

# GUIDANCE IN MEDITATION

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## BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM ON NEW OXFORD MOVEMENT

Dr. Barnes, who has been Bishop of Birmingham for nearly eight years, held his first visitation yesterday.

In the course of his charge, delivered in the Cathedral, the BISHOP said that the application of historico-critical methods to the New Testament was leading to conclusions which, if substantiated, would lead to far more serious breaches with traditional belief than any which had yet occurred. Ultimately, whether they liked them or not, the conclusions of experts would prevail.

Whenever faith had died down, revival had come through a conviction that it was possible to feel God's influence and to be led by Him. In the "Oxford Groups" movement to-day belief that God's guidance could be reached by meditation and surrender was fundamental. They ought to emphasize, far more than they had done, the fact that men could feel God's presence and receive His guidance. Guidance, sharing, and discipline were three notes, as it were, of the new Oxford movement. In the message of which they were the key-words there was, it might be fairly objected, nothing new. What was new was that men and women—especially young men and women—with the new scientific outlook and often with acceptance of the negative conclusions of ultra-modern New Testament criticism, turned to meditative quiet, and through it found religious certainty. To them God came. In their experience they found renewal of life. And then Church activities seemed to be a highly conventionalized picture, remote from actuality. Worship as they had endured it seemed dry, artificial, barren, because from it the quickening power of the Spirit was absent.

He was concerned to insist that in meditation, or in meditative quiet, they could get God's guidance. The more natural their meditation, the better. If it could be among the unspoiled beauty of nature they could rejoice at their good fortune. But let them not confuse true meditation with half-sleepy indulgence in tobacco; and they must test the guidance which came that they might be certain that it was of God. From true meditation there sprang the necessity for self-discipline. A conventional discipline was, he believed, useless. But they must regularly force themselves to some task that was hard or unpleasant if they were to gain that self-control which prevented meditation from leading to a dangerous emotionalism.

Declaring his dislike of religious medievalism because it was "stuffy," Dr. Barnes said he was convinced that, sooner or later, not only must our liturgy be revised to conform to a more natural approach to God, but also our ritual and its setting must be radically altered.