

GREAT VARIETY IN OPINIONS OF CLERGY ON OXFORD GROUP

Teach Nothing But Essentials
Church Has Always Taught,
is Contention

SHARING IS CENTRE

Widely conflicting opinions on the work of the Oxford Group were expressed to-day by Toronto churchmen, many of whom have repeatedly attended meetings of the group. Further opportunity to observe the methods and teachings of the followers of Dr. Frank Buchman was afforded a number of the religious leaders when they gave up their pulpits on Sunday to the various members of the "team".

Unreserved admiration for the leaders of the movement and the results they have inspired in their progress across the country is mingled with stern criticism. Many ministers however, preferred to reserve their opinions.

"It seems that the Almighty will get a better hearing for a while if he speaks with an Oxford accent, or a burr, or a brogue", observed Rev. J. B. Skene, clerk of Toronto presbytery. "We are not jealous of the Oxford Group. I presume it must be a trans-Atlantic voice that is necessary to wake people up. They are teaching no more than the essential truths I have been hammering in Toronto for seven years and I presume my brethren are doing the same. I don't care who converts Toronto as long as the city is converted.

"The distinctive thing about their method, I believe, has been the sharing idea—mutual confession. I would say that it is a Protestant principle and well-founded that a man need confess only to his God. It is not necessary to have a third party. The Book of Psalms says: 'Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned.'

"However, there may be a mutual benefit to be gained from the sharing. With neurotic people it would be dangerous but, of course, that might be said of almost anything.

Great Deal of Truth

"I have this to say about the whole thing. There is a great deal of truth in what they preach. Everything they have that is of value the church already has. It interests me that they have met with such response in this country, in which I was born and raised. It reminds me of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus."

Mr. Skene recalled that the rich man lifted up his eyes and was in torment and Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom. The rich man wanted Lazarus to cool his burning tongue with water, but it was impossible. He wanted Lazarus to be sent back to earth to warn his brethren of the errors of their ways. But it was explained to the rich man that his brethren had Moses and the prophets and that these should be enough.

"But the rich man knew that his brothers would look for someone who comes from afar," he said. "It is the same with the people here. They have had Moses and the prophets for a long time."

Sincere Earnest People

"I have come in personal contact with the leader of the Oxford Group, Dr. Buchman," said Rev. W. A. Cameron, pastor of Yorkminster, "and I have met some of the other workers. I find them sincere, earnest people, with a healthy religious atmosphere, who have evidently discovered some special power which has changed their lives and are manifestly anxious to share it with other people."

Rev. Hugh McDiarmid, First Ave. Baptist church, was quite enthusiastic over the leaders and aims of the group.

Gives Hearty Approval

"I very heartily approve of the message they are bringing," he said. "I think the ministry generally are behind the group and the work they are doing. I have no criticism of any kind.

"Rev. Mr. Perry, a missionary from Turkey, and Rev. George Wood, of Aberdeen, Scotland, preached in my pulpit on Sunday. From their words and from further observations I feel that their effect upon Christian people is to produce an honest heart-searching and a desire for more consecrated life. I think the natural outcome of the Oxford Group will be to awaken a new interest in Christianity and in personal piety as a result of it."

Criticisms "Humbug"

Criticisms of the group are "pure humbug" was the emphatic opinion of Rev. Dr. George Pidgeon of Bloof St. United church. "Of course there are dangers — there are dangers in every great spiritual movement, but I must say I have never in all my life seen a religious revival that presented so few," he declared. "I consider that they are doing an unequalled good in the city of Toronto. Recently I visited Montreal, where I had an opportunity of judging the permanence of the work of the Oxford Group. No praise that I can utter is too high for the work of spiritual uplift they have done in that city.

"Of course," he continued, "there are always the extremists who carry anything too far, but that is hardly the fault of the movement itself.

"I praise them without reserve," Dr. Pidgeon concluded.

Rev. Dr. Ernest Thomas: "It is frightfully complicated. Beyond doubt there is must good being done. There are possible perils as in all good things."

Rev. Dr. T. T. Shields: "No member or representative of the group, directly or indirectly, has come near me or asked for admission to Jarvis St. church. I have made a particular study of the group and shall have something to say in kind quite soon."

Return to Fundamentals

Rev. Dr. N. McLachlan, secretary of social service and evangelism in the United Church, felt that the Oxford Group was doing a great work in bringing religion back to certain fundamentals, which were sometimes overlooked. "The movement, however, is not without its dangers," he declared. "Neurotic persons may possibly suffer great harm from the open confession system of the group. This extreme introspection may have a very definite adverse effect on the mentalities of such highly strung people," said Dr. McLachlan.

Rev. E. Crossley Hunter of Carlton St. United church held the same opinion. "It is perfectly obvious that the group's idea of 'sharing' or open confession of sins has dangers for morbid persons," he said.

"On the whole, however, I think that they are desperately needed in Toronto. Their criticisms of self instead of others and their continual stressing of quality of life as the important thing, is a definite step in the right direction," Mr. Hunter declared.