

WHY I BELIEVE IN
THE OXFORD GROUP

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE OXFORD GROUP

BY

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FOREWORD

I COUNT it a privilege to be allowed to write a brief Foreword to a book written by one who first came into direct personal touch with the Oxford Group at the House Party in Oxford in the summer of 1933 from which my own identification with the Movement is dated.

The titles of the eight chapters in which the author sets out the grounds of his belief in the Oxford Group, I find almost identical with those which have led me to adopt a similar position. I am convinced that there are thousands of men and women within the Church, who have that same background of a Christian home and upbringing and of years spent in Christian service that we possessed, who may find through the Oxford Group the recognition of the causes of ineffective work

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and the secret of the power by which others may be won to the whole-hearted service of God.

I am personally thankful to the Groups for the way in which they put up the challenge of the "Four Absolutes" to everyone alike, without respect of persons. I had previously some conception of the meaning of "unselfishness," but after following the advice which was given, to look up in a good English dictionary the word "self" and study its numerous compounds, I had a fresh revelation of its far-reaching implications. I commend this advice to others with the full conviction that they will find that it leaves no room for any lack of humility. True we may fail and fall far short of our ideal, but for one who honestly makes "absolute unselfishness" his ideal, it must mean nothing less than that "self-emptying" which found its highest expression in our Lord and must be the very foundation of a character which is fashioned after His likeness.

I welcome the publication of this book

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addressed as it is especially to Christian workers. I do not question their sincerity, but often there is some problem in their lives which must be faced up to and solved before God can use them as "life-changers," or some strain of pride and self-assertion creating a barrier which must be broken down before fellowship and team work can be achieved.

May 3rd, 1934

Foss CALCUTTA.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is a small thank-offering. It is a book of personal witness to Christ ; witness to what He has done for me, and to what I have seen Him do for others, including many of my own friends. Good news clamours to be proclaimed. "We cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen."

I make no claim to any special attainment, nor to any special right to testify. I have climbed but a little way, and that little has shown me the towering heights still waiting to be scaled. But I am one of thousands for whom God has made life new through the working of His Spirit in the Oxford Group, and I would like to share with others some-

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thing of this new experience in the hope that, if they have not already had first-hand experience of the Group (e.g. in one of the House Parties), they may be encouraged to seek it.

We are fallible men and women, all of us ; and we often dishonour by our lives Christ and His cause. But I am convinced that, in spite of all blots due to human frailty, God is using this Movement mightily for the changing of individual lives, the quickening of His Church, and the renovation of society. It is quite true that God fulfils Himself in many ways. But I tell that which I know from my own experience.

The title must not be interpreted to mean that my belief in the Oxford Group has taken the place of my belief in the Church's creeds. All that follows will show that this is not so. Rather, my belief in the creeds, and above all my belief in the Holy Spirit, has become far deeper and more vivid through what I have seen and experienced in this Fellowship. For I have seen God at work here as never before.

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I write for all classes of people, but specially for clergy and church workers. We folk need desperately in our lives this renewal which God is giving to many through the Group. We reject this opportunity at our peril ; for it is of God.

Christa Seva Sangha, Poona.

April, 1934.

FIRST REASON

BECAUSE IT HAS MADE OLD THINGS NEW

My first reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that through my contact with it many of the truths which I have long believed as a Christian, and for the past 25 years have, as an ordained minister, taught to others, have become filled with a vital meaning beyond what they possessed before. The old things have become new.

The Oxford Group has no new Gospel to proclaim. I wish for no other Gospel than that which the Apostles taught in the first Christian age, and which the Christian Church has taught from their days until ours. That Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to all who believe" and no new Gospel can take its place. But if any way can be found

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by which that old Gospel can take on new life and reality for the men and women of our generation, and prove itself again to be the power of God unto salvation to multitudes for whom it had become dead and meaningless, then I can only rejoice and thank God. And this is what I have seen happening through the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group has no new creeds to teach. It desires no creeds other than the Creeds of the Church, wrought out of the vital Christian experience of the early centuries and confirmed by the multitudinous experience of later generations. But I welcome any movement which can make the experience enshrined within the Creeds live again for the men of to-day with something of its pristine glory and power ; and this is what I have seen this Movement able to accomplish.

The Oxford Group has no new church or sect to establish. It has not even any organisation which one can join. It is no new society. It has no register of names, no rules,

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no membership. If it had, I should not condemn it for that, any more than I condemn the Church of England Men's Society or the Mothers' Union ; but I should think twice before having any association with it, because for my own part I have always been hesitant about multiplying loyalties, and have felt that my duty as a member of the Christian Church really embraced and included all other loyalties. But if I find a great company of people in all the various Christian denominations, held together by no organisation, rules or membership, but only by the spiritual bond of a common self-surrender to Christ and a common determination to win the world to His allegiance, and exhibiting a quality of fellowship which gives me a new vision of what the Church of Christ might be, then I feel drawn to associate myself with such people, wherever they may be, finding my loyalty to the Church only deepened thereby. And this has been my experience in connection with the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group has no new worship to

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institute. It has no worship apart from the worship of the Church. It is for the Church to direct and maintain its own worship, as it has done through the centuries, and not for any one group within it. But if there may come within the Church such a revival of spiritual life that Christians begin to understand afresh the meaning of prayer, and those for whom church services have become dead and lifeless (including not a few of those whose duty it is to conduct them) begin to worship God in spirit and in truth, then, once again, I must needs welcome it with thankfulness. And such a revival I have seen through the work of the Oxford Group.

