

The Letter

6

OCTOBER 1929

A FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

*A movement of life within the churches
to make the principles of the New Testa-
ment practical as a working force today.*

This is a personal letter. It is addressed to members of a spiritual family of many nationalities scattered over the world. It is not intended for general circulation.

The contributors are of various churches and their backgrounds have ranged from religious to pagan. They are of different ages, and represent varying degrees of spiritual maturity. They have this in common, that in each the Christian life has been born or re-born through contact with a movement within the churches known as the "Groups," or "A First Century Christian Fellowship." Their mutual bond is not creed but Christ.

The purpose of the "Letter" is to keep these friends in touch with one another. It aims not to mould opinion but to reflect experience.



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**THE TEAM FROM ENGLAND TO AMERICA
CHRISTMAS, 1928**

Top row, left to right—F. Ritter Shumway, Jonkheer Eric van Lennep, Baron Godfrey van Wassenaer, Rev. Eustace H. Wade, Sir Walter Windham.

Bottom row, left to right—Principal G. F. Graham Brown, Rev. Frank N. D. Buchman, D.D., Rev. Sherwood S. Day.



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only to be done at every turn in the road. Christ has come to me with a message and my job is to pass it along. Two days later came the guidance to friends that I was to go to England to meet people and attend group meetings, travel with teams and so on. On faith, I went and the whole eight weeks spent abroad turned into a glorious adventure, a pilgrimage I shall never forget.

I find myself looking back now on the old life remembering how I once said the price was too great for me to pay.

Our work now lies in catering to human beings, sharing with them the change Christ has wrought in our lives, the joy and gladness He has brought to us as well as the fulfillment of life's highest hopes which He has made possible.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (St. Matthew 28:20.)

To know that I am about God's business has turned life into a happy and romantic "great adventure."

E. C. B.

Continuance and Group Leadership

(Being two talks given at the Briarcliff and Swarthmore Houseparties. Ed.)

GROUP leadership is not a matter which concerns only the man in the chair. Everyone leads in proportion as he takes part in groups. Each person should be ready at all times in every situation to consider the opportunities involved in group leadership, as they may effect the situation at that time. Remember, a group is not necessarily a set time in a set place. But especially in the local situation everyone should feel the responsibility for building a group. So, first of all, we must look at ourselves, as we are the larger problem.

I would like to consider first the sins that tend to bind us.

There are selfishness, wrong thoughts, hatred, jealousy, fear of failure, pride of success, demandingness and possessiveness. We cannot wait to go back to the local situation to face all these things. They will not only bind us from doing things then, but they will bind us right now from seeing the picture before we go ahead. I suggest that we take plenty of time for quiet to think especially of our own readiness to be used of God.

I am going to try to keep to the subject of group leadership, and in that connection perhaps the most important things to mention are the sins that blind. I would mention there such things as human values. We have in us preconceived ideas due to our family training and education as to just how things ought to be done. It may not be God's way. Second—human plans. We may have seen in another situation a group grow up in a certain way, and we humanly plan our own development along the same line. Third—conventional thoughts. We have in us some prides and standards that lead to unwillingness to do things in the way that our set might not approve. Fourth—generational thoughts. Older people are inclined to resent levity, while younger people resent what they call religious language. We must be sensitive to our atmosphere and ready to change. Fifth—dispositional thoughts. Our natures are such that we think we must carry on in a certain manner. Sixth—woodenness, lack of imagination. We are perfectly willing as far as we see, but we have never permitted God to help us to see very far. Seventh—lack of dare. We feel rather vaguely areas outside that might prove painful so that we close our spiritual eyes in self-protection.

These things bring on impatience, insensitiveness; they bring on fitting people rigidly into our picture instead of letting God build the picture around the individuals as they develop. The only salvation in this life is to do the next thing next and leave the result to God.

In this connection I would like to mention a few things which seem to me important to keep in mind.

- 1—Dedicate yourself to the Will of God.
- 2—Enlist before another person.
- 3—Do not live in "A Fool's Paradise."

