



The Oxford Group

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To the Editor, The Herald:

It is no easy task to compress into a comparatively small space one's impression of the latest Evangelistic Movement, known as the Oxford Group Movement. Like a sudden gale of refreshing power, it appears to have swept through, not merely over, a section of the English-speaking community of Montreal. Like a gale, nature's pruner, it has disturbed, if not removed, much that has been either dead or unsound in the faith and life of many. It has, doubtless, revived the spiritual faculties, tested the faith, and challenged the sincerity of both professing and non-professing Christians. No one, who in these troublous times "searches the horizons for signs of hope" could fail to be impressed by the righteous commotion this Movement has stirred and the joyful solace it has brought to many.

There is little that is new in this Movement judging from its methods and its emphases. Its methods are apparently based upon the evidential value and impelling power of "a maximum experience of Christ" articulated in terms of personal experience. "What we know and love we cannot but communicate" or share. Its emphasis is upon "divine guidance" "complete surrender to Christ" and service in "life changing." It takes the uncompromising line that every Christian ought to be a "life changer," and that the thing that keeps the nominal Christian from being the force he ought to be is simply sin in his own life, and nothing else. Its place of witness is not in mission-hall, street corner, or even churches, but in the attractive environment of private drawing rooms, ballrooms and reception rooms of hotels.

Like the Parisian artist who startled even Paris by his daring in painting the Christ in modern costume and presenting Him as standing in the midst of the follies, jostled by the gay and frivolous crowd—this Group introduces Him, with intriguing ease of manner, and absence of self-consciousness into the rendezvous of ease and pleasure. The unusualness of such daring contributed to its appeal. The Movement, with its unique method of personal evangelism, can be criticized; but the critics are charged with the task of accounting for its unmistakable results. It presents the punctilious theologian, philosopher, psychologist and even psychoanalyst, with challenging problems. It is certainly a challenge to the ecclesiasticism which is still frightened of the individual who claims complete liberty in looking after his soul. While it has, temporarily, and we hope permanently, given to many, a deeper sense of sin, a greater desire for holiness, a new zeal for service and dedication, and a missionary enthusiasm not before experienced, it has almost rudely shocked "smug" Christians, whose worship had tended to develop into formalism, to see the richness and depth of the ministration of their Church, which hitherto they had overlooked, and it may cause them more fully to appreciate their practical application in every day life.

While the Group may disclaim the importance of having a "common" theology it was inevitable that "theology" and even "dogma" should appear in its synthetic witness, without detracting from the effectiveness of the appeal.

I feel constrained to humbly offer a word of warning about "guidance" upon which so much stress was laid. It was Pere Grou who said "Nothing is more dangerous or more exposed to delusion than to mistake every impulse for a divine inspiration," and we shall most certainly go wrong if we take for the will of God or the voice of God any stray imaginations, which happen to rise up from our heart or pass through our mind. Absolute trust in the reality of divine guidance is a mark of spirituality everywhere; and spirituality is no shallow thing, but the sure and certain fruit of a disciplined life conformed to the likeness of Christ.

For the fresh vision, correction and guidance the Group Movement has brought sincere Christians cannot but be grateful.

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