

My text is-ACTS Second chapter, 17th verse.

“And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour fourth of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Early this summer I was informed that an invitation to a buffet supper at one of the homes here in Hingham had been accepted by Mrs. Doble for the both of us.

Naturally, I wanted to know what I was getting into, especially after I found that the supper was for the purpose of acquainting us with work of the Oxford Group.

What was The Oxford Group I wanted to know- I found out that it had something to do with religion.

So that was it- I was being dragged into a meeting on religion. Who would be there I wanted to know, would there be any men there that I knew - I was given the assurance that there would be.

Came the night of the buffet supper and I acted the part of the martyred husband - the lamb led to slaughter.

Upon entering the home, I was immediately relieved to find some men I knew among the many I did not know.

Soon some of those I did not know introduced themselves to me, and an excellent supper, with interesting dinner companions made me forget that I was there to hear a discourse on religion.

After the supper we gathered in groups in a large room, and I was having a wonderful evening out of one I had feared would prove a dud.

The conversation stopped and a man stood up and asked, did we know what The Oxford Group was, or had we ever heard of it. Only a few apparently had.

This man then gave us a brief outline of what The Oxford Group was, and then called upon different ones whom he introduced to us to tell us what The Oxford Group had done for them.

Then began a series of “witness”, as they termed it, by both men and women, of how The Oxford Group had brought them back to God and what God had done for them since their return.

I sat there amazed at the evident sincerity of each speaker.

I was shocked also at the frankness with which they talked of God.

I came home from that meeting with little to say but plenty to think about.

After the amazement and shock had begun to ease a bit, I became conscious of a disturbing discovery.

Each one of those men and women that spoke at that meeting had something that was lacking in me. Their faces were radiant with the evidence of an inner peace and happiness. Here were real men and women that had the faith such as my Grandmother had a faith that I as a young technical student thought was fine for nice old ladies, but not necessary for me. Slowly I became convinced that these people had something I needed and wanted if it were possible to obtain it.

Our minister was present at that supper party, and a few days later he announced that he would speak on The Oxford Group.

I was anxious and also curious to hear his reactions to what had amazed and shocked me. You will recall that his talk was most interesting, and was a brief history of the growth of the Oxford Group during a period of some twenty years, from one man, Frank Buchanan, to an activity of international scope.

Mr. Hooper in his closing remarks said that no one should criticize The Oxford Group without first having looked into it. He also said that certainly it could harm no one to look into it, and it might prove helpful.

I am one of those who looked further into this Oxford Group.

The ones responsible for bringing The Oxford Group to Hingham had a good deal of literature available and a list of publications which outlined the principles and described the activities of The Oxford Group.

First, I read "For Sinners Only" a comprehensive account of the work of The Oxford Group, by A. J. Russell an English newspaper editor. Then "He That Cometh" by Geoffrey Allen. "Twice Born Ministers" by S. M. Shoemaker. The "Venture Of Belief" by an intellectual who through the Oxford Group found that one could not know the religious experience unless he is willing to have the religious experience.

The reading of these books called upon me also to read the New Testament not once but many times.

I have been to a meeting for men. I attended The Oxford Group luncheon at the Parker House where the guest speaker was the Honorable C. J. Hambro, President of the Norwegian Parliament and principal delegate from Norway to the League of Nations. Mr. Hambro told us what a tremendous awakening had taken place in his country because of The Oxford Group.

I heard the founder of the Oxford Group movement, Dr. Frank Buchanan speak, and after having read so much about this man it was a pleasure to find that he measured up to all that had been said of him.

I have been privileged to sit in with an Oxford Group Team at "quiet time" as they call it, and witness how they were guided in arranging for an open meeting of the Group in a city in mid Massachusetts.

I was amused to find on this team a man I knew some 20 years ago. He was then a field superintendent of a large construction company. To have called him then a hard boiled slave driver would have been putting it mildly, and yet here he was giving himself over to the work and joy of bringing spiritual help to those in need of it.

