

IS THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP A NARCOTIC INDULGENCE?

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY AND HUMAN GROUPS

BY CAVENDISH MOXON

FELLOWSHIP is a magic word today. In a democratic country it seems the natural way of personal salvation and reform. Catholics, under the influence of the fellowship idea, are constantly insisting on obedience to the Church, the inherent powers of the hierarchy, the corporate life and social witness of Christians, the Body of Christ and the Fellowship of the Mystery.

Protestants are inspired by the belief in fellowship to make strenuous efforts to secure a reunion of all Christians in one fold. The numerous ecclesiastical fellowships for Church reform and the undenominational societies for moral, social, and political purposes, are a witness to men's growing faith in the power of co-operation to advance the cause of truth and goodness. Even liberal churchmen have so far forsaken their wonted method of individual influence as to form unions to advance their aims. Metaphysicians like Josiah Royce make the Beloved Community the object of Christian faith and the center of Christian life. Sociologists like Durkheim find in the fellowship of the clan or group both the primitive and the present meaning of God. Unanimist poets like Jules Romains tell us that "the men who henceforth can draw the souls of groups to converge within themselves will give forth the coming dream." It is true that M. Romains has not yet found a group that is fully divine. "None," he declares, "has had a real consciousness." But he has a confident hope that the day will come when a group shall verily exist as a soul. "On that day," he believes, "there will be a new god upon earth."¹

¹ *The Modern Churchman*, VIII, p. 321.

Since the majority of mankind have a strong desire for the power that comes from sympathetic association, it is important to study the behavior of men in groups in order that this power may be consciously directed towards socially valuable ends. The pre-Freudian psychologists observed the inevitable levelling of the individuals who form a fellowship. It was well known that the idiosyncrasies of impulse are to some extent inhibited by the behavior of the group as a whole. The French student of society, M. Tarde, declared, "One is not born like others, one becomes so" by living in their society. A fellowship always involves imitation, and aims at the propagation of general ideas and collective values. There is much imitation and social suggestion in the loosely-knit society of a city or nation; the gregarious forces are more active in a religious or moral fellowship which is of one heart and mind; there is an almost overwhelming degree of social pressure upon the individual in a closely packed gathering. In the crude and violent behavior of the revival meeting we can clearly see the forces that are hidden behind the more repressed behavior in orderly religious worship.

By his recent work on Group Psychology, Freud has made possible a deeper insight into the satisfactions of fellowship by tracing the influence of unconscious desires within the group. Freud has discovered that the infantile desires for parental protection, providential love, and irresponsible, careless behavior are all satisfied by life in a group. When the conscious individual will is relaxed in obedience to the suggestive force of the group leader, the hidden desires can rise from the depths and combine with similar impulses in the other members in such a way as to issue in nonrational acts. The crowd then regresses from the relatively conscious control of adult individuality to the unconscious control of childish desire. The home was the infantile paradise in the days before self-reliance was necessary. Therefore the home forms the model for all subsequent group life. In the home the parent is loved and worshipped by the infant, who agrees to share the parental affection with the other children in his family, when he learns that it is impossible to exclude his rivals. Moreover, home life was the delightful time of unmoral indulgence of pleasant desires before the period of moral control. The child was content to be economically and morally dependent on the elders who protected it from attacks of strangers or enemies. The first love was the love for the mother and the father; there was no original instinct of sympathy for the family

form of the human herd. Only later appears the love for brothers and sisters, and the repression of rivalry and envious hate. The organized group regresses in its behavior to the family situation. The sympathetic bond of the members to the leader and to one another is largely dominated by the emergence of infantile love within the group. The escape of infantile affects is made easier by the prestige of the group and by the suggestive power of its leaders.

