

Frank Buchman and the Germans



Frank Buchman and the Germans

Pierre Spoerri

translated and edited by Peter Thwaites

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Pierre Spoerri: *Frank Buchman and the Germans*

This is a book of historical research. The Swiss author, Pierre Spoerri, became involved in Frank Buchman's international work* as a young man in 1947.⁽¹⁾ In *Frank Buchman and the Germans*, however, his focus is on earlier decades.

The period in question, roughly 1920-1950, begins with a defeated Germany suffering economic collapse and widespread hardship following World War I, while its victorious enemies insist on the payment of enormous reparations. It covers the twelve years of Nazi power which promised rebirth but brought tyranny, genocide and national destruction. It ends as a democratic Federal Republic and a reconciled Western Europe are about to take shape.

Spoerri takes us behind the scenes to trace the attempts by Buchman and his international team to introduce the ideas and approaches of the Oxford Group to Germany at an unpropitious but critical time. We meet ordinary Germans struggling in a situation which is clearer in historical hindsight but at the time was confused and opaque. During the years of Nazi power we see Buchman's German associates intimidated, divided and forced to find compromises as they try to devise ways of dealing with their totalitarian government. Many believed that Nazis could change and worked for that, occasionally with success. We learn what became of some of them in the wartime 'years of isolation'.

While in other European countries in the interwar years the Oxford Group became well-known as a dynamic Christian revival and gathered large crowds, in Germany it struggled against the tide. It was only later, after the Nazi state had fallen

*Frank N.D. Buchman (1878-1961), leader of the Oxford Group from around 1921, initiator of Moral Re-Armament 1938

and the country (minus its eastern territory) moved to democracy, that Moral Re-Armament (as the Oxford Group was now called) was welcomed by the nation's leaders and became, in post-war Chancellor Adenauer's phrase, a 'household word' (*ein Begriff*). This new post-war phase is glimpsed in the short final chapter of *Frank Buchman and the Germans*.

Germany's improbable renaissance from the ruin and shame of 1945 has now continued for two generations. National repentance for the evils of Nazism has been systematic and ongoing, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn recognised.⁽²⁾ Sane policies have prevailed. From being a global pariah the country is now viewed as the lynchpin of an increasingly integrated democratic Europe.

Spoerri's narrative is based on letters and documents from the period. A collection of these is listed in the Appendix at the back. While not more than a sample, the documents convey the life and activities of Germany's Oxford Groupers *at the time*. Such documentation is instructive when we are thinking about our own historical moment, when we too are having to make decisions *at the time*, for the sake of a future as yet unknown.

The author

Pierre Spoerri (b. 1926) grew up in Zürich where his father, Theophil Spoerri, was Professor of Romance Languages and Literature (*Romanistik*), and in 1948-1950 Rector of the University.

Spoerri the elder appears in the pages of *Frank Buchman and the Germans* as one of several prominent Swiss who joined Buchman's movement between the wars (in 1932) and were involved in its activities in Germany. Other older colleagues with whom Spoerri later worked also appear. Some are interviewed. So this is a history of Spoerri's parents' generation.

The Spoerri's belong to the 80% of the Swiss population which is Germanic, speaking a number of Germanic dialects some of which are barely intelligible to most Germans. This is the famous 'Swiss German' which somehow typifies the ambivalent relationship between the two countries. It is a spoken language; in writ-

ing the German Swiss almost always use standard German which they refer to as *Schriftdeutsch* ('written German'). Switzerland's largest city, Zürich, where the Spoerri live, is the home of two German-language universities of international repute and of a daily newspaper, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which is among the two or three finest in the German language.

The ambivalent Swiss attitude to Germany was in evidence during the period of Nazi expansionism which aimed to include all Germanic populations in the Third Reich. The idea appealed to a section of German Swiss society. Others however fought strongly to resist the lure and the pressure coming from Nazi Germany, sensing the threat to democratic civilisation inherent in Nazism.