I remember leaving the Birmingham Houseparty last Fall in a pink haze which I thought nothing could disturb. We were an hour late in starting; the automobile behaved badly; there were a number of bad detours and at noon we were held up over two hours for luncheon instead of taking only half an hour as we had planned. A number of other things entered into the situation and by early in the afternoon I was completely off. We might as well be conscious that the world outside is not as friendly a place as a houseparty. We must be ready to face it.

4—Go constantly to God in quiet. Believe in Him.

5—Write letters to prepare the way.

I remember when a difficult situation came up at this same Birmingham Houseparty, I wrote the people involved, and when I returned home three days later I found the situation had been prepared to make everything work out smoothly.

6—Let your imagination be free in thinking of individuals.

Remember no name is too hard. In fact, it usually works out that the seemingly most difficult people are usually nearer spiritually than many others who seem friendly.

7—Put all non-essentials under guidance.

This life is a ruthless thing in that nothing in our lives should be withheld from God. Many apparently unimportant things may so occupy our minds that we are not free.

8—Take a stand immediately.

Do not expect your life to grow on people without definitely witnessing. In most cases if you do not do it at the first guided opportunity, you may never have the courage again.

9—Give God all fear—here is the cross. Prepare for persecution, not with strain, but just be ready to recognize sin in certain criticisms. There seem to be three types of people who criticize. There are the sinners who have been convicted, the sanctimonious, who are spiritually unreal, and the safe people who are too conventional to give God a chance.

THE GROUP — PHYSICAL ATMOSPHERE

There are certain things which are essential in the physical atmosphere of a group, though we are not conscious of them.

1—The place should be attractive. Comfort and beauty help you to forget surroundings and leave you free. They also make you glad to be there, which has a lot to do with the person being receptive.

2—It should be convenient. Finding God spiritually takes all of a person's time. It is not wise to add physical handicaps. Many times a person goes to a group at the crucial point because it is easy and pleasant. I am, of course, not advocating that people be pampered, but it is wise to save a person's time so that he can be devoted entirely to finding God, and after that in helping other people to find Him.

3—It should be quiet. Small things tend to divert.

I remember in my first days at 11 West 53rd Street that the subway was being constructed directly underneath that section. About every fifteen minutes a charge of dynamite was set off. At that time the actual noise was diverting, and I remember also that I spent most of the fifteen minutes in between blasts wondering when the next one was coming and counting the minutes to see if the blasts came at regular intervals.

4—It should be possible to split up the rooms in such a way that more than one smaller group may be held at the same time, and there should be places where people can slip away for talks.

5—The place should be permanent week by week. The two main reasons for this are: that it is well to build up within a person's mind a material picture as a setting for spiritual things. It is well for the person to be able to tie to one place. The second reason is that some people stay away from the group for weeks and even months, and when the urge does happen to come again, it should be very easy for them to find the group.

THE MAKE-UP OF THE GROUP

Most of you are in a group now. You may need to go on as you are or to tear it up or change the place or the plan of action. Let us all for the moment start over again.

After one's self comes one other person. Who is it to be? It will not be the nearest worker or the closest friend neces-

sarily. Think of the oddities in Christ's selection. There were brothers in the group, but also there were people picked up in odd places. There was no one from his home village.

Use guidance and imagination. Be alert for contacts. We have had classes and interviews and talks on dealings with people, and I am trying not to discuss that side in detail. Remember, however, that the group grows out of converted individuals; do not think in terms of building a group, but in terms of winning people. Our problem is first to be free; then to have imagination. Let each be big enough to see his situation as a whole, and certain people a part of it. You must choose between having a picture and filling in the colors under guidance or having the colors and seeing the picture develop from the use of them. Your picture should become bigger and bigger.

PREPARATION FOR THE GROUP

No matter whether a group is to be of three people or three hundred, the following things are important:

1—A long quiet time.

a—Surrender fear or demandingness of result.

b—Learn what God wants done and by whom.

c—Learn what progress individuals can make in that group.

2—Check for guidance where possible and build from an inner group and team work. Have courage enough not to take any human team-mate, but when someone honestly wants God, have courage enough to give him anything. What you are seeking is a sharing fellowship.