The exact nature of this suggestive force had long been in debate, until Freud and Ferenczi discovered its unconscious roots in the child-parent relation. The substitute for the father or mother authority appears not only in the hypnotist and the faith healer, but also in the crowd leader and the hero. The hypnotized patient and the obedient crowd reanimate their infantile attitude of dependence. It is therefore significant that both hypnotists and popular orators make use of methods that recall the parental authority of infancy. The hypnotist and the orator may use the masterful method that suggests the father or the quiet persuasion of the mother in order to gain the end desired. Since the dominance of the infantile unconscious depends on the suppression of conscious control, hypnotists and orators use repetitions of sights or sounds and gestures that narrow the attention and the rational activity. Suggestion, therefore works most powerfully when a dense crowd has a leader, or when a meeting of disciples is called for a definite purpose. Movement of body and distraction of mind both hinder the process. It is only when the unconscious is wholly free that suggestion may be direct and commands may be plainly made. So long as the conscious will retains some power of censorship over the unconscious and the temporarily submerged part of the self, the suggestions must be indirectly made in order to be successful. The child obeys the parental will so long as it can identify its own will with the commands of the elder. And this identification depends on the child's confidence in the elder's love. The ruthless assertion of authority on the part of a leader, by destroying the childish confidence in his love, calls forth a stubborn resistance to his alien will which now seems like a hostile attack upon the self. In any but the most ecstatically excited meeting, the successful speaker or preacher practises the indirect method of suggestion. By subtly concealing his will to suggest certain feelings, ideas, or acts, he eludes the resistance of his hearers.

The group and the gathering of men, in proportion to their psychological unity, behave in a way that is foreign to the normal life of their members in isolation. The crowd is anonymous and therefore irresponsible. When thus relieved from the checks of prudence and fear, the members of a group are capable of performing heroic or criminal deeds that they dare not do without a collective stimulus. The fellowship may indeed behave better than its units apart, but it usually behaves worse than its members at their best. This is natural, since the unity of the group involves some suppression of the inventive originality and the inspired individuality of its members. M. Gustave le Bon is probably right in saying that the crowd (in a psychological sense) is always inferior in ideas to some, at least, of its members, though it may be superior in the intensity of its feeling and the power of asserting its will. M. Anatole France is true to history and psychology when he allows M. Gamelin, the tender-hearted and kind lover and friend, to be led by the suggestion of the French Revolution to advocate cruel acts of merciless butchery.

In the primitive tribes of Australian aborigines the power and need of fellowship to foster a social and religious consciousness is most clearly seen. The normal life of nomadic and rustic men tends to destroy tribal unity. Hence their need of periodical gatherings of tribes and clans. At these festivals the normal methods of suggestion as practised in Christian churches are insufficient to rouse the dormant social sense of the members. The tribesmen must be roused to a frenzy of feeling and action in order to realize their social unity as the mystical body of their Totem. Without this strong social suggestion by means of fellowship, the tribal cohesion could not survive the long periods of separate family life and the primitive tendency to narcissistic isolation.²

From the lowly religion of these primitive men to the sacramental gatherings of Christian worship, the fellowship has played an important part in preserving and propagating the ideals which the inspired individual has created. Churches and prophets, states and reformers are consequently in perpetual conflict. The group ever seeks to keep the gains mankind has already won: the creative individual alone can win new gains for the world. The inevitable tension between these two factors of history provides the material for endless tragedy and heroism. At the dawn of history the groups are strong and the individuals weak. The dominant social suggestion

² Roheim, *Imagi*, VIII, p. 254.

almost excludes individual initiative, variety, and progress. In the middle ages, when ecclesiasticism was dominant, men readily caught the contagion of the Crusades. Even children could not resist the impulse to make a pilgrimage. When Stephen the shepherd boy of Cloyes in 1212 began a children's crusade, neither the edicts of authorities nor the threats of parents could counter the strong suggestion. Some children who were forcibly detained at home pined away and died because they could not respond to the social pressure which they regarded as a call of conscience to follow their leader.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century had to reckon with the awakening of individuality caused by the Renaissance. Groups and their leaders henceforth found it more difficult to exercise absolute power over the individual. The increasing use of conscious judgment reduced the suggestive power of established societies and limited the influence of their leaders. As a consequence, the modern world is less subject to the appalling psychical epidemics that occurred in the middle ages—the outbreaks of asceticism and flagellation, pilgrimages and crusades, and the hunting of witches and demons.

The scientists and modernists of the present day have gone a step beyond the truth seekers of the Renaissance in their conscious rebellion against the domination of groups and the inadequate parent-substitutes at their head. The spread of scientific education will promote the growth of mental and moral adults: the increase of psychically mature persons will, in its turn, reduce the power of crowds to determine the behavior of infantile men. The next step towards self-reliance and conscious progress will come when the Freudian psychology has been applied to the home and school education of the people. At present the powerful unconscious forces in human groups tend towards fickle and impulsive behavior with little sustained purpose and reasonable will. The crowd or meeting enormously increases the suggestibility of the members present. The unanimous show of hands in a packed meeting may but express the dominating will of a single leader. The power of the group over a rational mind is seen in the case of a young American sceptic who was led by hostile curiosity to join the circle of an open-air revival meeting. Neither his armory of doubts nor his force of will could resist the contagious excitement. The young scoffer soon began to beat his breast and to express the common religious emotion of the worshippers.