Theophil Spoerri was one of the leaders of this resistance. With other colleagues he formed the *Gotthardbund* ('Gotthard League', named after the famous Swiss mountain pass on the north-south route between Germany and Italy) to combat the activities of the German 5th column in Switzerland. It stiffened the national will to stand firm against the big neighbour.⁽³⁾

That will was also strengthened by the action of Switzerland's wartime general and national hero General Henri Guisan who guaranteed Switzerland's neutrality and independence throughout the 1939-1945 war when the country was completely surrounded by Axis-ruled territory. On 25 July 1940 Guisan called his officer corps together on the Rütli, the mountain meadow in central Switzerland where according to tradition the Confederation was founded in 1291, to swear a new oath of loyalty to the country. His mountain fortress strategy threatened the Nazi forces with unacceptable losses if they should ever try to invade Switzerland or use it as a transit route.

Spoerri remembers this tense period. 'My father came to me one evening in 1940 – I was fourteen years old – and told me that because of his public stand against Nazism he would be one of the first to be arrested if the Germans came,' he told a conference in Caux in 2012.⁽⁴⁾

Meanwhile across the frontier in Germany Spoerri's future father-in-law, Baron Wilhelm ('Guy') von Hahn, who had also

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been close to the Oxford Group, was working as a journalist in the German press agency. This involved becoming a member of the National Socialist Party. To stand against the Nazi regime was to risk your life and that of your family. Von Hahn decided not to do so. Spoerri told the same conference: 'Through my father-in-law I discovered what life in Germany had been for people who were convinced Christians and deeply opposed to Nazism but who still had to survive under this dictatorship.'⁽⁵⁾ The von Hahns were Baltic German aristocrats who lost their home when the Red Army overran Germany's eastern territories in 1945.

Their daughter, Fulvia von Hahn and Pierre Spoerri were amongst the new generation of young Europeans who joined Buchman's team immediately at the end of the war. They married in 1958.

Spoerri's work with Moral Re-Armament (MRA) – as Buchman's work was now called – began with interpreting for some of the leaders of the new democratic Germany who since the founding of the Caux conference centre in 1946 were visiting it in increasing numbers. Others came from Austria. Spoerri went with MRA teams to the industrial Ruhr area where, as the Cold War developed, Moscow was seeking to exert influence through class war ideology.

The Spoerri worked in Asia, Africa and Europe and later became part of the team guiding the operations of the Caux centre. In 1970 Adolf Scheu, a West German MP, asked them to move to Bonn to stay in touch with the leaders of the Federal Republic, now increasingly wealthy and dynamic but divided from the eastern 40% of the country which had been incorporated into Soviet-controlled eastern Europe. The Spoerri based in Bonn for twenty years, returning to Switzerland shortly after Germany, against all predictions, was reunified in 1990, with a reunified Berlin as its capital. During those years politicians and other leaders from Germany, Austria and South Tyrol continued to visit Caux and benefit from its special perspective.

A note on Buchman and Bonhoeffer

The story in this book of Buchman's early bid for Germany is contemporaneous with the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was in some ways a Buchman-like figure, in other ways very different. The two never met, but in 1934 Bonhoeffer criticised the attempts of Buchman and the Oxford Group to 'convert Hitler' as 'naive'. A generation younger than Buchman, Bonhoeffer was ahead of nearly all his church colleagues in seeing the falsehood at the heart of the Nazi ideology, and the theological impossibility of compromise with it. Members of Bonhoeffer's family were connected with German patriotic circles who were conspiring to rid their country of Hitler and his regime and included the plotters of 20 July 1944. The failure of that coup led to many deaths and Bonhoeffer's tragic execution in the last weeks of the war – a loss to Germany and the world. (See Eric Metaxas' biography: *Bonhoeffer* (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2010)).

Despite their contrasts, there are striking similarities between the two men. Both were gifted pastors and leaders of young and old. Both were radical in their Christian faith, deeply aware that true Christianity existed in life, not theory, and transformed the personality. Both worked in the realm where faith changed communities and societies, not just the individual.

Was Buchman misguided in his attempt to meet and redirect the leaders of the Nazi movement? With hindsight, success was never close, and history sides with Bonhoeffer, whose martyrdom continues today to offer an example of spiritual leadership and uncompromising faith. And yet one cannot dismiss *a priori* Buchman's belief in approaching the person who seems to be the problem rather than dismissing him, in the conviction that God is able to transform even the apparently impossible person.