These experiences both in reading about the Oxford Group and seeing them in action encourage me to give you a brief summation of my findings

You cannot belong to The Oxford Group as there is nothing to join. It has no membership list, no definite location.

It is the name for a group of people who, from every rank, profession, and trade, in many countries, have surrendered their lives to God and who are endeavoring to lead a spiritual quality of life under God's guidance.

The Oxford Group is not a religion; its workers have no salaries, no plans but God's Plan. Every country is their country and every man is their brother.

The Oxford Group is a campaign for the renaissance of the practice among men of the truths of simple Christianity.

The Oxford group works within churches of all denominations, planning to bring those outside back into their folds and to reawaken those within to their responsibilities as Christians.

It advocates nothing that is not the fundamental basis of all Christian faith and takes no side in sectarian disputes.

It seeks to enable us to use our beliefs to their best advantage for ourselves and for the world in general.

This means living as near as we can, by God's help, to the life He has mapped out for us.

When we diverge from His plan for us we can, by surrendering our lives to Him, get back to that plan again, and by our Christian endeavors to live as parallel as we can to Christ's life here on earth and, with God's guidance to show us how we can best do that, we can continue on that plan and bring it to fruition.

The aims of The Oxford Group are to awaken in us as individuals the knowledge that we are dissipating our spiritual inheritance and to make the world understand that spiritual common sense is of more practical value and use to mankind than selfish piety.

Their working beliefs are not misty ideals; they are practical standards within the scope of anyone who will give his or her life into God's absolute keeping. There is no reason why this giving of our lives to God should mean our being pious or religious boors. Neither should it mean that we have to give up our ordinary obligations or duties. It means we surrender to God everything that stands between Him and us.

The Oxford Group do not set up to be a collection of Paragons of the Virtues nor are they a set of religious boors. They are the normal men and women we would meet on any normal occasion who would no more force their religion on us than we would ours on them.

They might, as calmly as we might ask them to pass the salt, tell us that God had guided them to speak to us because, by that means, they have become aware that we are in spiritual trouble and need help; but, if in reply, we looked at them as if we suspected they were mad it would neither shake their poise nor damp their cheerful ardor. Because they themselves are not saints but sinners who know God, they have made the word sinner a common bond for humanity. The Group use the word sin a great deal but in no way does it smack of street corner salvation. Sin with them is anything that keeps us from God or from one another.

Undue emotionalism or religious hysteria are banned entirely by the Oxford Group. They have no use for these whatsoever. The business of the Group is to eradicate them from the spiritual system and so set life free for absolute Honesty of living. They know by experience that absolute Love can conquer all evil, that absolute truth is as personally necessary for those who preach it as it is for those it is preached at: that too much dependency on other people for our happiness is weakness and that fellowship with Christ is strength.

The Oxford Group has four points that are the keys to the kind of spiritual life God wishes us to lead. These are called the four absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute Love.

To be spiritually reborn, and to live in the state in which these four points are the guides to our life in God, the Oxford Group advocates four practical spiritual activities. These are:

1. Sharing
- 2nd Surrendering
- 3rd Restitution
4. Guidance

Sharing is a revival of an early Christian practice. St. James said, "Confess therefore your faults one to the other, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." This spiritual activity of the Group is misunderstood only by those who know nothing about The Group and grab at the word confession, and give an interpretation to sharing that in no way exists.

Surrendering - This is nothing new either. We all go through the form of surrendering continually as the Lord's Prayer is a perfect example of Surrender. The Group when they say "Thy will be done" mean just that, and through Guidance follow that will.

Restitution is righting to the best of our present ability wrongs we have committed in the past. The Parable of the Prodigal son is the classic example of restitution.

Guidance- Prayer is the natural complement of God's direction. We cannot expect God to talk to us if we do not talk with Him, but to The Oxford Group it is not always essential continually to ask God for help. Petitions are not always necessary for if our attitude towards God is conducive to real guidance then that in itself is prayer.

