreed to have lunch with a German woman. The meal began in total silence until, with perspiration breaking out on her forehead, Irène Laure poured out all that had happened to her.

18 cf. Matthew 7.29

Then she looked at the German for the first time and said, 'I'm telling you all this, Madame, because I want to be free of this hate'. The German was the widow of Adam von Trott who had participated in the plot against Hitler. She too was silent, and then described her own experiences in prison when her husband was hanged and their children were put in an orphanage under false names. 'Now I have found them again, and am bringing them up as best I can. I realise that we did not resist enough, or in time. Because of this you have suffered terribly. Please forgive us.'

To her own surprise Mme Laure suggested they pray together. 'Oh God,' she said, 'free me from my hate so that we can build a better world for our children.'

The next day she spoke from the conference platform. 'I hated Germany so much that I would have liked to see it erased from the map of Europe,' she said. 'But I have seen here that my hatred was wrong. I wish to ask all the Germans present to forgive me.' One of those Germans recalls: 'For several nights I could not sleep. My whole past was in revolt against the courage of this woman. I suddenly realised that there were things for which we, as individuals and as a nation, could never make restitution. Yet we knew, my friends and I, that she had shown us the only way open to Germany. The basis of a new Europe would have to be forgiveness.'

Several days later a group of young Germans told Mme Laure 'how ashamed we were for all the things which she and her people had had to suffer through our fault.'

Madame Laure and her husband Victor were invited to Germany. During their 11-week visit the Laures spoke in 200 meetings and in ten of the eleven Länder parliaments.¹⁹

The spirit of reconciliation emanating from Caux helped in the creation of the European Union. Today that Union is

19 CAUX, p.11-13

a fact of life and it is hard to imagine that often it all hung by a thread. In 1950 Jean Monnet said to Robert Schuman following a tense meeting in Bonn in January, 'We are on the brink of making the same mistake as in 1919. (He meant the humiliation of Germany which paved the way for Hitler.) When the Schuman Plan was signed²⁰ Konrad Adenauer wrote to Buchman: 'In recent months we have seen the conclusion, after some difficult negotiations, of important international agreements. Here Moral Re-Armament has played an invisible but effective part in bridging differences of opinion between negotiating parties, and has kept before them the object of peaceful agreement in the search for the common good.'²¹

This was no hyperbole. In 1949 Robert Schuman, a supporter of Franco-German rapprochement, had said to Buchman that he was unsure whom to trust in the new Germany. In reply Buchman gave him a list of 'some excellent men' who had been in Caux. Those men became France's partners.

A few months later Schuman wrote the foreword to the French edition of Buchman's speeches. In it he identified three aspects of the program developed in Caux: to create 'a moral climate in which true brotherly unity can flourish'; to understand the needs 'by bringing people together'; and 'to provide teams of trained people, apostles of reconciliation and builders of a new world'. This, he wrote, was 'the beginning of a far-reaching transformation of society...'

After Buchman's death the German Government's official *Bulletin* wrote: 'He brought Germany back into the circle of civilised nations... Caux became one of the great moral forces to which we owe our new standing in the

20 1951

21 CAUX, p.16

world... The foundations of the understanding between Germany and France were laid by the first meetings between Germans and French at Caux.²²

The 'teams of trained people, apostles of reconciliation and builders of a new world' are described in a book by Leif Hovelsen,²³ himself one of them. Here I want to mention a spontaneous step towards class peace which also had important consequences. Hans Dütting, Director of the Gelsenkirchen Coal Mining Company, visited Caux in 1949 for what he expected to be a mountain-climbing holiday. Surprised and captivated by the spirit of Mountain House, on his return home he put all his financial cards on the table before his workers 'in such a way that we no longer had the slightest thing to hide. The result was an extraordinary growth in trust between workforce and management.' Dütting began by asking the works council to help him straighten out a wrong decision he had made. In 1950 the works council chairman Paul Dikus called his actions 'something entirely new', opening the way for a remarkable social program. Dütting's initiative was one of the impulses leading to *Mitbestimmung* or co-determination, with equal representation of the workers on the boards of large public companies.²⁴

From 1950 onwards large delegations were coming to Caux from Japan. The spirit of Mountain House helped the Japanese to find a common language in their relations with the Philippines and in a number of internal conflicts (between workers and industrialists, between competing companies). Not all the changes were as dramatic as Irène Laure's. Suffice it to say that the meetings in Caux prompted

22 CAUX, p.16

23 Leif Hovelsen, *Out of the Evil Night*, Blandford, London, 1959

24 CAUX, p.15

a spiritual change of direction, because people felt that the spirit of brotherhood, which is usually only talked about (and then often hypocritically), was real. Many people, if one can put it like this, are half open to being freed from their passions and accepting reconciliation. When they get to Caux they open up fully and find confidence in the possibility of reconciliation and agreement.

The waves of violence rolling across the world would seem at first to refute the ideas of every peacemaker from Gandhi to Buchman. And yet there are cases where Moral Re-Armament has achieved the peaceful resolution of a conflict. An example is the participation of Buchman and his team in the decolonisation of Morocco and Tunisia. Mohammed Masmoudi, Tunisia's first Ambassador to France, admitted that 'without Moral Re-Armament we would be involved today in Tunisia in a war to the death against France...' Moral Re-Armament has persistently built bridges between white and black in South Africa (it began this work when it was still the Oxford Group). Nelson Mandela, today the president of the country, was one of those contacted in the 1950s.

There were critical developments in Kenya where the Mau Mau movement had spread – one of the most extreme examples of a national liberation struggle. In 1954 Mau Mau guerillas buried alive Agnes Hofmeyr's father, together with goats and dogs, on the slopes of Mount Kenya. He had been chosen as a sacrifice because he was known by all as a good man (this was required by the rite). For weeks Agnes struggled with hate and with her desire for revenge on the blacks. She doubted the existence of God. Then at one moment, she writes, 'through all turmoil the thought came perfectly clearly: "Have no bitterness or hatred but fight harder than ever to bring a change of heart to black and white alike."' Through stormy nights of tears, more and more my thoughts focussed on what we whites had done in

Kenya and what the Mau Mau men had told us of the treatment by whites that had driven them into revolt... Perhaps a key to the question: "How can I forgive?" is to look at another question: "How much do I need forgiveness?"

In the months that followed, after a series of reconciliatory meetings, hundreds of former Mau Mau renounced their oath and carried out a cleansing ceremony. Some of them came to Caux and worked with Agnes and her husband Bremer Hofmeyr to show that peaceful change is possible even after such horrors.

One evening years later the Hofmeyrs were having dinner at Caux with one of the former Mau Mau leaders, Stanley Kinga. He turned to Agnes and said, 'There is something I have never told you. I was one of the Mau Mau committee that chose your father to be a sacrifice and planned his death.'

Agnes was stunned. Then together they began to talk through all that had happened. 'Thank God,' she said finally, 'that we have both learned the secret of forgiveness or we could never sit here.'²⁵

It is indeed a secret – the mystery of complete openness to God and his commandments. The roots of that mystery lie very deep in the heart. Just being in Caux is not enough to bring about the miracle. There is a mystery too in the simpler story from Southern Rhodesia, where the leaders of two armed sides suddenly found trust in each other and reached an honest agreement. But the Caux atmosphere motivates us to seek such agreements, and sometimes they are achieved. In Caux we stop feeling the need for defences. This is well expressed by Peter Petersen, the young German whose story about meeting Irène Laure we have already cited. The story has a foreword which I quote at this point, and which does not apply only to the Germans: 'We were

25 CAUX, p.24-25

past masters at defending ourselves, but here the doors were open wide for us.'

We have all become masters of self-defence but only realise this when there is a catastrophe. Albert Camus has described such a catastrophe in his novel *The Outsider*. The hero is frightened of an Arab who is approaching him, and shoots first. Many wars have begun like that. Our neighbour is separated from us by an invisible wall and we expect nothing good from the other side of the wall. A synonym for Camus's 'outsider' is Sartre's 'other'. 'A whole space is arranged around the other,' says Sartre, 'and this space is formed out of my space... [The existence of the other is] an unsurpassable scandal.'²⁶ I must put an end to the scandal and destroy the other, or at least fence myself off from him with cold politeness. Our civilisation is divided up into cages, each containing a solitary prisoner. Even in families the cages and walls do not disappear. The being behind the wall is thought of as an object. If needed he is used; if not he is thrown out. The character in Kafka's story is metamorphosed into an insect, the insect is swept up and thrown out the door. All this is called 'alienation', 'abandonment' and so on. But not everyone realises that alienation is self-protection, and that the habits of self-protection separate not only people from each other, but our whole civilisation from God. And that even where it would appear that a door has opened onto the complete and the eternal, new walls appear, walls of creed, and we find the problems of defending *one's own* belief, like those which Gabriel Marcel speaks about in the letter to his friends.