Comments regarding the text

1. The original German text contains quotations from English speakers and writers translated into German. In producing an English text it is best not to 're-translate' these but to quote the original English. Fortunately it has been possible to locate the

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originals in the Oxford Group/Moral Re-Armament archives in Oxford's Bodleian Library and in the Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne.⁽⁶⁾

2. Spoerri's research on this subject began over 40 years ago. Some of his material appears in Garth Lean's definitive biography: *Frank Buchman – a life* (Constable 1985). See especially Chapter 19, 'Bid for Germany' and Chapter 21, 'Hitler and the Gestapo clampdown'.

3. The German-language documents in the Appendix are commented on in the narrative. Where needed, key passages or phrases are translated. Thus, the English narrative can be read without the need to read these documents. Still, for a full appreciation of *Frank Buchman and the Germans* some knowledge of German is an advantage as the documents add authentic detail and contemporary atmosphere.

4. In the course of translation and background research⁽⁷⁾ I also found myself making corrections and offering editing suggestions which have been agreed to by the author. Thus there are discrepancies between the German and English texts. The unpublished German text still awaits a final editing.

Peter Thwaites

Notes

1. See Pierre Spoerri: *No end to the adventure* (Caux Books 2011), p.13
2. A.I. Solzhenitsyn: *Repentance and self-limitation in the life of nations. In: From under the rubble* (Fontana / Collins 1976) p.114
3. Also described in a lecture by Philippe Mottu: 'Caux is the place', Caux, 30 June 1996. See the on-line Appendix
4. Talk in Caux, 13 August 2012
5. Talk in Caux, 13 August 2012. See also *No end to the adventure*, p.75
6. Some of the main archives holding Oxford Group and Moral Re-Armament records are:
 - i. Library of Congress, USA,
 - ii. Hartford Theological Seminary, USA,
 - iii. Bodleian Library, Oxford University, UK (formerly at Dial House, Whitbourne),
 - iv. Archives Cantonales Vaudoises, Lausanne, Switzerland,
 - v. Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart (LKAS): D 47 – Nachlass Hans Strohm.
7. Access to the internet and to sites like Wikipedia have been of enormous assistance in the process of checking, correction and supplementary research.

Foreword

Why yet another publication about Germany during the Third Reich? Is there anything new to report?

In deciding to assemble and publish this account of Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group/Moral Re-Armament in Germany from 1920 to 1950 I was thinking of two groups of people. First I wanted the generation working today with Initiatives of Change* to know of some of the historical roots of this work and the continuous thread that runs through the years. The second group are European journalists, academics, historians and politicians who have been influenced by a certain propaganda to think that Buchman and his colleagues were guilty of an ambivalent attitude towards Hitler and National Socialism. This disinformation still crops up in various places, including now on the internet.

A problem for the researcher is that in times of totalitarian rule written correspondence is restricted to what is absolutely necessary. Buchman's main work in those critical years happened in personal conversations, of which few notes exist. In the few diaries that have survived the war much has to be read between the lines. Some first hand accounts, however, were written down in the immediate post-war years or later.

Much of the material collected here comes from ordinary men and women who had to make decisions about the right path to take in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Most of them are not well-known. Some risked or lost their lives through following their conscience – and to these especially these pages are dedicated.

The experiences of those who had to cope with the despotism of the thirties are also important for our times – and not only for people who suffer under dictatorships. The corruptibility of

*In 2001 Moral Re-Armament changed its name to Initiatives of Change.

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human nature, the power of fear, and the capacity to resist these temptations are present in each historical period. Now and then we can learn from earlier times – even if we often avoid old mistakes only to make new ones.

*Bonn, February 1986; Revised Zürich, April 2010
and October 2014*

CHAPTER I

Frank Buchman and pre-Hitler Germany

Frank Buchman's connection with Germany was life-long. His parents, Franklin and Sarah Buchman, belonged to the Pennsylvania German community (known as the 'Pennsylvania Dutch' – from *deutsch*) whose ancestors had come to America from South Germany and German Switzerland. The German they spoke was Buchman's first language, and he later always enjoyed using German expressions. One can assume that links continued between the New World and the Old, and that from time to time Buchman's father might have had German guests staying at his hotel in Pennsburg.