There is, therefore, in a true sense, nothing new in the message of the Oxford Group, and the question naturally arises—"Then why start it? Why not be content with the Church as it is?" To which the answer simply is, that no one has "started" it but God, and God has "started" this great revival because He is *not* "content with the Church as it is," nor, for that matter, are most of those who

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have the honour of the Church at heart. The Church of God's vision and purpose is the Bride of Christ, without spot or blemish : the Body of Christ, through which He desires to work in the world far more widely and powerfully than He could ever do of old through the limited body which He wore on earth ; His instrument for throwing down the strongholds of Satan everywhere, and bringing in the Kingdom of God in the world. But the Church as we know it is terribly handicapped in this work by its own divisions, by its lack of an adequate supply of outstanding leaders with vision and spiritual power, and, above all, by the low level of its spiritual life and the fewness (in proportion to its total membership) of those whose lives radiate any really compelling witness to the truths they profess. So the Church has proved inadequate to cope with the situation which has followed the Great War. I have no wish to be pessimistic, nor to exaggerate, as some have done, the extent of the Church's failure. We have amongst us, thank God, Christian leaders

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whose voice is heard in the councils of the nations : the influence of the Church to-day is a growing influence, and one far less negligible than it was a generation ago. But it still remains true that, faced with such post-war problems as the economic depression, the continued international rivalry which hinders disarmament, and, above all, the widespread materialism and pursuit of pleasure following the strain of the earlier years, the Church has not seemed able to deal more effectively with the difficulties of the situation than our statesmen who have wrestled with these problems.

But man's extremity is God's opportunity ; and the present revival of religion which is taking place in many countries through the instrumentality of the Oxford Group is due to no human origin, but is simply a fresh working of God's Spirit in the world—one of those "times of refreshment" which at different epochs He initiates in answer to man's need and prayer. That is all that is new ; but that is everything. Through the

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present revival the old challenge is being heard again ; the tide of faith is beginning to flow ; the springs of new hope and joy and love which made vital the first years of the Church's life are being again unsealed. Those three weeks which I spent at the Oxford House Party in July, 1933, made me feel as though I had stepped straight into the Acts of the Apostles. In that astonishing fellowship the spirit of God was at work as of old, convicting of sin and working miracles of new life, day after day. Through the months which have followed since, the impressions of those three weeks have been deepened, and the whole of the New Testament has come to be filled with a new meaning. I know now that those fair days of the early dawn of the Church's life, to which I had looked back as to some beautiful idyll of the past which might never be recaptured, can live again for us in all their freshness and power through the Spirit of God Who makes all things new.

SECOND REASON

BECAUSE OF ITS UNCOMPROMISING MORAL CHALLENGE

My second reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that it sets forth the whole moral challenge of Christ in a more uncompromising way than I had seen before, and so brings home a new conviction of sin, essential to real moral progress.

I speak from my own experience when I say that it is lamentably easy to shirk or ignore the full implications of the Christian challenge. I know now that until I came in touch with the Oxford Group I was fairly consistently doing this. I can see now (though I was not aware of it at the time) that I did not really wish even God to convict me too deeply of sin, that I did not wish to be convicted at all by my fellow-men, and was

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usually full of resentments and self-justifications when any criticisms were made.

The reason is obvious. Such criticisms are wounding to our self-esteem. Most of us have a fine conceit of ourselves. In particular those who (like myself) have suffered, at one time or another, from an inferiority complex, have built up, by way of compensation, a very pleasing fantasy, far removed from reality, of what we conceive ourselves to be ; and anything which tends to cast doubt upon this fantasy, and reveal to us another and truer self, is so extremely painful that generally we will have none of it. We stifle promptly any answering voice of self-accusation within. We feel ourselves hurt by these cold blasts of unkind criticism, and draw closer around us the comforting wrappings of our own self-flattery.

That, at least, was my own condition : and not only did I resent my friends' criticisms of faults they saw in me to which I was blind (criticisms which, just because I resented them, were not often made) but I took care

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to hide from them as far as possible other faults known to me but unseen by them. I went about amongst them wearing a mask, knowing that there were things in my life of which I preferred they should be ignorant. I had achieved a certain reputation in Christian circles in India, specially as the founder of a new inter-racial Brotherhood ; and, though I knew there was precariously little to justify the reputation, I enjoyed being put upon a pedestal and looked up to as a superior person. Although I was experiencing moral defeat in my own life, I found it decidedly comforting to be thought better than I was.

Now one of the outstanding merits of the Oxford Group is that it takes no one for granted, not even an Archbishop or a Metropolitan. It will let off no one who comes under its influence from facing up to the full challenge of Christ. Its four moral standards are now well known—absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love ; and these are pressed

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home with a searching insistence, not in vague generalities, but in detailed application to every department of life. Men and women of our modern world, for whom sin had become an obsolete theological superstition, have been unexpectedly and painfully forced to face up to it again in their own lives as coming in a hundred ways between them and God or between them and their fellow-men.

But this facing up to sin is not allowed to stop with oneself or with secret confession to God. It is, no doubt, sufficiently painful to see oneself, for the first time, rather more completely in one's true colours, and to confess one's condition, so seen, to God. But something yet more costly is demanded before the foundations of a new and victorious life can be laid, and that is a frank confession also to our fellow-men. Absolute honesty demands that we should no longer go on wearing a mask. If we still desire that others should think better than the truth about us, that is a sufficient proof that we have not yet reached a full or effective desire to be done with our

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sins. Once we have reached such a full desire, we shall be transparently sincere about it and not care who knows what our past life has been.

But here let me guard against a possible misunderstanding. I have come across many people without first-hand experience of the Oxford Group who believe that, if they attend a Group House Party, they will be expected to get up in an open meeting and make confession of their sins. This is not so. The confession, to be full and effective, must often go into considerable detail, and this would not be wise in an open meeting. What is advised, for those wishing to make such a full confession, is that they should go to someone of really consecrated life, who has himself found the way of victory through Christ (men going usually to men, and women to women), and there in private unburden themselves by a frank sharing of all those things which they can see to be standing in the way of an effective surrender of their lives to God. When after such surrender they find new peace and

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victory, they may then bear public witness, not so much to their own sins as to Christ's love in giving them deliverance.