Only the person who stops thinking about self-defence is open to God. I have found this thought in the writings of

26 H. Schwerte u. W. Spengler, *Denker und Deuter im heutigen Europa*, Oldenburg-Hamburg, 1954. Vol. 2, pp.140-141. Quoted from: *L'Être et le Néant* (1943 edition), pp.313 and 397.

two very different people: Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was at one time singled out as a messiah by the Theosophists but declined that role, and Metropolitan Anthony Bloom. When I write or make a speech I try to rid myself of defensive mechanisms. This corresponds somewhat to the type of behaviour which Gabriel Marcel saw in Caux and called 'intersubjective'. A poet has 'intersubjectivity' – an almost indecent frankness connected with the creative process, no matter what is being created. The following quotation is from an essay by Joseph Brodsky (his speech at the opening of the 1988 Turin Book Fair, published in Russian in *Znamya* 1996, No. 4):

“They have no illusions about the objectivity of the views they put forth; on the contrary, they insist on their unpardonable subjectivity right from the threshold. They act in this fashion, however, not for the purpose of shielding themselves from possible attack: as a rule, they are fully aware of the vulnerability pertinent to their views and the positions they defend. Yet – taking the stance somewhat opposite to Darwinian – they consider vulnerability the primary trait of living matter. [I would say: of living spirit. – G.P.] This, I must add, has less to do with masochistic tendencies, nowadays attributed to almost every man of letters, than with their instinctive, often first-hand knowledge that extreme subjectivity, prejudice, and indeed idiosyncrasy are what help art to avoid cliché. And the resistance to cliché is what distinguishes art from life.”²⁷

I have a few reservations here but will not go into them. It is sufficient to stress the point with which I agree: that without defencelessness, without vulnerability, nothing authentic is born. Conception by the spirit, whichever spirit it may be, takes place in vulnerable flesh. For this I must be

27 Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York 1995, p.100

open to the voice from deep within, whatever it says, be it even heresy (I will think afterwards how to pass from this heresy to dogma), and no matter how they may set the dogs on me because of my frankness. I think such openness is the common characteristic not only of poetry, but also of preaching and of the philosophy which is called existential, i.e the analysis of personal spiritual experience (for instance the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel or Martin Buber about whom I will speak later). Naturally, openness is not everything. There is also the other problem: the fleetingness of truth which is too multi-dimensional for human language, or the problem of twisting the laws of logic and playing dangerous games with paradoxes in the style of Oscar Wilde; although there is nowhere we can escape from paradoxes and antinomies. The Gospel is full of antinomies and in fact you cannot utter a word about anything 'existential' without them.

*You think truth is simple?
Try to speak it
And suddenly your lips will be dumb
Yearning for the lie
What simplicity is in the lie
How easy it is
But truth is not simple at all.
It is far away...
Its unyielding temperament
You must understand, grasp
Try even once, without lying
To talk about love...*

(M. Petrovykh)

All the same, openness is the first step on the way to truth. Openness demands courage almost everywhere. Yet in Caux it takes no effort to open up. When I arrived I felt

that the atmosphere of trust that had been in our little flat when my wife and I were talking with Leif Hovelsen and Bryan Hamlin was here pervading everything – in the corridors, in the kitchen – and the fear of openness vanished. There was no need to think at all about self-defence; you could be a German in 1946 without hiding from others' contempt and hatred; you could be a Jew, a Russian, a black without any fear or inferiority complex making you want to shut yourself off and to shrink from close contacts.

I will put this in the terms Martin Buber uses in his book *I and Thou*. The 'Thou' here has a capital letter. It is the poetic 'Thou' which we use in prayer and in love. Buber separates the I-Thou relationship from the I-It relationship. The usual division into subjective and objective lumps together 'Thou' and 'It' in the object. It equates my attitude to a loved one, for whose sake I live, with my attitude to an object or a thing. This destroys and deadens the fragile, living world of love and prayer. The more technological thinking progresses and the more our reality is shaped and governed by technological laws, the more the 'I-It' relationship puts pressure on the 'I-Thou' relationship; in the end it completely devours it. But then life, while replete with comforts and conveniences, loses its meaning and its moral pivot. On the one hand we get apathy, and on the other the energy of monstrous, previously unknown crimes. Scientific statistical method, for instance, provides a basis for the repression of whole classes, nations and races while the rights of individual persons, whether guilty or innocent, are ignored. Vasily Grossman describes this in his novel *Life and Fate*.

The basic idea of *I and Thou* arose from a spiritual experience. As a young man Buber was walking home after a talk with a reverend pastor who believed unreservedly in the prophecy of Daniel. Suddenly the thought struck Buber: 'The God who gives Daniel such foreknowledge of this hour of human history... is not my God and not God. The

God to whom Daniel prays in his suffering is my God and the God of all.' With this thought came another: 'If to believe in God means to be able to talk about him in the third person, then I do not believe in God. If to believe in him means to be able to talk to him, then I believe in God.'²⁸ This seems paradoxical but is very close to one of Buchman's central thoughts as expressed by a Swiss colleague: 'Risk everything for God and you will see that He is really there.'²⁹

God is a reality who reveals himself in the heart, in passionate prayer, and fades away in arguments. God is real in the blasphemies of Job who does not understand why God has delivered him into the hands of Satan, and becomes an empty abstraction in the pious arguments of Job's friends. As history proceeds and theologians write more books, the louder become the voices of Job's friends, and the stronger grows the habit of thinking of God and of love in the third person, and the less there is of the reality of God, and of love. This does not mean that we can ban theology. The developed intellect demands food, and it finds it in theological theories. But the essence of faith can never be systematically expounded.

One of the peculiarities of the book *I and Thou* is that it is free of any confessionally distinctive features. A veto on speaking about God in the third person takes dogmatic questions and dogmatic disputes out of the picture. This does not mean that the author, Buber, ceased to be a confessor and apologist of Judaism. Indeed, in later books written under the influence of the bitter experience of the 1930s and 1940s he conducts a passionate polemic against

28 P.A. Schilpp and M. Friedman (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, (The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol.12), Open Court, 1967, La Salle, Illinois, Paperback edition 1991, pp.24-25

29 Theophil Spoerri, *Dynamic out of Silence*, p.94

distorted representations of his confessed faith. But from a higher standpoint – that of dialogue as he understands it – the differences between the revelations of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed are secondary. The important thing is not the wording in which the revelation has been cast, but the Spirit which has brought it to us. It is this spirit which I met in Mountain House.

Buber never visited Caux. When the issues of rebuilding Europe were being decided he was absorbed by another question: whether or not, and in what way, Israel was to exist (Buber dreamed of a peaceful federation of Jewish and Arab communities). But one of the thinkers who warmly welcomed *I and Thou* was Gabriel Marcel. He at once recognised that Buber had given classic expression to ideas they held in common, that it was not possible to stop the growth of the 'I-It' world but it was possible to balance it and keep it within some kind of bounds, by preserving the delicate world of 'I-Thou'.

Subsequently Marcel found terminology more appropriate to the spirit of the analytical languages of French and English. I-Thou corresponds to 'being', I-It to 'having'. These two verbs became auxiliary verbs because they embodied two universal attitudes to the world: that of capture, acquisition, private possession (having) and that of inclusion in the Whole, awareness of connection to the Whole, self-awareness as the image and likeness of God (whom the Bible also calls: I AM).³⁰ What Marcel had found, Erich Fromm also used. Having and being became contrasting opposites. But for those familiar with the spirit of the German language, with its complex composite words used in philosophical reflection, Buber's 'I-Thou relationship' retains a poetic charm. The two terms, Marcel's and Buber's, complement each other.

30 Exodus 3.14

Possession and supremacy in the I-It world is achieved by those who have good defences and are ready to strike their opponents or competitors. Being, and the warmth of I-Thou openness, enfolds those who, with trembling courage, are ready to be defenceless. As a biological and social machine, a human being strives to possess. As the image and likeness of God he strives to be.

The ancients understood 'image and likeness' literally, as something physically demonstrable. Even in the invisible God of the Old Testament a human image can be guessed at. And in Christ this image is affirmed in dogma as a hypostasis, one in substance and equal in glory with the Father. These images have been the foundation of great art. But I understand the image of God differently, as something outside physical form, as an infinite openness to the suffering of the creation and an infinite will to a beautiful and good world. This openness and this will were in Frank Buchman; they established themselves in Caux and are still alive there today. So it was not by accident that Gabriel Marcel, the philosopher of intersubjectivity, joined Moral Re-Armament; my presence is also no accident.

The main thing at Mountain House is the transition from the intimate openness of two people who love each other, the openness of a close family or a small circle, to openness between several hundred or a thousand people who have gathered from diverse countries. The phrases that have become Moral Re-Armament's hallmarks are merely the movement's beacons to mark the navigation channel. They bear the stamp of the particular period when they were coined, and could be replaced by other phrases. At the very least they demand more precise definition.

The name Moral Re-Armament is linked with past events. In the 1930s there were the fruitless disarmament conferences. Frank Buchman, who attended one conference on the invitation of an expert in the British delegation,

realised the impossibility of finding agreement without moral progress – hence the idea of moral rearmament. The Soviet press held it up to ridicule. ‘Rearmament’ was confused with ‘disarmament’, and the result was then abbreviated in Russian to ‘Mor-razor’. I read about it in the newspapers and like other young people laughed at ‘Mor-razor’. Stylistically, ‘Moral Re-Armament’ follows on from the phraseology of the 1930s. One would wish to find it a different name, without military connotations.³¹

There is also a flavour of the past in trying to explain totalitarianism as a materialistic philosophy. This idea arose when the only totalitarian society was the communist one. But Hitler was no materialist. Offering sacrifices to Satan is a religious act. In the philosophical sense he had nothing to do with materialism. We can assume that Buchman was speaking about materialism in the everyday sense, i.e. the predominance of material stimuli in deciding behaviour. But it is difficult to accuse Ayatollah Khomeini even of this. He was a fanatic of one of the great world religions. His followers who went to certain death facing the bullets of the Shahenshah were not acting out of material stimuli. It was the Muslim paradise that summoned them. Material incentives rule at the stock exchange and in the market. But the movements of terrible over-simplification are in their own way spiritual. And Satan whose breath can be sensed in them is not material either.

Philosophical materialism is not the cause but the result of the destruction of faith. The force of development undermines the symbols which express our consciousness of the spiritual whole, and undermines good moral habits. People feel a need to restore that lost wholeness. And at this point the chief disturbance is caused by movements trying to meet

31 In August 2001 the movement adopted *Initiatives of Change* as its new global name.

the emergency, to stop the disintegration, to revive the Golden Age. The world-wide evil of the 20th Century has been not unbelief but the fanatical belief in false idols. Communism, Fascism, Nazism, Islamic integrism all proceed from the belief that harmony and justice can be built by force. In all this Hitler was a mystic and a romantic; Khomeini (I repeat) was a Muslim. Romania's fascist 'Iron Guard' of the 1930s drew on Orthodox mysticism. Here in Russia an attempt is being made to create clerical fascism. Georgy Petrovich Fedotov, when he came upon the first stages of fascism in the emigration, wrote: 'We do not ask of what belief you are, but of what spirit.'