During his school and university years one of Buchman's special interests was the new Christian-Social movements in England and Germany.⁽¹⁾ So it is not surprising that his first overseas trip took him to Germany, where in the summer of 1903 he visited the great social institutions of Neuendettelsau, Gnadenthal and Kaiserwerth, the Johannesstift in Spandau and the Rauhe Haus in Hamburg. He spent several days in Bielefeld with one of the great pioneers of social work, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh. Twenty years later, Buchman wrote about this first German visit: 'This post-graduate work brought me in touch with Socialism and with the problems of labour, and with men like Stoecker, the pioneer socialist in the German parliament. I made a thorough study of Bodelschwingh's principles.'⁽²⁾

Buchman was fascinated by Bodelschwingh's life, work and personality. Born in 1831, Bodelschwingh had trained and worked as a farmer and seen with his own eyes the misery in which the poor rural workers lived. After studying theology at the University of Basel, he was appointed pastor of the German church in Paris. At that time 80,000 Germans lived there, mainly working as foreign labourers and garbage collectors in the French capital.⁽³⁾ He said later: 'I have learnt

that merely through human acts of good will you cannot alleviate human misery.' Bodelschwing himself was not spared suffering. At his first parsonage in Germany, in Dellwig in the Ruhr, his four children died in a period of two weeks from diphtheria.

In 1872 he was called to Bielefeld to take charge of a home for epileptics. The institution had one hundred patients in 1873. By 1900 it was caring for 1625 patients in 43 houses.

Bodelschwing had a few simple principles. 'The word "incurable" does not exist in the Christian vocabulary. Whoever has learnt to say "thank you" is cured.' 'I would be doing my patients the greatest injustice if I took away their responsibility and always tried to find excuses for them.' Another principle of his work was to give each patient not only the opportunity to learn a trade, but also to expect him to help someone who was in a worse condition than himself. This principle of 'mutual help' is still applied today in the institutions of Bethel (the name given to the colony by Bodelschwing).⁽⁴⁾

With the von Bodelschwing family a friendship grew which continued through several generations. Friedrich von Bodelschwing senior was Buchman's host on his first German visit; later it was Friedrich junior. In the biography of his father written by Friedrich's brother Gustav, there is a reference to Buchman's attempts to establish contact between Bodelschwing senior and the American industrialist and philanthropist Carnegie.⁽⁵⁾ An exchange of letters on this subject followed Buchman's visits to Bethel.

During his second visit to Bielefeld in 1908 Buchman wrote to his mother (in German): 'Eternally grateful to have these days here. I am very busy and feel very well. Yesterday I went for a walk with the young pastor von Bodelschwing to Freistadt where... the Brothers of the Road (*Brüder von der Landstrasse*) live and work. I had coffee with a young baron who is in charge there. We had our lunch with the workers. It is amazing what you see here.'⁽⁶⁾

In 1911 the younger Bodelschwing – his father having died the previous year – wrote to Buchman asking for introductions to American friends and supporters who might provide for the building of a teaching hospital, 'where our deaconesses [would receive] their professional, theoretical and practical training for the care of the sick and the poor.'⁽⁷⁾

A final letter of this period is once more about a possible contact with Carnegie. Bodelschwingh is glad ‘... on this occasion to receive another sign of life from you and to be assured that you still loyally support our work here. I hope we shall be able to welcome you once more to Bethel.’⁽⁸⁾

That loyalty is evident again in the difficult years after the First World War. In 1921 Buchman writes to Bodelschwingh from Paris: ‘I found that it was impossible for me to make a return visit to Bethel. I trust it is only a postponed pleasure. I sent a cheque for 1,000 Marks to the good woman who looks after the Hospice; to be used for furnishing there, and whatever was not needed to be returned to you for your own personal needs.’⁽⁹⁾ To a Mrs Woolverton Buchman writes in 1920 asking her to send three cows to Bethel.⁽¹⁰⁾

There are records of several other Germans whom Buchman met on these first visits to Europe. An exchange of letters with one Gerhard Heine in the early 1920s show Buchman concerned not just with the personal needs of individuals but with national developments in Germany. Buchman met Heine in Homburg, possibly through Prince Richard of Hesse to whom he had been introduced in Lucerne (Switzerland) in July 1920 by members of the Greek royal family.⁽¹¹⁾ In the correspondence between Heine and Buchman the three Hessian princes Richard, Christoph and Wolfgang are mentioned several times.