You can not be in contact with this Oxford Group very long before something begins to happen to you in spite of yourself.

If the president of the Layman's League had asked me last year to talk in church, I would have thought it a huge joke. And if he had insisted I would have become angry and I am sure that a team of horses could not have dragged me into the position I find myself this minute. And yet two weeks ago when he asked me to tell today what I know of the Oxford Group, no thought of dodging this request came to me — rather there was a sincere regret that I wasn't further along in this Group action so that I could bring to you something of what it has brought to me.

I well remember the first time I heard a voice on the radio instead of the dot and dash. My receiving set was only a paper tube with a few feet of wire wound on it, a crystal, the so called cat's whisker and two ear phones. The broadcast was on a football game in New York. I remember the thrill it gave me. Through the Group I recalled that God has been sending messages to man down through the ages.

When I entered this world I was equipped with a perfect receiving set as a gift from God. As a child it was the most natural thing in the world for me to use this set. But as I grew older I used the set less and less until finally I even forgot that I had it. As the years went on there were times when I thought of that set and needed it badly, but I thought I had lost it.

I met the Oxford Group and find that the reason they are getting so much more out of life than I am is because they have their receiving set in working order. They are getting a program I can't get but want. I have tried to use their sets but find that theirs will not function for me- as I have a wave length assigned to me.

They tell me I must find my set. I do at last find it. I try to tune in but there is no response. I go to the group for help as they seem to be experts in this kind of a receiving set. We examine it together and find here a loose connection, there a faulty tube and here a tube is gone entirely.

I am despairing of having my set in working order, when they inform me that it can be repaired and new tubes furnished.

Immediately I want to send a messenger for these parts but learn that I can receive them only by asking God for them myself. And if God is kind enough to re-equip me again then the only fair thing that I can do is to give an account of what happened to the old set. That is the difficult part and yet I know it's got to be done.

Through the Oxford Group I find that I have been doing some aimless sailing on the sea of my spiritual life. I have done fairly well with a fair wind but I can't always have a fair wind and if when I meet head winds I do not have God as my centerboard, I can not hold my course but must drift with the wind.

The first one of the four absolutes - Absolute honesty is the one I have been trying out. It is pretty bitter medicine but I am beginning to feel better for taking it.

Last month our minister sent this notice out on the calendar. "It is up to you". Let me repeat it. The type of a minister's preaching depends much upon the support he receives. In a well-filled church, sermons are apt to be more inspiring and inspired. When pews are sparsely occupied, his efforts tend to fall more or less flat. Empty seats are real obstacles to vigorous preaching. When a congregation is typically gray-haired, a minister's expressed word is likely to be of one sort. If a generous sprinkling of more youthful features is present, a marked difference of tone will be noted. If persons of spiritual temper or marked social interests appear regularly at church, the minister feels their support, and that side of his utterance is strengthened. It lies with you to help the minister to grow in power and to grow with him.

I accept the challenge that is in that notice. I also acknowledge that it is a well-deserved rebuke.

I have been one of those smug Christians, satisfied with my hypocritical type of religion. I have been facetious about the regularity of my church attendance, and have frankly said what has the minister or the church got to offer me but the same old line.

I have been wrong. My concern now is not what anyone has to offer me but what have I to offer my church and my God.

I am through with my being spiritually lukewarm.

Think for a moment what it would mean to this old church if we all ceased being spiritually lukewarm.

For my part I am through with sunning myself in the warmth of the tradition of this old church, and desire to contribute something of myself to it so that there can be real meaning to me of that tablet that hangs in the (?) erected to the memory of the founders of this church. "Ancient, yet not decrepit. Rich in history, yet not satisfied with past achievements; free, yet subject to the higher law of the spirit, dedicated to the worship of God and the service of man."

Let us pray. Oh God our father, help us to examine ourselves with absolute honesty, and when we have made that examination grant us we pray the courage and the strength to take the necessary corrective steps.

Amen