No movement can persist with explanations of the world which were formulated fifty years ago. The world changes too quickly. Completely new things appear. The solution to the crisis we know leads to another crisis which is deeper, more all-embracing and harder to understand. Marx was mistaken when he reduced all crisis phenomena to economics, just as Freud was mistaken when he reduced all the powers of the subconscious to the libido (or to the interplay of Eros and Thanatos). But human dependence on the sub-conscious is a real problem, and the real curse of history is that the very means used to solve one social crisis lead to a new crisis in some completely unexpected quarter (this is even more insidious than what Marx described, restricted as he was by his own economic monism). In the face of explosive population growth, the vicious circle of underdevelopment, terrorism, ecological crisis, AIDS, the ozone hole, the falling birth-rate of the white races, mass immigration, conflicts with ethnically foreign immigrants and other surprises one can only wonder at the complacency of some theorists – including some supporters of Moral Re-Armament – for whom western civilisation is the ideal consummation of history, a model like the Prussian monarchy for Hegel, or like Marx's imagined 'association,

in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.³²

Attempting to depict Buchman as a fulfilment of the Modern age leads us to picture a Modern age without conflict, with the Renaissance and the Reformation placed side by side like twins. In fact, the Renaissance brought with it a return to the paganism of antiquity, a defection from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Reformation (like the Counter-reformation) was a kind of Anti-renaissance, a protest, the same kind of reaction as Romanticism was to the Enlightenment, or Symbolism to the Positivism of the 19th Century. Historical development goes in zig-zags. Every major step in the direction of almighty Reason has provoked other attempts to restore the intuitive-holistic and to revive faith (Calderon and Palestrina; the German romantics; Rainer Maria Rilke). But on the whole the Modern age has moved towards what Nietzsche called the death of God. Kierkegaard felt like a solitary figure in a supposedly Christian civilisation. The tradition to which Buchman belonged was a counter-current to the main stream. It would, however, be worth examining other counter-currents that have taken the form of a 'struggle with the West' in cultures affected by the process of westernisation. There is Russian literature (Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy) and Russian philosophy; there is a range of Indian thinkers; there are M. Buber, Khalil Gibran, D.T. Suzuki. One of the tasks of Moral Re-Armament philosophy is to conduct a dialogue with them, to reunite western spirituality with the tradition of the 'struggle with the West'.

It is very important to recognise that the task of the 21st Century is not so much to bring the Modern age to fulfilment as move into 'Post-modernity' – which in some ways

32 Karl Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848

is as opposite to 'Modernity' as 'Modernity' was to the Middle ages. And we don't have so much time for this.

What could Moral Re-Armament's place be in this process? Any problem needing a practical solution inevitably takes us beyond the limits of the meetings at Caux and requires special structures, either traditional or new. That is how the new Europe was built after the Second World War. That is how the reform of television could happen, following Popper's plan or in some other way. The task of the Caux meetings is to preserve the spiritual environment in which animosities lose their power, where there is not even the need to defend one's own boundaries. But for this Moral Re-Armament must remain a movement, not a structure or system, and Caux must remain a meeting place above systems, a place of dialogue without pre-set boundaries and without the goal of arriving at such boundaries, dialogue with hearts open to the spirit that blows everywhere.

[III]

In the conversations of Krishnamurti there is the remarkable parable of the Devil who saw a man pick up a piece of Truth. 'That is a very bad business for you, then,' said the Devil's friend. 'Oh, not at all,' the Devil replied, 'I am going to let him organise it.'³³

In the Gospels there is no system. There is no system in the Koran, nor in the Vedic hymns. The fullness of truth

33 Quoted here from *The Dissolution of the Order of the Star*, a statement by J. Krishnamurti, 3 August 1929, Ommen Camp, Holland. The Star Publishing Trust, Eerde, Ommen, Holland.

comes to us in silence. 'I write because grace is with me,' testifies St. Silouan,³⁴ 'but if the grace were more I could not write.' The words come after the wave of grace has begun to recede. That is why it says in the Chinese *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*: 'One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know.'³⁵

For – I return once more to Silouan – 'What is written by the Holy Spirit can only be read by the Holy Spirit'. Without the beneficent breath of the whole, the mind only apprehends separate principles from which systems can be constructed. But the essence of the Scripture is something else: a prod towards the fullness of silence, out of which emerges today's answer to today's challenge.

The word that is with God is Christ himself, the totality of his spirit enclosed in a circle, not any particular set of sayings. Language provides words that match the situation and circumstances of one conversation, but contradict other words in other conversations. As soon as we are concerned about logical consistency, or a system, the spirit of truth grows weaker; in large systems it completely disappears. Hegel was right when he remarked that there is no abstract truth but that truth is always concrete – but this finding condemns all systems. A system is somewhat like an instruction booklet giving firm knowledge about things and how to handle them. It is justified in the world of things, and of concepts which are modelled on things. But truth as a whole is neither a thing nor a concept. It is a spirit. The more the world of things expands – and today it has become a technological world which shuts out the light of the sun – the more we are given firm, clear instructions and the more our spirits are cramped. Contemporary western

34 The Russian Orthodox monk Starets (Elder) Silouan of Mount Athos, b.1866, d.24.9.1938

35 Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Transl. D.C. Lau, Penguin 1976, Book Two, chapter 56

civilisation is a civilisation of the cramped spirit.

Scholars have long since forgotten how to read the Scriptures. It will be the task of a creative minority to learn this afresh, and to revive the culture of the poor in spirit, the culture of silence in which the essential comes to the surface. St Silouan became a master of this culture although his formal education was very modest. The Apostle Paul distinguished between 'fleshly wisdom'³⁶ and spiritual wisdom. But we cannot say that formal education is always a handicap. It depends on the kind of education and how it is structured. Thomas Merton, a highly educated person, saw *through* the facts and had the ability at every point to return to the essential, to spiritual wholeness. Sadly, the way Europe has developed since the 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries has shattered the integrity of the spiritual world, and every move to restore that world has been more like a breakout, a spiritual counter-current, rather than a change in the course of history.

One such breakout is the action from silence initiated by Buchman. Moral Re-Armament, at first a purely western phenomenon, very quickly became world-wide in practice, taking root in Asia and Africa. But the task still remains to go out in spirit beyond the bounds of Europe and to find a basis for dialogue in the great civilisations of other regions, to see not only their developmental backwardness but certain advantages which Europe has lost.

Europe's origins are in the Mediterranean region, where from earliest times an emphasis on differences developed which was stronger than the sense of unity. Maybe it happened because of the motley ethnic composition of the Mediterranean world, with many cultures crowded into a relatively small area. The great civilisations of India and China grew from one root, whereas the Mediterranean was

36 2 Corinthians 1.12; cf. 1 Corinthians 1.26

a cross-roads, a meeting place. For whatever reason, here the logic of sharp, categorical distinctions ruled. In Indian logic it is permissible to answer: 'This is, and is not'; or 'This neither is, nor is not'. In the Mediterranean world people have argued differently. Long before Aristotle they proceeded from his law of no third option and made the radical choice: either monotheism or polytheism; no third way was possible (*tertium non datur*). Yet the cultures of India and China imperturbably took a third way. They had retained something from the archaic cultures which we could call 'round dance' cultures. The round dance is one of the primary cultural phenomena which attempt to create an image of the cosmos and to enclose the abyss of the inscrutable within a circle. Each participant in the ceremonial dance is true to himself and to his mask (a symbol of one of the spirits), but moving in the circle he becomes an inseparable part of the whole and every image becomes his image and his 'hypostasis' – to express this in the terms of a theology which emerged much later. We cannot experience the relationship of the figures in Rublev's painting of the Trinity without to some extent turning back from refined Byzantine symbolism to the ceremonial dancing of the Africans.

'The African thinks while dancing,' said L.S. Senghor, the originator of the theory of *Négritude*. As yet the requirements of a logic separating the worship of the one God from belief in the gods of the elements do not apply. The integrity of the round dance is an image of the invisible unity when 'all is in me and I am in all' (Tyutchev). For an instant there is no difference between man and God, or between levels of spirituality (this hierarchy is then born afresh from within and becomes a personal experience). Many mystical sects return to this 'meditation of the feet'. The great Sufi poet Jalaladdin Rumi founded the order of dancing dervishes, the Hasidic Jews dance at their prayer meetings. Hasidic joy in

God spread among the surviving Jews after the terrible pogroms of the 17th and 18th Centuries. It overcame their fear and gave them the chance to live and rejoice in life. Many religious sects dance at their devotional gatherings. But the central thread of culture is the internalisation of the round dance, the continuation of its rhythm in tragedy and in other arts which have developed out of the oneness of the round dance – in reading verses around a circle, in platonic dialogue, and finally in dialogue as understood by Martin Buber, and as I understand it.

The Christian ‘joy of the spirit’³⁷ whirls without visible movement or sound, just as ‘intelligent prayer’³⁸ happens soundlessly. Meister Eckhart contemplated the Trinity as an invisible ‘game’: ‘The game is played in the nature of the Father; spectacle and spectator are one.’ This is precisely the relationship of the performers in a ceremonial round dance. In such a game the suffering of an individual person, bound to his piece of doomed flesh, is submerged in universal joy, as Job’s fate is submerged in God’s answer. Joining the round dance, the sufferer no longer identifies himself with his suffering; he merges with the Whole, where all opposites coincide like East and West at the pole; he surrenders himself to sorrowful joy and joyful sorrow. Rublev’s Trinity is another such internalised circular action, a round dance of death and resurrection, a sorrowful rejoicing of the spirit.

