

What was the Oxford Group?
By Mitchell K from his book on
Clarence H Snyder

In the autumn of 1922, the Lutheran Minister, Rev. Frank N.D. Buchman, and a few of his friends, formed what they called,
"A First Century Christian Fellowship."

Frank Buchman had resigned his connection with the Hartford Theological Seminary around 1921 and had begun his evangelical work of carrying a message of life-changing by "getting right with God."

Around 1927, Buchman began working in England. Several of his followers were connected with Oxford University; and when they began to tour South Africa, the press called the evangelical team "The Oxford Group." This because most of the team was from Oxford University; but Frank Buchman was never officially connected in any way with Oxford University.

This name stuck. By 1932, A.J. Russell's book *FOR SINNERS ONLY* was published, and made frequent reference to The Oxford Group. In 1937, the group was officially incorporated in Great Britain as a not-for-profit entity, known as The Oxford Group.

The fellowship held small group meetings, prayer meetings and what were called "house parties," at which its adherents spent "Quiet Time" in meditation seeking "Guidance" from God.

Part of these meetings involved "witnessing," or giving testimony regarding prior sins, and what God had done in their lives to remove these sins, or defects in character (or shortcomings).

Frank Buchman and his followers held certain theological beliefs, including the following*:

- 1) Sovereignty and Power of God.
- 2) The reality of sin.
- 3) The need for complete surrender to the will of God.
- 4) Christ's atoning sacrifice and transforming power.
- 5) The sustenance of prayer.
- 6) The duty to witness to others.

**Garth Lean, ON THE TAIL OF A COMET - p. 73*

Its beliefs included other elements added as the movement grew and became more popular. Examples are as the belief that an experience of Christ would transform a believer, IF he truly believed - beyond anything he had dreamed possible. The belief that an adherent could and should make prompt restitution for personal wrongs revealed to him by his life-changing experience. And the belief that adherents should be part of a sort of "chain-reaction" of life changing experiences by sharing the experience of what Christ had done for them with others.

The Oxford Group believed one must surrender to God, not only to be "converted" from sin, but to have his entire life controlled by God. They believed in "Quiet Time," or meditation, during which a believer would get guidance of what to do or in as to the direction he should take. They believed in open confession of sin, one-to-another, following James 5:16 in the scriptures. They believed in the healing of the soul and in carrying the message of personal and world-wide redemption through the sharing of members' testimony by witnessing.

Frank Buchman, and his followers believed that people had sick souls, most of which was caused by "self-centeredness." Oxford Group members believed that people were powerless over this human condition, this defect of the soul. To recover one had to admit he was separated from God and his fellow man, and that God could manage their lives. Then they

made a decision to turn their lives over to the care and direction of God. They had to make an inventory of their lives and of their sins, and to make full restitution to others, those they had hurt by their sins, or shortcomings. They also had to witness to others as to their own conversion from sin and be available to convert others from sin. Oxford group members believed and were taught that the only way you could keep what you had been given by God, was to give it away to another. They did not try to force anyone into their path. They were to live their lives as an example, which would inspire others to want to follow.

The Oxford Group called its conversion process "soul-surgery." Its so-called surgical procedure broiled down to five concepts: CONFIDENCE, COFESSSION, CONVICTION, CONVERSION and CONSERVATION.

Oxford Group people also believed that their followers should have a formula for checking their motives in following this path. Part of the checking procedure involved the Four Absolutes; HONESTY, UNSELFISHNESS, PURITY and LOVE. Oxford Group people believed these were the four absolute standards of Jesus. We mention the Absolutes in the text of our book. A.A. members knew that no one could ever hope to attain the perfection of absolute anything. They instead were told to strive for perfection, as their guide for progress, knowing that they would never fully attain it.

Bill Wilson was visited by Ebby T., an Oxford Group follower (who never really attained sobriety, and died destitute). Bill was told by Ebby, "I got religion." Bill went to Calvary Mission in New York City with Ebby and late surrendered to Christ, making open confession of his alcoholism at the mission which was run by Calvary Episcopal Church. Bill soon had his "white light" spiritual experience at Towns Hospital and after this surrender, never drank alcohol again.

[Author's note: According to Mel B.'s biography of Ebby (*EBBY, The Man Who Sponsored Bill W.* - Hazelden Pittman Archives Press, Hazelden Publications, 1998), Ebby "had two years and seven months of continuous sobriety in the beginning, a long period of about seven years' sobriety in

Texas in the 1950's, and about 2 1/2 years' sobriety just before he died" in 1966. Mel B. states that in a letter from Bill Wilson to an A.A. member in Texas, that Ebby was paying for his own care at McPike's Farm (a treatment facility in Ballston Spa, N.Y.) with his Social Security and with "financing of \$200 a month that comes out of the A.A. book money at headquarters." Ebby died at a hospital near Ballston Spa and McPike's Farm where he had been living under the care of Margaret McPike.]

Bill knew when he was going to have a binge. Prior to his spiritual experience, Bill had been a patient at Towns Hospital and knew that he had to make reservations at Towns Hospital. He would call up two weeks in advance of binge and tell Towns when he was going to be there. His binges were planned. After his spiritual experience, he never found the need to call for reservations again.

Dr. Bob too, had had experience with the Oxford Group. After Frank Buchman's series of Oxford Group meetings at the Mayflower Hotel in Akron in January 1933, Henrietta Seiberling and Dr. Bob's wife, Anne Smith, convinced Dr. Bob to attend the meetings which were, by now, being held at the home of T. Henry and Clarace Williams.

Dr. Bob, though he had confessed his drinking and had been a devotee of the Oxford Group and of its writings and teachings, had not been able to stop drinking. It was not until he had met with Bill Wilson, another Oxford Group member, and was relating, one-drunk-to-another, that he eventually surrendered. Dr. Bob met Bill on Mother's Day in May of 1935, and later drank while going to and attending a medical convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey in June 1935. Bill Wilson gave Bob his last drink of beer just prior to performing surgery on June 10th , 1935. This was to be Dr. Bob's last "slip."

Bill Wilson was once quoted as saying that even though he did not want the connection to the Oxford Group and its religious reachings associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, he had incorporated most of their ideals and precepts in Steps and in the writing of what was to become the A. A. Recovery program.