

The Oxford Group

"Sin, the Oxford Group puts it bluntly, 'is anything that keeps us from God or from one another.'"

A.A. grew in part out of The Oxford Group, a Christian group founded by a Lutheran minister named Frank Buchman around the year 1919. The first group was loosely called 'A First Century Christian Fellowship' and the Oxford Group name was later attached to the fellowship due to coincidental affiliation with Oxford, England. The Oxford Group enjoyed wide popularity and success, particularly in the 1930's.

In 1938, soon after the start of A.A., The Oxford Group in the USA was renamed to *Moral Re-Armament*. It became more widely known as MRA. In England, Oxford Groups continue to exist and follow the original tenets of the movement more closely than the groups descendant from MRA. In 2001, MRA changed it's name to *Initiatives of Change*.

The Four Moral Standards

1. Absolute Honesty
2. Absolute Purity
3. Absolute Unselfishness
4. Absolute Love

The Five C's (*Frank Buchman in 1919*)

1. Confidence – The establishment of rapport with the person to be changed
2. Confession – Admission of sins to God and to another person
3. Conviction – Become aware of one's sinfulness
4. Conversion – Give oneself to God and follow His guidance
5. Continuance – Fellowship and witness to others

Four Practical Steps (*developed in the late 1920's – early 1930's*)

1. **Surrender** - of our life, past, present, and future, into God's keeping and direction.
2. **Sharing** - of our sins and temptations with another Christian, and to use 'Sharing as Witness' to help others, still unchanged, to recognize and acknowledge their sins.
3. **Restitution** - to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.
4. **Continuance** - Listening, accepting, and relying on God's guidance, and carrying it out in everything we do and say, great or small.

Carl Jung on the Oxford Group

"My attitude to these matters is that, as long as a patient is really a member of a church, he ought to be serious. He ought to be really and sincerely a member of that church, and he should not go to a doctor to get his conflicts settled when he believes that he should do it with God. For instance, when a member of the Oxford Group comes to me in order to get treatment, I say, "You are in the Oxford Group; so long as you are there, you settle your affair with the Oxford Group. I can't do it better than Jesus." –*Collected Works, vol. 18, 1940*

Reinhold Niebuhr on the Oxford Group

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (often credited with writing the Serenity Prayer) criticized Buchman's philosophy and pursuit of the wealthy and powerful. "The idea is that if the man of power can be converted, God will be able to control a larger area of human life through his power than if a little man were converted. This is the logic which has filled the Buchmanites with touching solicitude for the souls of such men as Henry Ford or Harvey Firestone." – *The Christian Century*, 1936

Oxford Group influence on Alcoholics Anonymous

In Akron, Ohio, an Oxford Group member named Jim Newton knew that one of Harvey Firestone's sons, Russell, was a serious alcoholic. He took him first to a drying-out clinic and then on to an Oxford Group conference in Denver. The young man gave his life to God, and thereafter enjoyed extended periods of sobriety. The family doctor called it a 'medical miracle'. Harvey Firestone, Sr. was so grateful that in January 1933 he invited Buchman and a team of sixty to conduct a ten-day campaign in Akron. They left behind them a strong functioning group which met each week in the house of T. Henry Williams, amongst whom were an Akron surgeon, Bob Smith, and his wife Anne. Bob was a secret drinker.

Rowland Hazard claimed that it was Carl Jung who caused him to seek a spiritual solution to his alcoholism, which led to Rowland joining the Oxford Group. He was introduced by Shep Cornell to Cornell's friend Ebby Thacher who had a serious drinking problem. Hazard introduced Ebby to Carl Jung's theory and then to the Oxford Group. For a time Ebby took up residence at Sam Shoemaker's Calvary Rescue Mission. Reverend Sam Shoemaker ran the Calvary Rescue Mission that catered mainly to saving drunks and down-and-outs. Sam Shoemaker taught the concept of God being that of one's own understanding to the new inductees.

Ebby Thacher, in keeping with the Oxford Group teachings, needed to keep his own conversion experience real by carrying the Oxford message of salvation to others. Ebby had heard that his old drinking buddy Bill Wilson was again drinking heavily. Thacher and Cornell visited Wilson at his home and introduced him to the Oxford Group's religious conversion cure. Wilson was "aghast" when Thacher told him he had "got religion".

A few days later, in a drunken state, Wilson went to the Calvary Rescue Mission in search of Ebby Thacher. It was there that he attended his first Oxford Group meeting and would later describe the experience: "Penitents started marching forward to the rail. Unaccountably impelled, I started too... Soon, I knelt among the sweating, stinking penitents... Afterward, Ebby... told me with relief that I had done all right and had given my life to God." The Call to the Altar did little to curb Wilson's drinking. A couple of days later, he re-admitted himself to Charles B. Towns Hospital. Wilson had been admitted to Towns hospital three times earlier between 1933 and 1934. This would be his fourth and last stay.

Bill Wilson on the Oxford Group

"Early A.A. got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgment of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others straight from the Oxford Group and directly from Sam Shoemaker, their former leader in America, and from nowhere else." – *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes Of Age*, page 39