The round dance cultures of Africa and Oceania remind the high civilisations of what they have lost – what contemporary learning has called the ‘removal of oppositions’. A rapprochement between Latin logic and African round dance (Senghor talked of this) is needed not only by the Africans.

37 cf. Romans 14.17

38 cf. 1 Corinthians 14.15

There is now a process of rapprochement (and break-up) as cultures are crowded together in a common sphere of information. Global cultures are coming closer to local ones, and to each other. The Christian world, the worlds of Islam, of India and of the Far East are built on different revelations. But each revelation is only a translation from Divine into human language. The divine original lies beyond human distinctions between positive and negative theology, between the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and the Great Void around which the Buddha's Benares sermon revolves: 'There exists, monks, that which is unborn, that which is unbecome, that which is uncreated, that which is unconditioned.'³⁹

The interaction of cultures could pass beyond the present chaos and become a round dance, a structure in which manifest, positive images rotate around an invisible centre. In roughly the same way – according to the Taoists – a wheel rotates around its empty centre, the hollow bush which fits on the axle. We can liken the axle to the 'spirit which blows where it wills' and the hole at the centre to our own readiness to accept the Spirit beyond all forms and names. The forms and names are the spokes in the wheel. In motion they merge and are seen as hypostases of a single truth. If, looking at Rublev's Trinity, we are contemplating the one and invisible God in three visible images equal in glory, what then prevents us from seeing the equality in glory of a number of creeds? God is one, but he is Spirit, and to know His unity means to recognise each great revelation as only the visible reflection of an invisible light. The participant in a round dance does not discard his traditional 'mask'. He remains true to it, but he comes to feel the whole round dance as his own.

39 *The Udana*, Chapter VIII, 3, (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. 42. The Pali Text Society, Oxford 1994. p.166)

The possibility of accepting this, and of rejecting it, is present in every religious tradition. In the Gospel it says: 'He who is not with me is against Me'⁴⁰ and: 'He that is not against us is for us'.⁴¹

Regardless of which way people choose, the interpenetration of cultures is happening. We cannot hide from it, and in practice have the choice between the chaos of disorderly cultural relations or a conscious move towards a new harmony, a revival of the sacred round dance, of which we of Russian culture can see an exalted image in the icon of the Trinity. I too see a great round dance in the future, joining together what was separated by logic and by the law of no third option (*tertium non datur*). Development breaks up spiritual wholeness into objects, into atoms or – as Russell has said – into atomic facts. This is happening more in some national cultures than in others, of course, but it is the general trend. It is the soil in which (and only in which) contemporary science has been able to grow; but out of it has grown the contemporary spiritual crisis.

Mediterranean-European development started about 3,000 years ago. The Graeco-Roman world was losing the sense of an invisible, supreme God; the mind transferred all spiritual power to visible images of the divine which could be chiselled in marble or cast in bronze. But one nation renounced the sacredness of the visible in the name of the mysteriously audible, single, almighty and omnipresent one. The Germans have called the Homeric world 'Augenkultur' (the culture of the visible) and the Biblical world 'Ohrenkultur' (the culture of the audible). The spiritually whole is perceived more clearly through hearing, and the individual and the rational through seeing. We can observe this today also when we consider radio and televi-

40 Matthew 12.30

41 Mark 9.40, also Luke 9.49 (RSV)

sion. On television the sensual is given unlimited space while the spiritual is pushed to the periphery. On radio there is a little more room for the spiritual. Here the contemporary world parodies the ancient world, substituting thrillers for the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

But back to the ancient world. We can suppose that the Semitic peoples (the Jews and the Arabs) perceived more through hearing while the Greeks and Romans perceived more through seeing. From these ethnic differences, however, two irreconcilable trends emerged (trends which in India and China found room within the bounds of a single culture). One was embodied in the plasticity of Greek art and philosophy and in the exactness of Roman law. It reached its spiritual pinnacle in the platonic dialogue. At the other pole were the prophets castigating the Babylonian whore, the monologues spoken by God through the mouths of his prophets, and the commandments conveyed down directly from heaven.

The whole subsequent spiritual history of the Northern Mediterranean (and of its offshoots all the way to Australia and Argentina) can be described as a debate between Athens and Jerusalem, between the desire for the visible that can be possessed (if only intellectually as information) and submission to the invisible spirit. In Islam submission prevailed, and for a long time halted development; in Europe an unstable balance was preserved – with crises, catastrophes, and new births amongst the debris. The basis for this equilibrium was laid by St John: ‘No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.’⁴²

Christ was seen by crowds during his life and by mystics also after his death. Theologians basing themselves on John

42 Gospel of John, 1.18

demonstrated that the Son is of one substance with the Father and from the beginning was in the Father's bosom; according to church dogma Christ is fully God and fully man. The invisible and infinite was contained in a visible human image, and the way was opened to imitate God as a human being and to represent God in human nature. Only in such a form was Christianity, with its Jewish roots, able to conquer the Greeks and the Romans.

John's formulation made possible Rublev's 'Trinity' and Raphael's Sixtine Madonna. But it also made possible a profanation of God, a downward creep towards pagan sensuality, causing protests, schisms and religious wars. The first great crisis was Byzantine iconoclasm. The emperors of the Isaurian dynasty with perfect justification saw icons and statues as a violation of the commandment 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image'.⁴³

But the Greeks could not manage without visible sacred objects. It ended when the Athenian Irene who had been chosen as Empress for her beauty took advantage of her husband's death, blinded her iconoclast son, was crowned in the male line as emperor and ordered the destruction of all who would not worship the icon. Some 100,000 people perished. Irene was canonised by the Orthodox Church.

The second great crisis was the Western Reformation. This was – once more I repeat – in no way a continuation of the Renaissance but a countercurrent to it, a protest against its spirit, against the revival of the pagan passion for sensual possession and against corruption in the holy of holies, the church. It was not just a matter of the selling of indulgences. The very style of church painting and sculpture was capable of outraging strict religious feelings. Here again the ethnic factor played its part. The Reformation triumphed in countries where painting had never been the

43 Exodus 20.4

leading art form. It failed to capture Italy and Spain, and it split Germany and France. The passions that flared up in religious wars led people very far from the final conclusion of this historic change – namely the world of the present. But in the end a certain equilibrium emerged – temporary and unstable, and based on a combination of opposites.

What we now call an open society came into being. It was the result of many interacting processes which require longer description and analysis than is possible in the scope of an article. Anyhow, it was born and started to live. This society was based on two contradictory principles: pluralism in the search for economic advantage and for scientific truth – and a firm moral law establishing the rules of fair play. Both principles are contained in the saying: ‘Each for himself, and God for all’. The more people are freed from outer restrictions, the greater the role of inner discipline, so the builders of the new civilisation needed a more severe religion than late medieval Catholicism. On the one hand, the tutelage of souls was abandoned. The Protestant became his own priest, able to disregard canon law and to lend money. On the other hand all luxury was abandoned, every indulgence of the senses. Some catholic prelates considered that the church could come to a compromise with the spirit of the times; but mutual hatred won out. In the intolerance of both Catholics and Protestants the fanaticism of the prophets was revived. Two centuries of religious war produced an aversion to any kind of religious fervour. Amongst the best minds tolerance became the paramount value, which then led to indifference towards faith.

An erosion of religious feeling and religious morality began. It became impossible to deny scientifically established facts. A Galileo today is not shown the instruments of torture to make him deny what he has clearly seen and understood. But the inner hierarchy of values, with its

priority of spiritual over technical criteria, has also been dissipated; Enrico Fermi when creating the atom bomb consoled himself with the facile phrase: 'After all, it's superb physics'.⁴⁴

In a purely technological reality there is no place for God or for a humanity created in His image and likeness. There are only habits of behaviour, the inertia of the Christian ethic; and this is steadily weakening.

An exclusive concentration on 'the world of the It... [leads] into technocratic developments increasingly perilous for the integrity of man and even for his physical existence,' wrote Gabriel Marcel, commenting on the treatise *I and Thou* (which appeared in 1923).⁴⁵

He went on to develop this idea on many occasions, including in the collection *Fresh Hope for the World* which I have quoted. He saw the movement created by Buchman as an embodiment of the philosophy of dialogue.

What is dialogue? My understanding of dialogue originated during a conversation, the content of which I have forgotten. I remember only that I was engrossed, and that I kept failing to get in my point. Suddenly I felt that I no longer wanted to say my piece and had begun to want something else. My unuttered rejoinder no longer demanded a voice. I began to feel ownership of something that had not yet come to birth but was still being born, something completely new, floating above all the arguments and identical with none of them. I began standing guard over the birth, not allowing the dialogue to get stuck or bogged down in details – sometimes I would put in a few words to bring things back to the main track but then at

44 cf. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, Hutchinson 1990, p.96

45 Gabriel Marcel, *I and Thou* (transl. from the French by Forrest Williams), in Schilpp and Friedman (ed.), *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, p.41

once be silent. It was as if I had left the service of defending and developing my own ideas and begun to serve something nebulous, not mine or anyone else's but 'blowing everywhere'. Then it occurred to me that perhaps Socrates had understood dialogue this way. Admittedly this is only a supposition. But here is something I found in Buber – not a definition but something more authentic: the description of a factual dialogue, of that variety of dialogue which is the subject of Buber's essay: *Dialogue*.

In a heated discussion Buber and his opponent had expressed sharply differing views. Suddenly,

“he stood up, I too stood, we looked into the heart of one another's eyes. ‘It is gone,’ he said, and before everyone we gave one another the kiss of brotherhood. The discussion of the situation between Jews and Christians had been transformed into a bond between the Christian and the Jew. In this transformation dialogue was fulfilled. Opinions were gone, in a bodily way the factual took place.’

‘Here I expect two objections,’ Buber continues. ‘One... takes this form. When it is a question of essential views, of views concerning *Weltanschauung*, the conversation *must* not be broken off in such a way... To this I answer that... neither needs to give up his point of view; only, in that... something happens to them which is called a covenant, they enter a realm where the law of the point of view no longer holds...’