3—Pray about it. Be honest with yourself about your belief in prayer, but even if you are not intellectually sure of the results, pray with constancy and discipline.

4—Go into any group with faith and trust; think positively. Be ready for guidance, however, to come more completely or differently.

5—Be released and alert. You are interested in each person there. Show it.

RUNNING THE GROUP

1—Do not humanly decide what is a healthy atmosphere, and then set out to make it so. If it is right, God will direct

you in the preparation of it. Be released. When I am ready to really let God have the group, there is a lightness of touch, and a released, comfortable atmosphere that is very greatly used, but when I try to take over the group most of this lightness of atmosphere changes to levity, and though there is about the same amount of laughter in both cases, one is healthful and the other is futile. Also do not mother the group, do not hang over it with fear and trembling; learn to wait and to trust. Long silences are all right if the proper groundwork has been laid in quiet and prayer. These silences are not dead, but living.

2—On the other hand, do not sit back and let the group go. My idea when I first started leading a group was to follow the instructions to keep myself out of it, so I would open the group with a few remarks and then drop it without any plan or keynote or continuity. Everyone would be lost, and there would be a silence which was literally dead. Fortunately, Frank or Ray was there to take it over, put it on the track and then hand it back to me again. You notice in groups that sometimes there is a little argument or some sharing which appears unguided, or some remarks which seem to be insensitive, and then you see the group go back to a smooth, clear sailing ahead towards the goal. This does not happen by accident, and it usually means that the man in the chair has been patient and loving and willing to be led by God in the direction of that group.

3—Here again I must emphasize that everybody shares in the leadership of any group he is in. Do not lean on the person presiding, but share in the alertness. There is a responsibility laid upon you to know when you are needed.

4—Never be satisfied with less than the best. Do not plan to raise up the group by stages, feeling that you will get people together on a lower level, and will gradually work up to group principles. To my knowledge this plan has never yet been a success. Take the full plunge.

5—As a leader you have three particular things to keep in mind.

A. For the group itself, you must keep it on the guided track. You must center the activity around a few people

according to the plan as it comes to you. Where the group is really guided, 100 people are just as easy as one dozen, because God builds the group around a few people who at that moment are crucial. Forget the many and think of the few. Be ready always to sacrifice the satisfaction of the many for the few who seem most important at that time. It is selective work, and the reason it is selective is that you are always thinking about the welfare of the many. You are out to win one for Christ that he may in turn win many others. See that he does.

B. For the people there you must pull in, include, challenge, have said what people need to say, have said what people need to hear. Make everyone feel at home, relaxed, friendly, with all walls down. In this connection, it is usually wise to start your group with introductions, each one giving his name and why he has come. It makes new people feel at home, and gives members of your group the opportunity to witness.

C. For yourself—it is a time when you must watch those in whom you are interested. This does not mean a detective kind of watching. But just a friendly observation to learn their needs and their reactions to things that are said. Some people there lack confidence; some need challenging because there is a choice to make; some need training in continuance.

D. Be sensitive. Are you ready to exclude when necessary? This is sometimes difficult. Are you willing to include where you feel it is right, but where the risk seems large? Expect the highest of people; expect the best in the situation.

We must remember always to be positive and constructive. There should not be a negative note, such as "Well, I guess there are enough here to begin." Such remarks are usually founded on false humility.

Use differences and mistakes. Do not fear them or be strained. You will be led in how to handle them.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

I am trying in this connection to deal only with matters which have essentially group effects.

Let us remember that we are not to be instructors or spellbinders. Be willing to share yourself, your innermost self,

your time or money with anyone who should have them, but be willing to let God direct you. There is a lot of unguided giving toward ends that may be good in themselves, but they may not be the right places for you. Remember that people need an experience of Jesus Christ, not an understanding of your principles. Do not explain, challenge. In all this do not seek results for their own sake. If we truly love people, we will share with them because we love them without asking for any return or result.

The wrong groups are those where everyone leans on the leader and not on Christ. People may have to come through a dependent state, but do not let them stay dependent. I know of a group which has been started not less than five times with tremendous possibilities, but it has always failed because the leader has been a human one, and though he led the groups in a fascinating, entertaining way, God was not in it, and the group is not there today.

