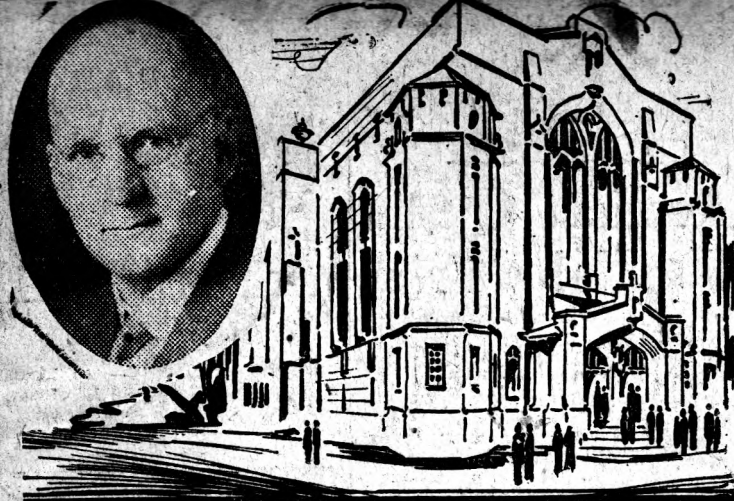




The Oxford Group

By **THE REV. LAWRENCE CLARE**

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The Editor, the Montreal Daily Herald:—

The Group leaders begin by confronting the soul with God, and making it conscious of the fact that there is some obstacle in the way of communion. This obstacle is sin, and the modern world has forgotten what it is and why it is so dangerous, confusing it with mere social offense. So, also, there is some obstacle, and it happens to be the same one, in the way of proper relationship with one's fellow men; things need straightening out; a neighbourly basis can only be one of complete trust, frankness and companionship, without reserve, and without any touch of falseness. On both counts, therefore, we must be straightforward about our sins with one another and in the presence of God. That straightforwardness secured, God's invigorating life may flow into the soul, and at the same time right relationship may be effected between man and man. So far, so good. It is old doctrine, but salutary.

Is there anything this Continent needs more than going into the Silence, there to wait expectantly for what God has to say? The Group has done well to stress it. Looked at in the most natural way, is it not a fact that our ideas and promptings in this busy world get jammed, and in conflict with one another, to the destruction of the unity of our thought and feeling? Silence and a refraining from fussiness allow them to come into equilibrium and restore the unity of personality.

In the Silence there may come promptings to do certain definite things. To these promptings the members of the Group give the high name of Christ. There is some danger here. Such "guidance" may come from any level of the self, good or bad; or may be due to what psychologists call "dissociation." Rigorous tests are therefore necessary. The Group requires that seeking "guidance" shall be controlled by good intention, by conformity with the Scriptures, and by the collective sense of fitness. This is wise. Nevertheless I think it should be admitted that there is no infallibility in guidance. Not to realise that is to make of untrained men infallible popes by comparison with whose claims those of the Pope of Rome are modesty itself.

"Giving testimony" is another feature of the movement that presents dangers. Unlike the Catholic Confessional it is liable to feed complacency. In the act of publicly confessing one's sins one is sometimes not unpleasantly conspicuous, and, through the emphasis upon how bad one was in the past, it may be insinuated how good one is now. The only remedy is strong Group control.

The Group make their appeal by assertion, reiteration and suggestion. One may well criticise this; but it is necessary for their purpose to keep the Group homogeneous; so they have a practical justification for their hypnotic policy. There is no Franciscan hardship in this Movement, although there is earnestness, determination and sensible technique. **The success attained is due to the fact that the world is waiting for something.** It is tired of the spirit of the cocktail party; it is sick of a barren pessimism and is ready to clutch at any straw that may save from drowning. **To this feeling of revulsion from evil the Group has given shape,** and we may well acknowledge our indebtedness to it on that account. Its finest service is that of turning inert ideas into available power, of striving to regain the immediacy of New Testament Christianity.

One other matter—People are going about saying that the Church has failed and that we must look to the Group. May I therefore point out that all such groups rise from within the Church, and owe their spiritual nutriment to it; and may I further point out that the Movement in Montreal is a few days old, and that the Christian Church goes back for nineteen hundred years. Repeatedly in its history people have presumed to regard the Church as dead, but there has always been a resurrection. Let not enthusiasm destroy the sense of historical perspective!

LAWRENCE CLARE.