‘The other objection... is to the effect that this may be true so far as the province of the point of view [philosophical, ideological – G.P.] reaches, but it ceases to be true for a confession of faith... For the man who is so related to his faith that he is able to die or to slay for it there can be no realm where the law of the faith ceases to hold.’

Buber answers with a ‘confession’:

“I have not the possibility of judging Luther, who refused fellowship with Zwingli in Marburg, or Calvin who

furthered the death of Servetus. For Luther and Calvin believe that the Word of God has so descended among men that it can be clearly known and must therefore be exclusively advocated. I do not believe that; the Word of God crosses my vision like a falling star to whose fire the meteorite will bear witness without making it light up for me, and I myself can only bear witness to the light but not produce the stone and say 'This is it.' But this difference of faith is by no means to be understood merely as a subjective one. It is not based on the fact that we who live today are weak in faith, and it will remain even if our faith is ever so much strengthened. The situation of the world itself, in the most serious sense, more precisely the relationship between God and man, has changed. And this change is certainly not comprehended in its essence by our thinking only of the darkening, so familiar to us, of the supreme light, only of the night of our being, empty of revelation. It is the night of an expectation – not of a vague hope, but of an expectation. We expect a theophany of which we know nothing but the place, and the place is called community.”⁴⁶

“Real faith – if I may so term presenting ourselves and perceiving – begins when the dictionary [of rules, laws and analogical conclusions] is put down, when you are done with it. What occurs to me says something to me...”⁴⁷

It seems to me that this is the very community that Buchman understood how to create, and which is alive at Caux. I see in this community one of the ways towards a spiritual unity that can make complete the material unity of the contemporary world, one of the ways to creating a spiritual counterbalance against the destructive forces of development.

46 Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Collins/Fontana 1961, translated and introduced by Robert Gregor Smith, pp.22-24, Chapter: *Dialog ue* (1929)

47 *ibid.* p.29

TWO TALKS

Introductory note

The two talks included here were given during visits to Norway in October 1997 and May 1999. They continue Pomerants' analysis of factors shaping the Russian mind at a critical time, when the country is searching for new direction at home and a new role in the world.

'Europe, Asia and Russia: perspectives on the dialogue of cultures' reflects on the way global civilisation is developing. Breathtaking technological advances are part of a 'torrent of change' which is destabilising traditional societies not attuned to western values. But even the West itself, the main source of the changes affecting the world, is suffering from the imbalance produced by its own brand of material progress. The threat of fragmentation is both internal, through a loss of the spiritual dimension, and external, if cultural and religious traditions do not learn to how to share a globalised world.

In response, a new dialogue between East and West is needed, between the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the scientific. And there is a faint but real hope that Russia could play an important part in that global dialogue – prepared particularly, perhaps, by its traditional devotion to the Trinity, the great Three-in-one, the unity in diversity.

The second talk, *'Russia's spiritual and social crisis'*, analyses the mood of the former superpower following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Attempts at economic reform

have brought at best mixed results and the sense of loss and insecurity has been painfully aggravated by the Kosovo crisis and NATO's intervention against Serbia/Yugoslavia.

Having described the dangers, Pomerants' main concern is the need to mobilise the positive spiritual forces within Russia, what he refers to as 'creative minorities', not only to modernise the country itself but to allow it to make its unique contribution. He sees the main hope less in the Russian church (despite some outstanding representatives) and more in the educational networks and the potential of the media.

To a reader in 2004, the absence of any mention of Vladimir Putin is a striking reminder of the suddenness with which Putin, only months later, was elevated from obscurity to the Prime Ministership and then the Presidency. This is the 'stable instability', described by Pomerants, the 'bureaucracy making unpredictable decisions', the continuing sense of conspiracy in Russian politics. Democracy is still new and vulnerable in the world's largest country.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Geir Flikke and Hans Kr. Hyldmo in producing first draft translations of the two talks.

P.T.

EUROPE, ASIA AND RUSSIA – PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

In one of Antonioni's films the natives tell the traveller: 'We must stop.' 'Why?' he asks, after his guides have remained silent for moment and then walked on. He receives the answer: 'We were moving too fast. Our souls were not keeping up with us.'

Perhaps the most important feature of modern civilisation is the headlong increase of the new, the unprecedented, the extraordinary. In earlier times the new would operate within old, familiar boundaries. 'The king is dead. Long live the king!' said the French. One king died; another ascended the throne. There was nothing extraordinary about it. Nostradamus foresaw that the royal family would perish at the end of the 18th Century, but could not discern how. His vocabulary did not contain words like revolution, terror or guillotine.

Saint-Exupéry wrote in a letter to Madame N.: 'For a whole century now everything has been changing excessively fast, while our thinking digests these changes too slowly. Imagine a physicist being handed a jumble of two hundred known phenomena and a thousand new ones. He would be unable to cope. We might have to wait a century for someone who would unhurriedly digest it all, create a new language and reorder our picture of the world. Because there would be no more system in mathematical physics.'

One would think that the thought processes of our time were quick enough. But Saint-Exupéry is not talking about separate ideas, theories or methodologies (there are more and more of these, infinitely more than previously). When he speaks about 'thinking' which is unable to keep up with the new, he has in mind holistic thinking, a contemplative world view. The flood of the new obliterates the world view and turns the spiritual cosmos into chaos. Here are some new words and concepts which have emerged in the last hundred years: radio, aeroplane, concentration camp, cinema, tank, mustard gas, robot, collectivisation, Auschwitz (and the question: is poetry possible after Auschwitz? Is belief in God possible after Auschwitz?), atomic energy, United Nations, television set, computer, ecological crisis, population explosion, satellite, AIDS... Fathers now live in one world and their sons in another – a world so new that everything old seems completely obsolete and unsuited to the young generation.

I happened to read the notes of a young man who was undoubtedly talented and aware of his gift – perhaps too strongly aware... He was trying to construct a life exclusively out of all that was modern, unknown to his parents, untainted by their dreary life – and ended in a blind alley. Such a result (the experience of the poet Mayakovsky, of futurism, of every avant garde) was foreseeable. The spirit of a culture cannot be fully embodied within the life of one generation. Some of the most profound breakthroughs happen once in five hundred, in a thousand, in two thousand years, and to base one's self on today's reality, without yesterday or the day before, is a notorious path to nowhere, to superficiality, to fashionable banality. A personality of any depth will be certain to feel the superficiality and banality and start to pine. The trap of futurism is present wherever the stream of the new becomes a flood. This did not happen earlier. But since 'progress' became a concept,

people and movements have appeared acting as forerunners of progress...

The rapid superimposition of new on old makes society and its consciousness dizzyingly complex. It becomes ever harder to formulate and to resolve the most essential moral problems. In such a society reason excels in complexity and loses its taste for simplicity. And the more reason excels in resolving individual problems, the harder it gets to feel that all are one, and to approach life as a whole, 'to love life above its meaning' (Dostoyevsky), above an idea of meaning which is separate from life itself. The need for prophets and spiritual leaders only makes its appearance in a complex society: family and kinship societies have managed very well without them.

Today reason has been dispersed amongst thousands of scientific disciplines. New medicines, washing powders, refrigerators etc have been invented. The broader effects on humanity become evident later: from refrigerators – the hole in the ozone layer, from medicines – the population explosion. Scientific reason brightly illuminates one sector, but in relation to the whole it acts blindly, like a gladiator equipped with armour and a sword but with a helmet that covers his eyes, so that he must fight his opponent blind. This is to say nothing about obviously diabolical devices such as atomic, biological and chemical weapons. All innovations are frightening, and so is the avalanche of innovations, the process of a cumulative differentiation of reason, of increasing successes in countless individual directions, of the increasing destruction of wholeness.

The new is always particular and separate. The whole is always old, like the world. The whole is a synonym for eternity. In his *Dream of a Ludicrous Man* Dostoyevsky wrote how the people on the imaginary planet felt the Whole as something immediate and wrote this word with a capital

letter, like the name of God. Time and space can be divided into infinitely small pieces, but the whole is the whole just because it is indivisible and inviolable. In a poem by Zinaida Mirkina time and space are called eternity turned inside out. Wholeness, eternity, God – this is the axis around which our world of time and space revolves. That world has now been caught up in a centrifugal movement and can only be preserved through a very powerful centripetal will, a counter-force to the momentum of development pushing it outwards – into outer darkness. The stronger the centrifugal force, the greater the role of a centripetal spiritual will.

In far-off times work itself was unhurried and inseparable from forest and field, river and sea. Today work has fenced itself off from nature and built a technological world with its own rhythms. A worker has become an appendage to a machine, a programmer an appendage to a computer. (This does not depend on the choice between a market system and a centrally directed one. It is the common lot of civilisation.) But a human being is not a robot. He is a microcosm that may function for a time like a robot but then without fail must re-establish his unity with macrocosm. He must feel himself a particle in the cosmic whole, a vessel of the universal spirit. If this does not happen there is a build-up of irritation, a dull inner anguish. Every so often the pills provided by civilisation stop working, and then there are epidemics of anguish and mass hysteria. My friend Alexander Melikhov has expressed the profound thought that fascism (in its most general sense) resides in each of us, and that in the instant (be it only an instant) when we are ready to use unlimited violence to finish off the irritant and consolidate the good (and who has not had such fits?) we are ripe for mass enthusiasm, ready to believe in scapegoats and in leaders bearing the spear of St George the Victor.