A curious result of group feeling, unchecked by critical individual reason and will, is the collective vision of hallucination, which is occasionally recorded at times of religious excitement or collective strain. A notable instance of this was the soldiers' vision of the angels at the battle of Mons. Indeed the contagion of a vision or audition is such that the evidence of five hundred witnesses is not necessarily stronger than the evidence of one. Collective emotion is at the mercy of the primitive unconscious mind, and always seeks pleasure in the old paths and familiar fancies. The fellowship therefore tends to be intolerant of differences, complexities, and novelties. Ideas must be simple and familiar in order to please the group which prefers images or symbolic acts. Even in the French Revolution we see the tendency of the group to become a cult with a goddess, with a belief in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, and with leaders to increase men's faith, to sustain their hope, and to destroy the enemies of the people. The explicitly religious fellowship exhibits the power of suggestion at its height. In a large or ancient society the dogmatic forms, ascetic disciplines, and symbolic rites tend to fix the attention, to control the thought, and to rule the will.

Are we then to conclude that the practice of fellowship in groups is condemned by psychology as unworthy of a place in civilized life? Do the facts drive us to an exclusive individualism? Certainly not. Society is indispensable for the making of men. Life without human fellowship is a contradiction in terms. Social intercourse is an essential means to individual growth in knowledge and power. But psychology has proved the practice of fellowship to be like alcohol in its narcotic effects upon the highest powers of conscious personality. Consequently fellowship must not be indulged in blindly lest it strangle initiative and weaken resistance to the infantile part of the self that is stimulated by the group.

Children are ready to accept almost any suggestion, and they retain their infantile impressions for life. Children should therefore be given more fellowship with children than with adults in order to develop their self-expression and will power. The aim of childish fellowship should be to prevent precocious development and over stimulation of the senses of the imagination. After the home, school is the chief formative fellowship for children. Yet the school, instead of educating children to resist the crushing domination of the group, often tends to produce a life-long habit of uncritical subjection and dependence. As if the boy's fear of his fellows was not already strong enough, Mr. Cecil Rhodes made popularity

a recommendation for his scholarships. In view of the atrocities that have been produced by esprit de corps, it is perilous to drill the children into unconscious conformity with group conduct as if it had divine authority.

With regard to the fellowship of adults. No rule can be made to apply to all alike, because all differ in mental age and symbolic need. The person who is naturally inclined to independent activity is in danger of ignoring the traditional values of fellowship. Such a man does well to come down from his lonely height at times, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra and sink himself in fellowship. He will soon prove his power to emerge and rise again in full possession of his soul. But fellowship is like a dangerous drug to the person who is naturally passive and obedient. The frequent indulgence in the enervating emotions of group gatherings uses the energy that is needed for a strong grasp of the real world and its tasks.

From this brief review of the psychological facts about fellowship we conclude that group emotion tends to inhibit the action of the conscious will, to let loose primitive impulses, and to discourage intellectual activity. The group has no higher soul than the psychically adult individual in its midst. Indeed the unity of the fellowship tends to an artificial suppression of personal excellence to the average level of traditional thought, conventional feeling, and primitive impulse. No fellowship as a whole ever makes a discovery or a moral advance. Not even humanity with a capital H can be regarded as essentially superior to the best individuals it contains. The development of the race depends on a healthy tension between groups and their members. No known group, nation or race is a perfect embodiment of human life. Mankind is in the making, and the growing points are the finest specimens of men and women at a given moment. The practice of fellowship is only justified insofar as it contributes to the development of mental and moral adulthood, and involves no sacrifice of the highest persons to the lowly passions of the mob. Groups that are formed to satisfy the temporary desires of men dissolve when these desires are satisfied. Uniformity means death: variety and schism are the signs of life. A rigidly organized world-state might lead to racial decay. The clearest indication of vigorous life is man's creative will to break up and remake his fellowships in order to enrich his personal life and to contribute to racial development.