Many members of those churches in which sacramental confession is practised have found this peace and deliverance through confessing their sins to God before a priest, and receiving that absolution which he is authorised to pronounce. And, provided that the priest be a man of truly surrendered life, and a wise spiritual guide (as all entrusted with such work should be), no better way could be found for casting off the burden of past sin and entering upon a new life. Those, however, who make use of this means would do well to bear two things in mind. In the first place, it is easy for the penitent to rely too much upon the seal of secrecy. For the priest the obligation of secrecy is absolute and must on no account be broken, and there is danger, in consequence, that the penitent may be willing to confess to him *solely because* the disclosure can go no further, and without having that complete sorrow for sin which

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implies the willingness that any should know and the dislike of a spurious reputation. I am impelled to say this from my own experience ; for I was long making use myself of sacramental confession without gaining the victory I longed for, and I now realise that the fault was, not indeed in the system of the church, but in myself, in that I was willing to shed my mask at the time of confession but don it again as soon as I went back among my fellow-men. It was only when I came to see the unreality of this, and began to desire both to know myself and to be known by others for what I am, that the way was opened for the fuller victory.

The second point to be borne in mind by those who are accustomed to make their confession before a priest is that, whilst what I have said above as to its value within its own proper sphere remains true, it needs to be supplemented by the daily "sharing" which is practised in the Oxford Group in regard to any backslidings or falls by the way. Much depends, in the case of such falls, on

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immediate sharing with others, thus arresting the temptation before it has time to gather power. It cannot wait for our next visit to the priest, for in the meantime other lapses may have followed. But the close spiritual intimacy which exists in the Group amongst those who are seeking to live lives daily surrendered to Christ for His Service affords this opportunity of daily sharing, which not only nips temptation in the bud but also enables them to keep on terms of transparent honesty with their fellow-men. Thus, even where sacramental confession is practised, I would urge the need for "sharing" also.

A further point in the moral challenge which the Oxford Group presents is that known as restitution, viz. putting right, as far as in our power, wrongs committed in the past, e.g. restoring goods wrongly appropriated, confessing and making amends for acts of dishonesty or injury or uncharity towards others. Such acts of restitution sometimes have a surprising effect upon the lives of those towards whom they are made ; but,

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whether they have such effect or not, it is only by making them, where God guides us so to do, that we can clear our own consciences and give solid proof of a changed intention. This, then, was something of a new moral challenge which came to me through touch with the Oxford Group, the demand for a more searching scrutiny of my own conduct in the light of Christ's absolute standard ; the demand that if I desired victory in my own life, I should begin by laying aside all pretence and be willing for my friends to know the worst of me ; and the demand that I should make such restitution as I could for wrongs done to others in the past.

I will not pretend that I have yet made a full answer to this challenge, but at least I have made a beginning ; and this beginning has already brought such wonderful results that I am encouraged to explore further a road which, though often steep and difficult, rewards one with a view of wide horizons and the bracing refreshment of mountain air.

THIRD REASON

BECAUSE IT EXHIBITS THE MIRACULOUS EFFECTS OF COMPLETE SELF-SURRENDER TO CHRIST

My third reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that I have seen, in my own experience and in that of others, how that complete self-surrender to Christ which the Group teaches and practises produces infallibly the miracle of changed lives.

The full and frank confession of all one's sins and problems to another is often the first step to a new life. The release experienced through the sharing of the burden is sometimes immense, and is an essential pre-requisite for the cure of the trouble. But it is not itself the cure. That can only come when the self with all its burden has been handed over entirely to Christ.

It is here that the psycho-analyst, unless he

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be a man of religious faith, so often fails. He can elicit the confession of sins and difficulties of which I have spoken, and so help his patient to that sense of release which confession brings. Often he can help him to see more deeply into the root-cause of his trouble. But too often the synthesis is less successful than the analysis. The delicate machine is taken to pieces, and the trouble which hinders its working is brought to light; but the attempt to reconstruct it fails. Sometimes the analyst palliates the sins confessed, and even advises their continuance for the sake of mental peace, thereby creating a new conflict between his patient's conscience and the advice rendered. Or the analyst endeavours to effect a transference by the patient of the whole emotional complex to himself—a device which only too often lacks reality and effectiveness. I have in my own recent experience come across a number of cases of people whose trouble the psycho-analyst had only been able to alleviate but not cure, who through surrender of their lives to Christ gained swift and lasting release.

Miraculous Effects of Complete Self-Surrender

What, then, is meant by this surrender? It implies a recognition that we have failed by our own efforts to overcome our sins and live the life that we desire to live, and a consequent abandonment of self-effort and committal of ourselves with all our sins and problems completely into the charge of Christ.

Christ is the one Person Who has fully succeeded in overcoming temptation and living the ideal life. That perfect human life of His was consummated by a perfect death. Through His sufferings and death the gold of His character was put to the final test in the fiercest of fires, and emerged in unsullied purity. In the seeming defeat of the Cross He achieved unchallengeable victory. And, because He rose triumphant over death and is alive to-day, that victorious life of His can be ours if we hand ourselves over completely to Him and give Him the freedom of our personality.

But just here is the crux. It is precisely this complete handing over which we so often fail to do.

Once again let me instance my own

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experience. I have for years known in theory, and taught to others, all that I have written above ; but in practice I was still fighting my own battle with temptation instead of letting Christ do it. True, I used to ask for God's help in prayer, but I still bore the brunt of the fight myself. It was I in the centre of the picture—I fighting and God helping me, instead of I acknowledging defeat and letting Christ fight the battle for me.