That is how it was in the 1930s when some 40% of Germans voted for Hitler. Today mass hysteria is raging in Europeanised countries which are outside the centre of the civilisation from which the torrent of the new is bursting out – that is, outside both geographical Europe and overseas ‘Europe’. The western coalition of cultures is trying to save the situation by giving help to less developed countries and sending UN troops to conflict zones. But the basic source of the conflicts is the selfsame western civilisation, the civilisation of Modernity and of unlimited growth. Unlimited, unbalanced growth, enveloping region after region, is turning the whole planet into a torrent whirling no-one knows where, a spiral spinning outward into darkness where unknown misfortunes await it. Will the West be able to preserve its own relative prosperity in mounting global chaos? Who will survive if a dictator, summoned out of desperation, unleashes bacteriological weapons? And if this does not happen, will science and technology be able to compensate for the lack of raw materials? The lack of air to breathe? The lack of silence for God?

The West has created a unified sphere of information, but not a unity of sacred symbols. In each of the four cultural worlds which have endured two thousand years there was not only a common sphere of information but also common sacred symbols. The flesh of a cultural world was language: Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit/Pali, Chinese (a system of ideographs pronounced in different ways but unified in writing). But in this flesh lived the spirit of the sacred books: of Christianity and Islam in the Mediterranean region, of Buddhism and Hinduism in South Asia and Confucianism and Buddhism in the Far East. In Islam the shared sacred symbols and shared language were disseminated together, in other cultures they could appear independently of each other. But in the end, in all the great civilisations which have survived until today, they have

coincided (albeit aided by the translation of the Greek Gospels into Latin and of the Buddhist sutras into Chinese). A region with language, laws and administration in common would be unstable without common sacred symbols. The experience of the early Roman and early Chinese empires demonstrated this. Both found stability through 'the light from the East'.

It should be said here that the culturological East is not the same as the geographical East. In the same way the West has spread right around the globe. New Zealand is Western, while Serbia, located in Europe, is a westernised country still deeply stamped by the Turkish East. In the Indian-Pacific region the 'East' from which the light comes is located in the west. 'Bodhidharma came from the West': Buddhism came to China from India. In the end the dual Indian-Pacific world, taken as a whole, is the East, in comparison with the dual Mediterranean world or even with Islam. This strikes one when comparing the fine geometry of the mosques with the Hindu temples which resemble cliffs and trees. For India Islam was a western force which drew the country into the relatively rational world of the Mediterranean middle ages, just as the British subsequently drew it into the modern age.

Culturologically, the East signifies steady orientation towards the whole and the eternal, towards the vertical axis (heaven-hell), to the detriment of outward expansion. Culturologically the West signifies the opposite orientation. It is thanks to this orientation that the Far East has adapted more easily to global western civilisation than the Middle East, which would have appeared closer to the West both in religion (monotheism) and in its style of logic (both going back to Aristotle). Today some countries of the Far East (insular and peninsular), while remaining the Far East are becoming the Far West, part of the flourishing Euro-American-Japanese 'West'.

There were reasons for all this. China is a country of exact dates and fixed frontiers. India is a country without dates, a country with a mythology instead of a history, a country that has never defended its frontiers but instead has ever given birth to new religious movements... Differences of epoch change little here. India, even in classical antiquity, the time of the birth of philosophy, remains the motherland of religious movements, and India's philosophy remains religious philosophy. China, even in the Middle Ages and having absorbed Buddhism, remains Confucianist, guided by political wisdom.

In the Mediterranean region, on the other hand, the difference between ancient and medieval, medieval and modern times is decisive. Here each major epoch means a new civilisation. We have got used to thinking, and saying, that western civilisation is more dynamic. Ancient Rome was dynamic and the contemporary West is dynamic. But in the middle ages there was not this dynamism. More precisely: the Roman West and later the contemporary West tend towards outward expansion and towards the loss of the vertical values which predominated in the middle ages. Today this instability, this growing spiritual crisis is spreading across the entire globe and has materialised in the ecological crisis. The ecological crisis is insuperable unless we profoundly reappraise our values, renounce the cult of the new, and learn the idea of harmony between the new and the old, the temporary and the eternal.

I think that a global culture of equilibrium with nature can only develop in a dialogue between Europe (in the broad sense – Spengler's West) and Asia. The role of the West here is suggested by its position at the centre of the information sphere. The old formula goes: '*ex oriente lux, ex occidente lex*' (Light from the East, law from the West). This 'lex', the spirit of organisation and rational form, makes the West the natural organiser of a global dialogue.

In practice today the Far East already communicates with the Middle East via the West, through English language media: literature, radio, television, internet.

The genius of the West is technical and organisational. The West builds empires (the Roman – and today's economic and information empire); it does not build an adequate spiritual counterweight to growing complexity and the threat of disintegration. The West has twice lacked sufficient centripetal power of its own to counter the impetus of centrifugal movements: in the first centuries AD and today. I do not know if the equilibrium will be restored. I am just stating certain conditions without which the equilibrium cannot be restored. I am just stating the common task. Whoever turns out to be the first in performing it – Europe itself, America or Japan – the dialogue between unstable (dynamic) and stable (stagnant) cultures will be the main movement of the 21st Century (if this century does not become the century of general decay).

Dialogue with the East does not mean a departure by the West from its own spiritual roots. On the contrary, however bizarre it may sound, the East reminds the West of its own forgotten past: the culture of silent contemplation, of slow, prayerful, attentive reading of the holy Scriptures. A dialogue with the East is simultaneously a dialogue with the culture of the Church fathers.

In Christian icons Christ and the saints are often depicted with a book in their hands. Muslims call Christians and Jews 'the peoples of the book'. By the middle of the 20th Century this was out of date. Mass culture was concentrated on newspapers and pamphlets. Then the television set displaced the entire culture of books and the printed word. A man wears himself out at work, comes home tired and mindlessly watches flickering colour pictures. He may consider himself a believer. But his deeper spirit is suppressed twice over: by the mental strain of work

and by mindless relaxation. The part of the soul where a God-bearing word can enter and grow is tightly shut. The shocks of war time produced a surge of faith. Now souls are closed again.

This is one side of the contemporary spiritual crisis. Another is that the language of the sacred books, which was thrilling in ancient times and in the Middle Ages, has ceased to convey the feeling of God, the reality of God. God did not speak in Hebrew or Sanskrit. Those who spoke were the prophets into whose hearts the Holy Spirit had entered. But they spoke in the language they knew and at the level of their understanding. That is why the apostle Paul has said that the letter is dead and only the spirit gives life. And quite recently, at the start of the 20th Century, this thought was repeated by the Saint Silouan in his own way: 'What is written by the Holy Spirit can only be read by the Holy Spirit'. Approaches to God are only metaphor, only allusions to the meaning which the Holy Spirit in the writer transmits to the Holy Spirit in the reader. This meaning is the sense that the eternal whole is a reality, that one is a part of it and no longer the captive of time and space. Words alone do not convey this meaning without the help of the Holy Spirit.

In the country where I live millions of people repeat the words of the creed: 'I believe in one God the Father... and in the only begotten Son of God... and in the Holy Ghost who spake by the prophets.' But scarcely one person in a thousand could explain what the words 'Father' and 'Son' mean in this context, in what way three 'hypostases' are one, or what the Greek word hypostasis means, as it has not been given a Church Slavonic translation. Faith as an inner reality is confused with conviction, and conviction with knowing certain words by heart.

This situation was able to persist while bad roads separated one cultural world from another. Christians became

accustomed to one lot of stereotypes, Muslims to another. Today in a single world of information all the formulas have come into collision. Faith is supported by the feeling of cultural unity, the wish to continue the spiritual life of one's fathers. But this wish too has been shaken. The youth feel and conceive themselves in some completely new world and assert themselves by denying what their fathers once accepted.

What is happening could be called a great crisis of hypostases. The word hypostasis means simply substitution. Instead of the unfathomable mystery of God, the mind is offered an image, a substitution: God the Father, God the Son. We can imagine the Son in the flesh, and we can feel the Holy Spirit as his image in our hearts. And we can experience being part of the mysterious whole in which all our sorrows are submerged. Essentially, all the images of all the great religions are hypostases, substitutions, mental (and sometimes painted) icons. Mentally contemplating the sacred image, a person communes through it with the eternal and breaks free from the slavery of time. Understood in this way, images and icons do not age or lose their power. But people started long ago to take images and substitutions for objects in time and space, and this confusion provokes reason to revolt. Modern consciousness is too sophisticated in its grasp of details to keep ancient and medieval symbols on one level with literal, factual truth.

I believe in a religious process in the course of which the Holy Spirit inspired people at first to create the tribal religions and later, with the emergence of philosophy and the formation of world empires, destroyed the tribal religions and provided revelations which united many nations and tribes. Then the four cultural worlds arose which I have already mentioned. Today the Holy Spirit is seeking a global unity. But it seems to me that this unity will appear neither as a new faith, nor in the fusion of the four cultural

coalitions into a single one, but as a dialogue of the prophetic monologues and an understanding of the great religious traditions in the West and the East as hypostases – as stated, verbally expressed embodiments of the spirit which is beyond conception, the unfathomable source of life and meaning. I believe that the different religions are different languages of religious experience; they are precious and should in no way cede their place to a religious Esperanto. But we must learn how to understand all the main languages and translate between them. Furthermore, we must also understand the primitive religions, which have created an image of unity in the ritual round dance. When Senghor said that the African thinks when dancing, he was not joking. In the circular movement of the round dance its participants immediately feel they are a single whole. The Christian Trinity is, in my understanding, also a round dance – the vision of a dance around the incomprehensible, a circling unity of logically incompatible principles – God and man. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Trinity has taught me this.

At this point let us recall that the Islamic world is a comparatively new phenomenon. Until the 7th Century the Eastern Mediterranean was the Orthodox East. Later Byzantium fell, but Russia arose. The role of the Orthodox world in the dialogue of cultures is still an open question.

At the beginning of the 20th Century it appeared that the Russia of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and the thinkers of the Silver Age was in practice the main, and very nearly the only, partner of the West in the cultural dialogue. This however did not last long, and not only because the October 1917 coup tore out Russia's tongue. Even if philosophy had not been physically evicted from Russia, the potential for a dialogue of the West with India, China and Japan would have been greater than the potential for a dialogue with Russia.