Take time in prayer and quiet to see clearly each person, where he stands and what he needs. We are inclined in this regard to spend a large amount of time in quiet, seeing the problems, but not enough time in prayer for those problems.

It is also important for us to forget the ultimate end in an individual's life, and to concentrate in our thinking on the next step. The other tends toward impatience and towards teaching people things that they should be left to discover for themselves, even though years may go by before they discover them.

Perhaps the most important part in raising up leadership in the group is to keep pushing people out into joint leadership, and then into dependent leadership. It, therefore, is important to delegate others for receiving people, others to see that there are enough chairs, others to deliver talks. Remember there are many stages of responsibility, and they all can be used. I think of one man in the group at 11 West 53rd Street, whom we felt it right to include in leadership before he seemed humanly ready. It seemed a dangerous process but the rewards have been tremendous in that he has come into full leadership. It is wise to change leadership of your group wherever possible. In this connection, do your own job. Stop leaning on

houseparties to bring out leadership in your group or to make progress yourself.

Relate people to each other. Your effort is to get them out into the lives of other people and in many cases you will be led, where you see both sides, to give them work by throwing two people together. It is important, however, that all the time you keep it in your mind effectually to get them to see their own opportunities and to stand on their own feet. In relating people and challenging, let your imagination be large. Get people out into a larger vision which includes other centers. Get mixed up in other centers yourself at all times, in interest if not in action. Do not lay demands unguidedly on other people to help you in your own work, but include them in your imagination so that you will be ready to use them if it is right.

Remember nine out of ten people are undisciplined, especially mentally. In order that the Bible should play its proper part, it is wise to keep especially in mind the steps which are necessary to help each person to become so intrigued with it that the fascination will overcome the lack of discipline. A Bible class should be available if the proper teaching is available.

Remember most of all that each individual lives seven days a week. The regular group once a week may be sufficient, but your work is to lay your life along side of each other person and live his life with him in guided imagination. You must understand, foresee, woo, win, warn and it will be necessary to think in terms of the little things of life as well as the big issues. But here again, though you are to be so close in fellowship, there must always be a guard against dependence.

Be ready to sacrifice your group on the altar of unity. Do not worship it. Let God have it. Do not worship the size or the results, or fear shrinkage. Sometimes a group history looks like an hour-glass, with a reduction of members down to almost nothing, or at least down to the point where everyone there was really sincere, when a new healthy group began to take place.

You have only one work to do—Belong to God—I am confident that any failure in leadership is not due to your nature, your position, or your occupation, but only to your conscious

or blind unwillingness to let God have all of you. Compromise usually creeps in where we have created a human situation, and we start cutting corners in order to save the number of people who are going to the group, to save our job, our future or our reputation.

Be willing yourself to be a member of a team within a group. There are many Lone Wolves who are doing a good job, but they can never teach or bring about the teamwork which seems to me such a keynote part of this message. It is not possible to work out this message on an eclectic basis, trying to make a whole piece out of a lot of different parts which were never intended to fit together. The thoughts expressed here are not new with the Fellowship; there are no brilliant creations. The strength of the message lies in its re-emphasis of the important principles found in the New Testament.

Let go! Take responsibility! It may be only for the small things just now, but take it.

H. M. T.

Fellowship Notes

THE marriage of Peggy Stewardson and Howie Blake took place in Philadelphia on April 12th. Ray Purdy performed the ceremony. Nearly a month later Margaret van Winkle and Al Campbell were married in Calvary Church by Sam Shoemaker. A third wedding in the Fellowship took place on June 11th, when Mary Blair Williams and Harvie Zuckerman were united. The service was taken by Sam Shoemaker and Garrett Stearly.

Al Campbell was ordained to the Presbyterian ministry a few months before his wedding. Al is now pastor of the Home Street Presbyterian Church in the Bronx. Norman Schwab was ordained to the diaconate of the Episcopal Church in St. Paul's, New Haven, on June 16th. Sam Shoemaker preached the ordination sermon. Norman will assist Sam at Calvary this winter. Shortliffe