For defeat there was, and always must be if I rely on myself for victory. By the force of my own will, and with the help of prayer, I could keep from falling for a time ; but always, sooner or later, temptation would return with a force too strong for me, and get me down again. Now I have learnt, in face of temptation, "to let go" ; viz. to give up my own futile efforts and simply surrender myself with the temptation into the hands of Christ, and He wins the victory for me.

This has been to me an amazing new experience, and has made Christ more real to me than ever before. Even now I have

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only advanced a very little way along the road, and cannot claim to be living a fully surrendered life. But there has been a new experience of victory. Temptation will always, I imagine, be with us to the end. But this I can say. Some old and powerful temptations have passed almost completely out of my life, and others are losing their force. And this has been accomplished, not by me at all, but simply by Christ for me, since the day, nearly two years ago, that I made a new and fuller surrender of my life to Him, a surrender which day by day I renew in the time of morning quiet. This full surrender of one's life to Christ is no light thing to take in hand. It means that from that day forward all that we have or are is His, and at His disposal. Our time, our talents, our instincts, our intellect, our bodily powers, our possessions, are all to be placed at His service. We are to give up planning our own lives, and accept His plan for our life instead ; and we are to be prepared for any sacrifice that He asks of us, however costly.

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Such a surrender should be sealed by a simple and deliberate act made in front of at least one witness, after facing up to all that it involves ; just as a woman, having resolved after full consideration to accept for life the man who has asked her hand, seals that resolve in a simple act of will, done before witnesses, when she says to him : “ I take thee to be my wedded husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death us do part.”

In the course of one short year I have seen large numbers of lives, including some among my most intimate friends, quite transformed through being handed over in this way to the control of Christ ; and I have known in my own experience how much of the struggle, the strain and the stress passes away when we let Him take charge. The old beliefs, “ Salvation through the Cross,” “ justification by faith, not works,” have come to life in vivid and startling ways through the miracle of changed lives. The old has been made new by the Spirit of God working through the instrumentality of the Oxford Group.

FOURTH REASON

BECAUSE IT HAS MADE DIVINE GUIDANCE MORE REAL

My fourth reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that through my contact with them and attention to their teaching my belief in God's guidance has been deepened and my dependence upon it strengthened.

Perhaps I need hardly say that I have long believed and taught the necessity of seeking God's direction if we would make our lives in the highest sense a success, for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are God's Sons"; but I have received a great deal of fresh light on this subject from the teaching of the Oxford Group.

First, I have come to realise in a new way that God is willing to guide us in small things as well as great. God's plan for our lives is

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perfect, not only in its broad outline but in its detail too. God's design for the natural world extends to the tiniest detail of insect, plant and flower, and nothing in human lives is too small for His thought and care. Actually the distinction between small and great events is a false one. Big doors swing on little hinges. A fault in some tiny portion of a machine may throw the whole out of gear. In our own lives we know how results of vital import may issue from some event which we regard as trifling. A man is prevented by some seemingly trivial cause from catching his train, and goes by a later one, in which he meets for the first time the girl who afterwards becomes his wife. A woman pays a "chance" visit to a friend's house, perhaps because rain has come on and prevented an intended outing. There she meets a missionary from India who thrills her with accounts of her work in that land. She throws in her lot with her; the whole direction of her life is changed; and numbers of lives in India come under the influence of her work.

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Thus I have come to see God's plan as comprehending the *whole* of life, and perfect in all its detail ; and I have come to realise more clearly that God, having this plan, must desire to show it to us ; and that our real happiness and usefulness will depend, not on scheming out our own lives, but discovering *God's* plan and following that.

In the second place, I have come to understand better the *conditions* of discovering God's plan. The first and essential condition is that, having completely surrendered our lives to God's direction and control, we should renew that surrender morning by morning as the work of each new day begins. The chief hindrance to receiving guidance is self-will in some form or other in our own lives, preventing the whole-hearted acceptance of God's will. The chief condition of receiving it is such a surrender as implies complete readiness for whatever God may ask of us. We cannot have God's guidance on approval, accepting so much of it as we find pleasant. We must

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be willing for any task and any sacrifice. Then God will reveal His plan.

A second condition of receiving God's guidance is the living of a disciplined life, the life of men under orders, available to God at any hour of the night or day. The Oxford Group stresses particularly the discipline of early rising, in order that there may be ample and unhurried leisure for the quiet time with God before the tasks of the day begin. Of this more anon. But the whole of life must be under discipline ; for without orderliness we cannot expect orders.

A third condition of receiving guidance is that we should have the interests of the Kingdom of God at heart, and be intent on the King's business. If we are not, our times of quiet will probably degenerate into day-dreaming ; for what activity will there be for God to direct ? You can't guide a car which is standing still. On the other hand, the faster a ship is travelling the more responsive it is to the helm ; and, if we are all out for getting God's Work done, He will

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show us what it is that He wants us to do.

Then, thirdly, I have come to realise more clearly the *ways* in which God guides us. Some of these ways have long been familiar to me—His guidance of us through our conditions and circumstances; His guidance through thoughts which come to us from meditation on the Scripture. What has become much more vivid and real to me through my touch with the Group is the way in which God gives us direct intimation of His Will as we wait upon Him in silence and listen to what He will say. The morning quiet time has come to mean to me a time when I seek to know God's plan for my day—when I come to Him for orders. After a time of quiet adoration and thanksgiving and the renewal of my self-surrender for His service, I ask Him for His directions, and listen receptive for them. Normally they come to me through my reason and conscience—not through making my mind a blank but through using my mind for quiet thinking and asking

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God to direct those thoughts. I think of the tasks already planned under God's guidance for that day and I ask Him to show me how He would have them done. I think of those parts of the day for which no work is yet planned, and ask how He would have them filled. As thoughts come, and the tasks are shown, I write them down in order that I may remember them and make sure that they are carried out; and I find that this writing helps also in keeping my mind from wandering. So there may come to be a page filled with the day's orders—people to be seen, letters to be written, other jobs to be carried out, perhaps a confession to be made or a wrong to be put right. And there will be further messages which come from meditation on the Bible, which also finds its natural place in this quiet hour.