But in the 19th Century there was continuing ignorance and incomprehension about India and the Far East, so Russia as the first 'westernised' country was also the first to speak on behalf of the East as a whole, on behalf of holistic understanding versus the almighty western spirit of analysis. Then in the 20th Century India, China and Japan began themselves to speak in English and intriguing things came to light.

It turned out that the spiritual languages of the Indian-Pacific region are a kind of negative of the Mediterranean ones. In the Mediterranean the supreme value is light. We say: light and darkness. The Chinese say: ying-yang, that is darkness-light. Lao-Tse in lauding the Tao exclaims: 'Oh, indistinct! Oh, obscure!' In the Middle East (and subsequently in the West) we say: 'In the beginning was the Word'; in the far East – silence: 'Those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know', wrote the same Lao-Tse. The language of Indian spirituality contrasts less sharply with that of the Middle East (and the West), but in India also negative theology is more distinctly developed than in the West. In the most ancient classic of Indian thought it only says about the Atman: 'Not this! Not this!'

Let us ask a naive question: Why did Providence see all this as necessary? I think it was so that we – by comparing civilisations and translating from language to language, and by learning from each other to heed the silence, to meditate and pray – might learn to see through every letter and to apprehend the spirit. So that we might not confuse the moon with the finger pointing at it; so that we might be cured of the literal understanding of sacred words and rites, and might approach closer to the incomprehensible that can be experienced and discovered in oneself, in one's own heart. From this point of view (and I think it is the most important of all) a dialogue with the 'negative' cultures could give Europe more than a dialogue with other versions

of monotheism (Orthodoxy, Islam). But the latter dialogue too has significance.

Russia has something to offer the world, especially if it finally assumes real ownership of its Byzantine spiritual heritage. Let me give an example which is particularly close to my heart. One of the difficulties in understanding God, or Brahma, or the unborn and unbecome, is that when approaching him the categories of logic cease to operate, like concepts of east and west at the pole. From the North Pole every direction is south; from the South Pole there is only north. Nagarjuna⁴⁸ showed that any logical sentence destroys the Whole from the outset by dividing it into subject and object and then binding it with conditions. In relation to the absolute whole, logic is an inability to get to the essence. In the East they try to express this essence by openly overturning logic and underlining the incomprehensibility of God, Atman, Tao. The Greeks, on the other hand, the heirs of Plato and Aristotle, still found here the possibility of a certain positivity. They worked out special categories: 'oneness of substance', 'equality in glory', 'neither confounded nor divided'. True, these concepts themselves are paradoxical: the Son is 'of one substance with the Father', and the two natures of Christ, divine and human, are united 'not by confusion of Substance but by unity of Person'.⁴⁹ This permits us somehow to imagine ways to approach the Whole that do not destroy the wholeness.

The categories of trinitarian theology could, I believe, prove useful in many cases beside the one for which they were created. They offer an especially fruitful approach to the question of religious unity. If God and man are of one

48 Nagarjuna, 2nd century AD, founder of the Madyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism.

49 See the Creed of St Athanasius, Book of Common Prayer

substance, then why not Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism? If the human and the divine are neither to be confounded nor divided, then why not imagine just such an unconfounded and undivided unity of *ways* to God? The great Russian mystic Daniil Andreyev, in solitary confinement in Vladimir prison, came very close to this when he sketched the contours of his fantastic World Rose. For him the different religions were petals of one flower. The conception of the World Rose is more a poetic fantasy than a practical plan of action. But a great thought was expressed in this fantasy, and I count it as my task, and Russia's task, to bring it to the world.

Today a different wind is blowing in Russia, a wind of isolation, and Russia's world-wide sympathies are in collision with Russian Orthodox fundamentalism. The outcome of this duel will decide which role Russia will play in the evolution of a global dialogue of cultures: as one of its leading participants or as a remote province.

Talk given in Oslo, October 1997

RUSSIA'S SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL CRISIS

Imagine a man who has been constantly forced to walk around in old, tight, torn shoes. His feet are blistered and bleeding and he curses his shoes. Suddenly he is allowed to throw them on the rubbish heap. The first minute is joy. But then it gets cold. His toes start to freeze. And the old, hated shoes become dear and familiar.

This allegory by Konstantin Kholmogorov is about the spiritual, social and economic crisis of Russia. People have lost not only a poor and miserable life, but also a life to which they had adjusted with some certitude about the morrow – poor and miserable, but bearable. Even more important, their sense of identity has been lost. The ‘I’ has lost its ‘we’.

The subjects ‘I’ and ‘we’ are not fully independent of each other. No man, according to John Donne, is an island. Each is part of the mainland, of a great continent. If a part is broken off from the mainland, then it is your loss too. So do not ask for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for you. That is how the bell is tolling for greater Russia, for the Russian empire, for the Soviet empire. The average person may not think as deeply as Donne, but he feels that he is not just an ‘I’. He has, and had, his ‘we’. The ‘I’ that loses its accustomed ‘we’ is diminished. That is why the collapse of the Soviet ‘we’ has torn something in the soul of millions of people.

For many years the concept of ‘Russian’ was interwoven and intermixed with the concept of ‘Soviet’, and not only in official consciousness. A kind of Soviet-Russian ‘we’ took shape. It was fairly absurd. The intelligentsia laughed at it and parodied it. I remember a comic verse from that time:

*It's good that our Gagarin
is neither Jew nor Tartar,
not Georgian, not Uzbek ,
but our very own Soviet Man.*

Then suddenly everybody felt the pain when the Soviet ‘we’ disintegrated. I had predicted the disintegration of the Soviet Union for about 20 years. From the very beginning of *Perestroika* I was saying that it would be a good idea to make a well-considered transition from empire to commonwealth, from the sham federation to something like the European Union. But when the empire simply fell to pieces there was a sense of loss.

Hugeness and immensity were part of the very idea and image of Russia. It could be asserted that Russia was a complete world. You could argue about it, but that is more or less how it felt. Then suddenly, frontiers carved Russia into pieces. True, huge Siberia remained, but most Russians do not live in Siberia.

This was especially hard for the Russians who ended up outside Russia’s borders. The well-known poet Boris Chichibabin from Kharkov has expressed the pain of those 20-25 million in the poem ‘Lament for the lost motherland’ which he has frequently read in public. It contains the lines:

*I did not leave my motherland,
Why was it taken from me?*

The poem drew a passionate response in Moscow also. We have remained in Russia, but our Russia is the stump of historical Russia and we feel the pain of the parts that were

cut off. We can write off the Soviet experience as a bad dream. But Russia was also an empire before 1917, a continuous expanse from the Black Sea to the White Sea. Crimea, the Caucasus and Odessa were all ours. Pushkin walked in those places and his invisible footprints remain in streets with Ukrainian names.

'I' and 'we' are not the same, nor are they completely different. They are connected so as to be, as the theologians say, 'neither confounded nor divided'. When the empire collapsed we felt that part of our way of life collapsed with it. This is the kind of soil in which political demagogues sow their seeds. This is the kind of confusion in which imperial ambitions unexpectedly surface – whether over the Black Sea fleet, or Crimea, or Serbia for which the old Russia twice waged war. I do not think that bombs are the way to solve nationality problems and I do not agree with the actions of NATO, but the reactions of the Moscow crowd have frightened me still more. A wound has been opened into which it is dangerous to rub salt.

As an empire, Russia is a stump. As a European nation it is deficient, not having learnt to live as European nations live – and this is not simple to learn, probably impossible in a short time. There is a multitude of questions here that are difficult for a thinker, and quite incomprehensible for an ordinary person. When an ordinary person comes up against a challenge which is beyond his comprehension he starts looking for scapegoats.

Not long before his premature death, Alexander Soprovsky wrote an essay: *Privacy and sobornost'* ('being together'). Maybe it separates the two cultures too sharply, but it is a fact that the relationship of 'I' and 'we' is different in England from what it is in Russia. English 'privacy' stresses the primacy of the 'I'; 'sobornost'' stresses the primacy of the 'we'. Not every Russian understands what *sobornost'* is. It is not collectivism but something

more subtle, something with deep roots in the spiritual world and in a common God. All the same, something like *sobornost*' continues in many contemporary sayings and turns of phrase, for instance: 'I (Russian *ya*) is the last letter in the alphabet', or 'the personal is superfluous' (Russian: '*lichnoe – eto lishnee*'). Peter Waage has noted that Russians, when asked their name, do not say, 'My name is so and so', but literally 'they call me so an so'. The emphasis is on the people who call me so and so, all sorts of people. The word 'people' is unspoken – in German or Norwegian the indefinite '*man*' ('one') would be used here – but we glimpse the image of a rather hazy 'we'.

Of course England has its own sense of 'we', for instance the saying: 'my country, right or wrong' (today regarded as jingoistic). And Russia has its own individualism, sometimes repressed and sometimes assuming distorted forms, but also capable of creative development. The trouble is that the Soviet period encouraged these distortions – which combined a sense of dependency on the state with the drive to compensate for one's slavish subservience by plundering state property. It was an extremely unfavourable starting point for the transition to a market economy. There was too little healthy initiative and too much criminal initiative.

The Soviet system did not prepare the ground for a viable successor. Overdeveloped security organs turned any initiative into a crime. As a result criminal society was the only heir which grew in the womb of Soviet Russia. When the rotten structure collapsed, the criminal world started dictating its own laws. The judicial and administrative hierarchy was sufficiently corrupt and submitted readily to the new leadership. Not one scandalous murder has been cleared up. Hardly a single scandalous swindle has been punished. Yeltsin issues his decrees but they are not carried out. In fact a two-power structure has emerged: Yeltsin is

the boss in the Kremlin, but the farther you are from the Kremlin, the greater the power of the mafia.

