

Christianity Cleared for Action

By THE OBSERVER

THE more I learn of this Oxford Group movement the more significant it becomes. On first view it may seem almost preposterously simple, familiar, almost commonplace, especially to one familiar with Quakerism, or primitive Methodism or the Salvation Army or the Christian Endeavor movement in its early years. There seems to be nothing in its principles that has not been taught and more or less fully manifested by all branches of the Christian church from the beginning. In its theological ideas it seems to travel on the beaten track.

And yet even while one is saying to oneself, of course this is all correct but commonplace, there may come over one an almost dazing sense that one has suddenly found oneself in a strange new world, confounding yet fascinating.

FOR most of a fairly long life I have been supremely interested in religion, particularly in the infinitely varied forms that have been presented in the history of the Christian religion. And now for many years I have been trying to discover and make known something that might be considered essential Christianity, a simple, universal, reasonable, practical, brotherly Christianity. I have felt that if only such a Christianity could be presented the time was ripe for its acceptance and that its acceptance might mean the solution of the world's problems. I confess that so far as I understand it the Oxford Group movement seems to me to come nearer to such a Christianity than any other form of Christianity that I have ever become acquainted with. I do not mean that I think it is ultimate and full-orbed Christianity. I dare say it will change with the ever-changing life of man. I should like myself to see more emphasis on the great idea of Jesus—the Kingdom of God on the earth. I can see that this idea is implicit in the teaching of the group, but it seems to me it should be more explicit, that it should confront all curious inquiries as challengingly as the teaching on full surrender, guidance and "sharing." I gather also in conversation with members of the Group that they expect fuller light on their cardinal principle of guidance.

But with all recognition that no conception of Christianity and no Christian technique is likely ever to reach finality it still seems clear to me that of all working Christian systems this seems nearest to the ideal as an agency in which all sorts of Christian people could unite and work together for the bringing in of the Kingdom of God.

MEMBERS of the group affirm that in it all sorts of Christians are at this moment living and changing lives as comrades, Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics, Protestants of all sorts, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Plymouth Brethren, Presbyterians. Somewhere I read not long ago that even devout Mohammedans in the East were finding the Oxford technique helpful to Moslems and that the movement was drawing Christians and Mohammedans together. I would be indisposed to deny that a Mohammedan might not find great spiritual help in full surrender to God, openness to Divine guidance, and "the complete honesty towards one another which is found in sharing." I do not see, however, how the highest ethical illumination could come except through the Christian idea of God. Even the Koran, however, has a place for Jesus, and the Christian scholar who

probably knows Islam better than any other, Dr. Zwemer, left the impression on some of his hearers during his last visit to Toronto that even the inadequate account of Jesus given in the Koran might to-day be a window through which much more of real Christianity might stream into a Mohammedan soul than Christians would once have supposed.

In saying this I am wandering into remote regions of which I know little, but I do not see why any one who thinks that God is like Jesus, whatever his name or however he construes the relation between them, should feel excluded from this inter-denominational or rather super-denominational, super-national fellowship.

I DO not mean, of course, that there is everything in this latest of Oxford movements which the soul of man may need or may yet find in Christianity. The movement presupposes the church, or, as in stricter conformity to the facts I should say, the churches; it has grown up in the churches, does not dream of supplanting the churches. The wonder of the movement is that it has found ground common to all the churches without, as far as I can see, including one thing necessarily unacceptable to any member of any of them, and what increases the wonder is that this element common to all the churches when stripped of everything peculiar to any church is showing a vitality which makes it impossible to think of it as an imperfect or maimed Christianity. Other helps are provided in the various churches, other helps will be valued by members of the Group. Individually members of the Group have, no doubt, their own ideas of the Bible, of the nature and authority and organization of the church, of the Sacraments and of other things pertaining to religion. The Group, as a group, as far as I can learn, has no doctrine of any of these things. It has only a doctrine of the distinctively Christian experience. It aims to help men to win this and to hold it and to develop it. Those who have won the experience may interpret it as they think best. It is only the experience they seek to share with others, not their theories about it.

OF all the great souls who have quickened and purified the religious sense of Christian folk Francis of Assisi, Wesley, General Booth seem to me to have been the most purely Christian, and though we are too near it for our estimates to have much value it seems credible to me that this Oxford Group movement has been guided by the spirit of God to spread among the nations an experience of Christianity more distinctively and purely and exclusively Christian than any of the movements associated with these venerated names. At this economic crisis on this continent God seems to have inspired a mobilization of the mightiest resources of Christianity adequate to guide it with good-will through the most radical changes that we may be called upon to make.