Sometimes directions may come from God in a more immediate and unexpected way, not so much through our reason as through the deeper faculty of intuition. I cannot claim for myself much experience of such

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direct intuitions ; but many amongst my friends have had them, and they have been the occasion of many important decisions and developments in the work of the Oxford Group. Such direct and unlooked-for commands from God are common in Scripture, and we should not be surprised at their occurrence now. If we are at God's command, He may just as well tell us to go to a particular place at a particular time for a particular piece of work, as He sent Philip by the desert road to Gaza to meet the eunuch, or Ananias to the house of Judas in Straight Street to restore and baptise Saul.

If it be asked how we can be sure of distinguishing God's directions from messages out of our own consciousness or dictated by our own desires, I would reply that at first this is no doubt difficult, just as it is hard for the untrained ear to distinguish good music from bad. But just as with training we learn to recognise good music as soon as we hear it, so, as our spiritual sense is developed by ever more intimate friendship with God,

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we become more quickly and surely sensitive to His Voice. "My sheep hear My Voice."

Till there is this sureness of perception, we shall do well to "check" our guidance, as the Group advises, particularly in important decisions, by the teaching of the New Testament, by the standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and by the guidance of friends spiritually in advance of us. Indeed, at any time the submission of our own leadings to such friends for their confirmation of them, if there be any doubt, is an act of humility and a wise safeguard.

I have found, through all this new light on the matter of God's guidance, a wholly new sense of life being under God's direction—of His plan being worked out rather than my own. I have found that the work He allots me to do day by day is just the right amount for me to accomplish, and that there is no longer the overburdened sense of impossible tasks, and incessant rush. I have found that the new conviction that the tasks are not mine but His—and that He will

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accomplish them, not I—takes away the old strain and stress, and leaves one free to be relaxed and quiet, and therefore a more usable instrument in God's hand. I have found, too, that I need not be anxious about the means of carrying out the tasks assigned ; for, if God guides, He will also provide.

Thus I can see already, though as yet I have progressed so small a way upon the road, that in a life lived definitely under God's direction there are infinitely greater possibilities of happiness, usefulness and effectiveness than in one which we laboriously, and often vainly, endeavour to direct along the ways of our own choosing.

FIFTH REASON

BECAUSE IT HAS SHOWN ME THE POSSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

My fifth reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that I have found amongst them a quality of Christian fellowship beyond what I have found elsewhere—a fellowship which has given me a new vision of what the Christian Church was meant to be, and yet may be.

Before coming in touch with the Group I had had many opportunities of experiencing Christian fellowship. It has been my privilege to be associated frequently and in many connections with keen Christian workers, and I have known the close bonds which have been woven through common work and a common loyalty. I have had, I suppose, more than the average lot of such happy co-operation

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with others, and it has meant much in my life.

The fellowship which I have met in the Oxford Group has been along the lines of these earlier experiences, but it has transcended them all. Let me try to explain why.

The Group, as I have already said, lays great stress upon the complete surrender of one's whole life to Christ, and the daily renewal of that surrender, with desire that Christ's Spirit should hold unchallenged sway. There is, as explained above, no membership of the Group ; but, in so far as it is possible to speak of being "in the Group" in the sense of meeting together with others for spiritual fellowship, this daily self-surrender and waiting upon the Spirit's guidance is the essential condition. I do not claim that all those "in the Group" are living fully surrendered lives ; and I should, of course, be foremost to recognise that many who have not formally associated themselves with the Group are living such lives. But it remains, I think, true that the stress which the Group

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lays upon this daily surrender and waiting upon God as the essential condition does create a peculiarly close and intimate fellowship between those who practise it. I have known the same kind of fellowship with *individuals* not openly associated with the Group who are yet living this kind of life ; but it is only in the Group that I have found it existing amongst a whole company of people ; and there is in it, when so found, something peculiarly impressive and convincing. It has about it a quality which is quite different from the good fellowship met with in other companies of people associated for a common cause. And it has become to me now quite evident that this peculiar quality is due to the fact that the fellowship has not been created by men but by Christ. No one has started this fellowship, as men start human societies. No one has been invited to join it. No one has tried to bring people together in it or create good feeling amongst them. Christ has created it by drawing men and women to Himself and leading them to give

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their lives to Him ; and in so doing they find themselves inevitably drawn in and through Him into intimate fellowship with one another.

One of the most characteristic things about this Group fellowship is the "sharing" which takes place in the inner Group meetings. In order that there may be no barriers to full fellowship, all are transparently honest with one another. Faults are frankly confessed, even though they may sometimes appear trivial. What is equally important, it is regarded as a duty to point out in love the faults of others, if we see them (instead of telling them to others behind their backs), and this, so far from being resented, is welcomed, since we must needs desire to be rid of anything which makes us less effective for God's service, and often others can see such faults better than we can see them ourselves.

Thus those in the Group fellowship hold each other up to the highest standard. To refuse to do this would be culpably to let one another down. The effect of such frank and loving mutual criticism is such as those who

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have never experienced it may find hard to understand. It does away with barriers, if they exist, and creates a peculiarly close friendship. Criticisms harboured in the mind, or deepened through repetition to others, inevitably produce alienation. Criticisms made openly in love, and thankfully accepted, produce mutual respect and affection. The knowledge that no unuttered criticisms are being harboured in another's mind creates a refreshing sense of confidence and trust ; and the challenge of uttered criticisms is delightfully bracing to the moral sense, when they are offered not to hurt but to heal.