Along with the government, all the rescue programmes for Russia are on shaky ground. Shock therapy was the first – i.e. abolition of price controls, hyperinflation, and the right of those citizens who could fend for themselves by any means, while those who could not were left to sink. In Poland this policy succeeded. In Russia it took on distorted forms, provoked strong resistance and collapsed. There were several reasons for this. In East-Central Europe the communist experiments had been a whole generation shorter. There was a living memory of something else to turn back to. In Russia the old men remembered only Lenin's and Stalin's experiments and voted for the communists. Furthermore, the reforms in Hungary and Poland were linked with national liberation and national rebirth and there was reason to be patient. In Russia the reforms, in theory the same ones, were linked with national humiliation and the loss of superpower status. During the war against Hitler people endured incomparably greater privations for the sake of victory; but in the 90s no such cause was perceived. To me, to be sure, it was clear that we should endure for the sake of freedom of speech and of the press, but to the masses this was not obvious. Hence the widespread hatred of Gaidar and Chubais, hence the general belief that they were not Russians but were acting on the instructions of the CIA.

The reformers indeed wanted the best for Russia. But they did not understand that to endure hardships it is essential to have some great goal. They themselves were able to manage perfectly well without one. The mass consumer society of the West suited them completely, and they themselves were trained for well paid jobs. The reformers reckoned that enough people would support them, while those incapable of adjusting to *perestroika* (reconstruction)

would die out. But they left Russian culture and the Russian cast of mind out of the picture. The opponents of reform were not restricted to alcoholics incapable of hard work; they included the intellectuals, the bearers of traditional spiritual values without which life loses its meaning. Crude imitation of the West repelled them. In this environment a second project for saving Russia sprang up, the Eurasian project. The project has not been carried out and in my opinion cannot be, but it does exist as an idea in people's minds.

The Eurasians are endeavouring to revive the old emigrant dream of the 1920s, that Russia is a special civilisation, comparable to the West, India, China or the Islamic world. It was suggested that certain basic elements could be developed and a civilisation constructed with its back turned to the West. How long it would take, and in the name of which god, was not specified. In the past it has taken 200-300 years to build a new civilisation (Islamic, Tibetan), and each time there was a powerful religious idea uniting the peoples. The Eurasians have no such time scale, nor the ideas which could weld Orthodox and Muslims together into one whole. But an illusion which possesses people's minds becomes a force, at least a political force.

A third project is the simplest – to return to the old shoes which produced the bleeding corns and vote for the Russian Communist Party. Elderly people respond to this call. Juveniles who feel lost in the current chaos are more attracted to a fourth type of project: the hooligan neobolshevism of Limonov (slogan: 'Stalin, Beria and the Gulag'), or the neo-nazism of Barkashov, a new enterprise (for Russia) and a new version of the crude and simple order where everyone is given a prescribed role. As in the army: 'If you can't, we'll teach you; if you won't, we'll make you!' The fuehrer of the neo-nazis, Barkashov, a former electrician, has not been able to think up anything

really new. He has simply declared that Hitler made one big mistake: to underrate the Eastern Slavs. This mistake ruined a good idea which will now be carried through to victory by Russian storm troops. The Barkashovites fight the 'blacks', take it on themselves here and there to protect workers from the arbitrary actions of the administration and to protect the population from bandits and hooligans. They intend to exterminate the Jews but so far do not touch them because they fear the reaction of the authorities. In many outer districts the Barkashovites cooperate with the police. An opinion poll has shown that Barkashov's prestige is growing. But until now his Russian National Unity party has not got a single candidate into the Duma.

Unfortunately the war in the Balkans has given the extremists new opportunities. In the crowd outside the US Embassy the Barkashov and the Limonov supporters got what they needed: a state of mass hysteria. NATO's politicians have reckoned without at least two things: Milosevic's retaliatory moves, and the shifts in Russian public opinion. For the first time I felt the possibility of a Communist-Fascist coalition coming to power, threatening a catastrophe more serious than refugees from Kosovo. Russia is helpless because it is divided, but God forbid that a demonic idea should unite it. Not only God works miracles. The devil can too, and 'black miracles' have happened before in Russia.

The strength of the patriotic front (consisting of the Russian Communist Party, nationalist groupings and associated extremists) lies in discipline, organisation and the traditions of the Soviet 'we'. The political impact of the 'patriots' is greater than their actual number. At the moment more than two thirds of the electorate vote for non-communist candidates, but there are no democratic parties with solid traditions, only unstable unions in which the leaders fight for primacy and every 'I' is written with a

capital letter. Yabloko is more solid than the others, something like a social democratic party. For an *effective* parliament something like the Christian Democrats would still be needed. But Christian democracy has not emerged in Russia. The prerequisite of ecumenical accord between the Christian churches is absent. The Patriarchate regards ecumenism with unconcealed loathing.

Our democracy is paradoxical. It rests on the President's almost dictatorial powers and from the start has had the character of a presidential bureaucracy making unpredictable decisions. In the presidential elections a communist wins the first round, but in the second round all the opponents of communism vote for the one who came second. That is how Yeltsin got in in 1996, and that is how Luzhkov, or Primakov, or someone else claiming to be a third force – democratic as well as patriotic, promoting the market economy as well as caring for the poor – could get in. At the Duma elections the communists will most likely have the strongest parliamentary party again and will again use this for their own political games.

This stable instability is unlikely to change soon. One of the underlying factors here is the Orthodox Church. For it, democracy is suitable only as a transition to a new authoritarian regime, if necessary under the aegis of the Communist Party, but with Orthodoxy as the state religion. The church is governed by bishops who were selected by the communist authorities. Once ordained they are not replaced, and they maintain as their ideals: a national Russian Church (with a capital letter; all other churches to be written with a small letter), no ecumenism, no attempts at renewal – and hatred of imperialism and Zionism. By the reckoning of Alexander Borisov, a disciple of Alexander Men', 20% of parishes support this view very actively, and these impose their will on the rest. In many churches the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are sold, and to doubt their

genuineness is considered heresy. Students at theological colleges write diploma theses rehabilitating the Black Hundreds who sullied themselves with pogroms and killings on the eve of the 1917 revolution. There are few overt liberals among the priests, and these are being persecuted. The majority are indolent pastors mechanically performing their rituals.

Anthony Bloom, however, the Metropolitan of Surozh (a title devised some time ago for the Orthodox Archbishop in London), belongs to the same church. In my view at least, he is one of the spiritual leaders of our time. Unfortunately he has never lived in Russia and only comes on flying visits. Notes of his talks were already being circulated in the *samizdat* period; in recent years they have been published no less than 15 times. Sometimes Bloom's talks are shown on TV; there are audio and video cassettes. Anthony radiates a spirit of love and faith without exaltation, in the spirit of the best tradition of Orthodox 'sobriety'. His faithfulness to tradition is not aggressive and is not directed against anyone. His conviction is that you cannot invent God, but that in all the great religions there are the traces of a living, divine presence, and he likes to refer to these traces in the works of Catholic authors, Hindus and Hasidic rabbis. He is a remarkable example of an Orthodox open to the contemporary world. I think that in the perspective of the centuries Anthony will outweigh the protégés of the KGB. But what will happen in the next few decades?

Today the Protestants stand as an alternative to ossified Orthodoxy. The number of Baptists is growing rapidly, and the number of Pentecostals even faster. Certain forms of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have also spread. Under pressure from the Patriarchate a law has been passed limiting the activities of religious groups that are new to Russia, but the police will scarcely stop people who are

thirsting for a personal, direct experience of the sacred. The central position of Orthodoxy could be shaken. I would be glad if this happened, and would wish the loss of authority to force the church to embark on its own *aggiornamento*, regardless of the conservatives.

Meanwhile my hopes for the next few years lie not with the church but with the schools. There are more good teachers than good priests. I am getting into contact with the teachers through the newspapers they read. The schools will not be sufficient on their own to awaken in people a sense of duty, a capacity for self-organisation (without state tutelage) and creative activity. Political, economic, and judicial reforms must continue, corruption must be resolutely fought and much else. But I am emphasising those things which strengthen people internally in the fight against chaos.

Besides the schools I put my hope in the radio and would like to put it in the television. On the radio you hear the voices of those Orthodox intellectuals who are continuing the work of Alexander Men' and who are not afraid of the Patriarchate. I have made friends with many radio journalists; we are working for the same cause. Recently I had the opportunity of speaking once a week on a small religious radio station. Unfortunately the 'Dialogue' company has now had to cease operation for lack of money.

The potential of television is enormous. It can bring people face to face with a man like Anthony Bloom and break through the barrier which exists when faith is professed through books and literature (when you see Anthony Bloom it is impossible to doubt that he has actually felt the presence of Christ). Television could gather together the creative minority who are scattered across the country in small groups, and increase their influence tenfold. Without that, I believe, Russia will long continue to mark time. There needs to be a living, attractive, personal example of moral activity. Unfortunately, the television

provides this extraordinarily rarely and very often pulls in the opposite direction.

I do not consider the situation hopeless, but it is very difficult. We cannot restore the past, and bouts of imperial self-consciousness only do damage. We must understand that a modern nation is not an isolated tribe, but a junction in a world-wide network. We must set ourselves a worthy goal: to become one of the world's major nations, to occupy a leading position in solving world problems, to learn from our neighbours in the hope of surpassing them, to open up new ways of development, and – in the West's interest – to help Russia, help it to become a worthy partner. Some features of Russia and the West complement each other very well.

If the Russian sense of yearning and discontent with the present finds a natural outlet, it can become creative. The stump of the empire is not doomed to rot and decay. Turkey got itself out of a similar situation. Japan, from being an archaic empire, has become a modern nation. Neither is Russia doomed. There is hope for it. But this hope will be in vain unless the luminous energy stored in the creative minority is combined. For now, just one thing gives encouragement: that small sources of light exist and continue to glow.

A talk given at the MRA Centre in Oslo, 20 May 1999