

Frank Buchman

1878 – 1961

Founder of the Oxford Group

Franklin Nathaniel Daniel, best known as Dr. or Rev. Frank Buchman, was a Protestant Christian evangelist who founded the Oxford Group (known as Moral Re-Armament from 1938 until 2001, and as Initiatives of Change since then).

While still based at Hartford, Buchman spent much of his time travelling and forming groups of Christian students at Princeton University and Yale University, as well as Oxford. Sam Shoemaker, a Princeton graduate and one-time Secretary of the Philadelphian Society who had met Buchman in China, became one of his leading American disciples.

Buchman designed a strategy of holding “house parties” at various locations, during which he hoped for Christian commitment among those attending.

In response to criticism by the London Daily Express that this “strange new sect” involved members holding hands in a circle and publicly confessing their sins (a fabrication according to those who were there), the Express printed a statement by Canon L.W. Grensted, Chaplain and Fellow of University College and a university lecturer in psychology bearing “testimony not only to [their] general sanity... but also to [their] real effectiveness. Men whom I have known... have not only found a stronger faith and a new happiness, but have also made definite progress in the quality of their study, and in their athletics too.”

Buchman traveled widely in Europe during the 1930s. With the rise of the Nazis he focused on Germany, holding house parties and meeting church leaders. In 1932 and again in 1933 he sought, unsuccessfully, to meet with Adolf Hitler, whom he hoped to convert. By 1934 the Oxford Group's activities in Germany were being spied on and prominent members interrogated, making effective work there increasingly difficult.

“The Oxford Group is a Christian revolution for remaking the world. The root problems in the world today are dishonesty, selfishness and fear – in men and, consequently, in nations. These evils multiplied result in divorce, crime, unemployment, recurrent depression and war. How can we hope for peace within a nation, or between nations, when we have conflict in countless homes? Spiritual recovery must precede economic recovery. Political or social solutions that do not deal with these root problems are inadequate.” –*Frank Buchman, “Remaking the World”, Blandford Press, 1947, (a collection of Frank Buchman’s speeches)*

“We need a power strong enough to change human nature and build bridges between man and man, faction and faction. This starts when everyone admits his own faults instead of spotlighting the other fellow's. God alone can change human nature. The secret lies in that great forgotten truth, that when man listens, God speaks; when man obeys, God acts; when men change, nations change.” –*Frank Buchman, “Remaking the World”, Blandford Press, 1947*

Critics charged that the “total honesty” encouraged at Oxford Group house parties really concentrated morbidly on sexual issues, particularly masturbation. In response to these criticisms, Buchman said, “We do unhesitatingly meet sex problems in the same proportion as they are met and spoke of in that authoritarian record, the New Testament... No one can read the New Testament without facing it, but never at the expense of what they consider more flagrant sins, such as dishonesty and selfishness.”

One quote in particular always dogged Buchman, from an interview in the New York World-Telegram, August 25, 1936 - “I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defense against the anti-Christ of Communism.”

Compiled from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Buchman