It naturally follows from all this that there comes to be amongst all those associated with the Group fellowship the family affection of brothers and sisters ; and because all are brothers and sisters in the family of Christ it has become a customary, though not universal, practice in the Group to address one another by the names by which we were baptised into that family. The free use of Christian names, particularly between men

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and women, has been criticised by those outside (and certainly is contrary to ordinary conventions). But the very unconventionality of it helps to bring into prominence the principle on which it is based, which I have described above ; and the employment of the Christian name from the first as between men and women has the advantage of sweeping away at one fell swoop the danger of a certain sentimentality apt to be associated with the restriction of its use to a certain degree of affectionate intimacy. I confess that the practice jarred on me a little at first, but I now believe it to be sound and wholesome. It is not, however, a matter of great consequence. What matters is the relationship of brothers and sisters in Christ for which it stands ; and I have found in the Group the fellowship of a true family—a fellowship which breaks down in a marvellous way barriers of race, class, sex, and all differences arising from variety of education, background and upbringing, so that “ there is no Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus.”

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I think that if I were asked what is the biggest gain which has come to me through contact with the Oxford Group, I should reply that it is the discovery of this quality of fellowship. In my personal life it has meant much, particularly in regard to continuance in the Christian way. I have experienced many times of spiritual uplift in my own life, but on all previous occasions they lacked adequate basis for continuance; and, as the emotions or impulses behind them lost their power, tended gradually to wane. But the new uplift which has come to me from God through the instrumentality of the Oxford Group has increased, rather than waned, with the passing of the months, and I believe this is mainly because of this new fellowship on a "sharing" basis to which it has admitted me. In such a fellowship one is kept from going back, because any return of the old temptations is at once arrested by being promptly shared with others and with their help handed over to Christ; and one is also constantly urged forward on the road by

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the challenge of other lives, by the goad of loving criticisms, and by the inspiration of a common vision and a common work.

I have had a far clearer conception of what the great fellowship of the Christian Church was meant to be, and may yet in God's goodness become. If once the whole Church is instinct with such fellowship, there will be no need of theological argument to establish the truth of the saying: "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*"

SIXTH REASON

BECAUSE IT HAS SET IN A NEW LIGHT MY TASK AS A MINISTER OF CHRIST

My sixth reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that it has thrown new light on the central task of my ministry, the winning of men to new life in Christ—and has opened the way for me to accomplish it more effectively.

Here let me say once more that the new has involved no repudiation of the old. The new inspiration and outlook which comes to us may seem so wonderful that in comparison with it the past tends to appear of no account. I wish, therefore, to make it clear that, in writing of the new help which has come to me in the work of the ministry, I am not disowning anything which was of worth in the past. I know that God has in

A New Light on My Task as a Minister of Christ

His goodness made use of my ministry, during these past twenty-five years, in bringing help and inspiration to many ; and the new things which He has been teaching me during the past year are not a denial but rather an enrichment of the old. It is for the sake, more especially, of others in the ministry that this chapter is written.

Without, then, in any way disowning the past, I am obliged to confess that, during all the earlier years of my ministry prior to my contact with the Group, whilst I was able to bring spiritual help to many, there were very few who through my ministry were won to any radical change of life. I taught that if men and women would give themselves entirely to Christ, their lives would be completely transformed ; but I seldom had the joy of witnessing such transformation.

As I look back now, I can see the reasons for this. The first was my lack of real expectation of such change. In my own experience I had seen little of radically changed lives, and I had not faith enough

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really to believe in such change. I held what may be described as a doctrine of "gradualism." I expected that those to whom I ministered would gradually grow and advance in the Christian life, and this was a perfectly right and proper expectation in regard to those whose lives were already fully surrendered to our Lord. What I failed to realise was that the great majority of professing Christians, who had never made this full surrender, needed to come face to face with the challenge of Christ in a way that they could not ignore, and could then by the acceptance of Christ enter at once upon a wholly new life become, there and then, men and women so different from what they were before that none of their friends could fail to notice the change. To put it in theological language, what I failed adequately to realise was that, while the process of sanctification is gradual and lifelong, that of conversion is often swift and drastic. I had supposed that this drastic conversion was for the few, for those living particularly evil lives.

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Now I have come to see that it is needed by the many ; and, having seen these miracles of conversion happening frequently, I have come to expect them, and to regard them as God's will. "There is a new creation whenever a man comes to be in Christ : what is old has gone, what is new has come."

The second reason why I was seldom able to bring men to the full victorious life in Christ was that there was still serious defeat in my own life. This was undoubtedly the most important reason of all ; for clearly we cannot hope to lead anyone farther than we have gone ourselves. Our success in winning others to Christ depends on our being ourselves witnesses who have good news to tell of what He has done for us. We must be able to speak from our own experience and guide men by the path we have ourselves explored. I recognise that my failures even now to lead others into the new life, which I long for them to have, are due largely to the small measure of my own attainment ; but I know also that God can use me more fully

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than He could of old because of the new experience which He has given me of Christ's victorious life.

A third reason why my ministry so seldom bore fruit in transformed lives was that I lacked experience in what has been called the art of "soul-surgery." The Roman Church equips her priests by long and careful training for that care of souls which will form so large a part of their priestly duty. We Anglican priests were sent out to our ministry twenty-five years ago (are things very different even now?) not too inadequately equipped with theological knowledge (though even here unlikely ever again to become *stupor mundi*), but almost entirely untrained in the delicate and difficult art of dealing with human souls. Often I have been in the position of a surgeon faced with the necessity of performing an operation far too delicate for my training and experience, and courting almost inevitable failure. The only wonder is that our failure has not been worse.

And I cannot but pay this tribute to the

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Oxford Group, that it has taught me much that ought to have been taught to me in my theological college days as to the right ways of bringing men and women to the new life that is in Christ. Our Lord calls us to be fishers of men ; and if the Oxford Group can contribute something towards making us more expert in the art of "the compleat angler" it will rightly earn our gratitude.

SEVENTH REASON
BECAUSE IT IS BRINGING REVIVAL
WITHIN THE CHURCH

My seventh reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that I have seen new life coming in the Church in many places through its influence.

I have already written, in the first section of this book, of the Church's comparative ineffectiveness in face of the present world situation. We who love the Church have long been praying for a revival of her spiritual life. We have realised what great things our Lord is longing to do through His Body, and how poor an instrument it is as yet for fulfilling His purposes. Those associated with the Church have lacked that radiance and attractive quality of life which would commend itself to others as something pre-eminently

Because it is Bringing Revival Within the Church

worth having. The clergy too often have concentrated their efforts on trying to bring to the church services men and women whose spiritual hunger has never yet been quickened by the witness of Christian lives. Those in the Jerusalem Chamber fellowship of prayer have for several years been making prayer for the Church's revival one of their continually-offered intercessions. Thousands in every branch of the Christian Church have been praying that the Holy Spirit would descend again upon the Church, as at Pentecost, quickening her with new life, that she may worthily witness in this age to Christ as the only answer to the world's need, and win multitudes into true discipleship to Him and into the fellowship of His Body.

I believe that in various ways, and notably through the revival of which the Oxford Group is the instrument, God is sending the answer to our prayers. Let me illustrate this, out of many examples which could be chosen, from two parishes with which I happen to have a rather special relationship.

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The first is a small, self-contained country town, in which it is not difficult for the parish priest in a fairly short time to know all his people with some intimacy. Here the influence of the Group has been two-fold. In the first place a number of those who were already church-goers, and in some cases servers, have been brought to a much more vital faith in our Lord and depth of spiritual life ; and, in the second place, others to whom religion meant previously little or nothing have been brought to a new life in Christ, and are active missionaries for winning others. Those influenced through the Group in this parish are mostly young people.

The second parish is a country village, unlikely to experience any great increase of population, and containing hardly any wealthy families. Here, in contrast with the other parish, those influenced by the Group have been mostly the middle-aged, rather than the young. A few amongst them are people to whom religion meant little before, but the majority of them were already church-goers.

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The change which has come into their lives has meant that religion has now become the vital thing in life, and the sharing of this new life with others the first duty and joy.

Now in both these instances the revival in the life of the parish has begun in the same way. The parish priest has received a fresh inspiration and renewal in his own life ; others have caught the fire from him, and others again from these. This is the best way for such revival to happen. The result is that its influence comes quite naturally right into the Church's life. The parish priest is himself at the heart of it. He instructs his people, including those who are practically converts from paganism, helping them to interpret aright the new experience which has come to them, and building them up in the fellowship of the Church and its sacraments. He gives them also careful teaching as to the right ways of approaching others to win them also to Christ. The parish priest need no longer carry a solitary burden in his central task of making the place where his charge is situated

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a Christian town or village. He can have with him now, not simply a church committee ready to handle the finances of the parish and the other duties commonly committed to the laity, but a band of men and women who meet together regularly in intimate fellowship and prayer—men and women of varied backgrounds, who between them have close contact with all the different groups of people in the parish, and who realise their obligation to be witnesses in life and word, as God guides them, to the men and women around them, of the Christ Who has transformed their lives and filled them with new radiance and power. The prime task of Christians is seen once again as the missionary task of winning others, a task just as much the privilege and joy of the laity as it is of the clergy. The dream of a village really won to Christ, its people united in Christian worship and service, seems no longer an impracticable vision, as the band of witnessing Christians grows steadily larger. Nor are their efforts confined to their own parish ; for at times,

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in response to an invitation from other places, a "team" will be sent out to witness farther afield to what Christ has done for them individually and in their common life.

One of my most vivid experiences of the alleviation of the priests' burden by such a company of ready helpers was in connection with a "Week of Witness" which I was asked to conduct in a parish in the North of England. In old days I should have been the missionary, with perhaps another priest with me as assistant missionary. The whole task would have been upon our shoulders, and in the limited time available we could only have reached a small percentage of those attending the mission and needing individual help. But on this occasion, owing to the existence of a large Group in that locality, I had working with me some thirty men and women, for whom Christ had already come to mean everything in their lives, who in the services held could supplement my teaching with the witness of their own experience, and (better still) could get in touch with large numbers

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of other men and women sharing a common environment and background, whom I by my unaided efforts could never have reached. There are clearly unlimited possibilities about missions thus corporately conducted.

There is, as I see it, an immense responsibility laid upon the bishops and clergy of our Church to-day, not to look on at the present revival from a standpoint of superior criticism, or even of tolerant sympathy, but to be willing in all humility to receive from it all that the Holy Spirit desires to bestow on them of new inspiration and power, that they may become vital centres from which new life will radiate to all whom their influence can reach. The churches will find themselves revitalised by it for their supreme task of preparing the way for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

EIGHTH REASON

BECAUSE IT SHOWS THE TRUE WAY TO THE SOLUTION OF THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS

My eighth reason for believing in the Oxford Group is that it is bringing us back to Christ's own way for the solution of our social, industrial and international problems.

Probably no generation of Christians has realised more clearly than our own the social implications of the Christian religion. The work and writings of men like F. D. Maurice, Kingsley, Scott Holland and Gore aroused a new social consciousness in the Church. The great C.O.P.E.C. Conference brought this movement to a head, showing the practical application of our religion to every department of our common life. The Student Christian Movement has for many years been bringing home to successive generations of

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Christians this same vital and essential bearing of Christian faith on all spheres of our corporate activity.

I have sometimes heard the Oxford Group criticised on the ground that it has no social Gospel, but my own experience of the Group has been quite otherwise. I have never, even at Student Movement Conferences, found a more thorough facing up to our social and international problems than I have found in the Oxford Group, nor a more courageous determination to solve them in the name of Christ. In almost every House Party of the Group these problems and their solution occupy a prominent place.

But, whilst I have long been familiar with the idea that Christianity touches the whole of life, and have believed that in Christ is the solution of the world's problems, the Oxford Group has for me thrown fresh light on the *way* in which Christ provides this solution. It has helped me to realise far more clearly what should have been obvious before, viz. that there are no short cuts to social regeneration,

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that the evil conditions prevailing in the world are due to evil human wills, and that society is made up of individuals and can only be changed as individuals are changed.

This, I say, should have been obvious ; but, looking back now, I realise that I was singularly blind to it in my own work. I have in the past spent a great deal of time and energy on the work of reconciliation, particularly inter-racial reconciliation and fellowship ; and I must confess that two things tended to give me pause and awaken doubts as to the usefulness of this work. One was that it seemed to bear so little fruit. I would labour hard to bring people together by the way of persuasion and the encouragement of mutual understanding ; and there might for a time be some result ; but, as a rule, it would be short-lived and liable to be shipwrecked by the next storm that arose. The other thing which perplexed me was that Christ Himself appeared to have been so little concerned with these social and racial problems, and to have concentrated His attention almost

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entirely upon the work of personal salvation ; and I failed to understand adequately the reason for this. I now realise that it was not due to any lack of concern with these larger problems, for they were comprehended in His whole vision of the Kingdom of God. It was due rather to His penetrating insight into the root of all social evils. He saw how they all proceeded from man's evil heart, and that, so long as that heart remained unchanged, no programme of social amelioration could permanently alter the evil conditions ; but that, if men in sufficient numbers gained a new heart of love, the conditions would right themselves. And I realise now that the reason why so many of our efforts to bring about mutual understanding and reconciliation prove ineffective is that they deal with the superficial trouble, but never get down to the real seat of the evil. We can best achieve reconciliation between two persons that are estranged, not by trying to bring them together, but by bringing both to God, in Whom they will find themselves already at one.

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Thus the Oxford Group, while supremely concerned with the solution of world problems, believes that that solution can only be found through the changed lives of individuals who have surrendered themselves to Christ. When these individuals are people occupying an important position or exercising widespread influence, this change in their lives and outlook may produce unexpectedly rapid changes in the social environment. John Newton, the slave-owner, is converted. He becomes the Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City of London. In his church Wilberforce in his turn is converted, and in a few short years the slave-trade has come to an end. This principle of the change of individuals as the only way to the change of society can be worked out in relation to every department of life ; but this would require an entire book rather than a few pages, and one or two instances must suffice.

As an illustration from domestic life, let us take the problem of divorce—a growing and pressing problem. Here it is sufficiently

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obvious that no general programme is of much avail. The State by legislation can make divorce harder to procure. The Church can teach the indissolubility of Christian marriage, and refuse the sacraments to the divorced. But neither of these things touches the root of the trouble, which lies in the mistaken partnerships and the unhappy homes which cause the desire for a divorce. Where lies the cure? If our young men and women have put their lives completely under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they will not go wrong in the choice of a life-partner. But, further, though an ill-matched union has taken place, or through some other cause husband and wife have drifted far apart, Christ can still heal the breach. During the last year I have witnessed, on not a few occasions, how husbands and wives on the verge of divorce have been brought back immediately into a fellowship of love that they had not known for years, not through anyone attempting to bring them together, but simply through their being led severally to surrender their lives to

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Christ, and finding that He then made them one.

An illustration from industrial life. I think of a firm in the North of England, which has been transformed through the influence of the Group. The manager and his wife, the manager's son and his wife, the assistant manager and his wife, and a number of others working in the firm were led into a full self-surrender to Christ. What is the result? The whole business has been put definitely under God's direction. The day's work is preceded by half an hour's quiet time in which all take part, when the Holy Spirit's guidance is sought as to the direction of the work through that day. All forms of dishonest dealing are rigidly excluded. Care is taken that no goods are sold under false pretences or at less than their full worth. There is a brotherhood between employers and employed such as in effect abolishes such a distinction, for all are workers together with God. And the firm is not only a prosperous business, but a means through which the

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lives of many in touch with it are won to Christ. Is not this the only way in which industrial conditions can be radically transformed? And is not this the way in which business life can be cleansed of dishonesty and graft, and cease to be a cause of inner conflict to conscientious Christians engaged in it?

One final illustration from the international sphere. The part played by the Oxford Group in preparing the way for the national government in South Africa is well known. It is not, perhaps, so generally known that the revival which has taken place there has done much to draw together the different races in that land, so that one of the leading South African statesmen has said that, if the work of the Group goes forward for a few more years as it is going now, there will be no racial problem left.

The Disarmament Conferences have shown how impossible it is to find a road to peace along the line of mutual agreements and pledges, so long as the evil spirits of aggression, rivalry and fear remain unexorcised. But

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Christ can exorcise them ; and when more of those who hold the world's destinies in their hands are led to put themselves under His control, disarmament will no longer present an insoluble problem, and the way to security and peace will be made plain.

When the nations' leaders, and those whom they lead, not only render lip-homage to the principles of Christ but put their lives at His disposal, then and then only the new world for which we long and plan will come to the birth ; for then in very truth the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

Christ our Leader has His plan of campaign for the overthrow of the forces of evil, and the bringing in of that new world. He needs for its accomplishment an army of men and women completely ready at His command and under the guidance of His Spirit. These He will direct to the strategic points which must first be captured. Once these are secured the tide of victory will roll forward with an irresistible speed which may well surprise us.

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I can imagine no life more satisfying, no enterprise more thrilling, than that of serving in this army of Christ, in daily attendance on His commands, for the establishment of God's Kingdom in the world.