On 21 October 1921 Heine writes from Berlin: ‘Our situation has never been so bleak. An indescribable rage and bitterness has taken hold of all sections of German society... In Geneva pernicious seed is being sown which will sprout fearsomely and cause rivers and oceans of blood! Yes, dear Mr Buchman, in these circumstances it is difficult to think of your always helpful and reconciling attitude, for every day we are roused to fresh indignation.’⁽¹²⁾

His next letter shows growing resignation: ‘If we only knew what is to become of our beloved Germany. The dollar is climbing higher and higher. Where will it all end? Do you remember the time you changed 60 Dollars in Frankfurt? Today, you would receive a small fortune for this sum.’⁽¹³⁾

Buchman replies to Heine on 14 December: ‘God gave you rare physical charm and grace which must all be used for Him. I count

upon you heavily to be one of the great spiritual reconstructing forces in Germany which is her greatest need. I am grateful that there is a very hopeful chance through the influence of broad-minded statesmen to see that the Treaty of Versailles needs to be changed and the conditions were far too drastic and unjust... I am going for this weekend to visit various members of the Disarmament conference, meeting them at breakfast, lunch and dinner... Do write me often and remember that I am keen to see you a fully possessed Christian.'⁽¹⁴⁾

A month later Buchman writes again: 'It is great to have a friendship like yours where we need to have no apologies for speaking about the deepest things... We have had interesting house parties where groups of fellows come from some of our best known families and where they talk about the deepest things of life.' He mentions the profound change experienced by two students at Yale University.⁽¹⁵⁾

In the autumn of 1922 Buchman writes from Paris to Heine and to Countess Ursula Bentinck, whom he has got to know in Holland, that he has unfortunately been unable to visit Berlin in the summer. He has tried unsuccessfully to meet Heine in Homburg and only managed a short conversation with Prince Richard at the *Friedrichshof*.⁽¹⁶⁾

During the 1920s Buchman continued to help German friends with their personal needs. In a letter to Ursula Bentinck in 1923 he writes: 'I have just written Baroness Tiele-Winkler this morning enclosing some money for the daughters of a General who alternate a day in bed so as to assuage the pangs of hunger, and am ordering some pictures from H.R.H. Prince August Wilhelm to sell for him here. He remembers you well and spoke of your lunch in the vegetarian restaurant, which amused him greatly. There is real need in his household.

'I am grateful to you for all the contacts you have given me in Germany. My one regret is that I have never had more time at my disposal to follow them up more adequately, but unquestioned good has come from the contacts.'⁽¹⁷⁾

In a 1935 letter Buchman looks back on these early visits to Europe and Germany as a formative period with longer term significance: 'Even before the first war I was in touch with Germany. During the war I looked after German war prisoners in India and Japan. After the war I went back immediately to help under-nourished students and kept in touch with conditions and followed through earlier con-

tacts, feeding people and helping people who had lost their all and wanted their furniture to go to the pawnbroker. My friendship with Germany and the Germans has not been a matter of moments, but over years now there has been a constant progressive contribution, which has not been dependent on a passing fact, but on a deepseated conviction that the German people have a contribution to make, and it may be that a Renaissance may emerge that will bring Germany to her true leadership among the nations.'⁽¹⁸⁾

In the autumn of 1928 Buchman met a young German theologian, Justus Ferdinand Laun, who was at Oxford University on a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship and writing a thesis about a medieval cleric.⁽¹⁹⁾ The meeting led to a complete turnaround in Laun's life.⁽²⁰⁾ He gave up his academic career and, up to the outbreak of the Second World War, devoted all his time and energy to the development of the *Gruppenbewegung* (Group Movement), the name given to Buchman's work in Germany. Laun also wrote a book which made the movement known all over Germany, with the title *Unter Gottes Führung* ('Under God's leadership').⁽²¹⁾

Together with Laun Buchman organised some of the first *Haustagungen* (house parties) in Germany. Buchman's early collaborator, Loudon Hamilton, writes about a house party in Potsdam in 1923 or 1924. There are reports of a similar meeting in Augustabad near Berlin in September 1931, in which sixty persons participated, amongst them Professor Heinrich Rendtorff, the Bishop of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and Paul Le Seur, head of a *Jugend-Volks-Hochschule* (Junior Evening College) on the Heinstein near Eisenach.⁽²²⁾ Another centre of the work was Munich, where friends of the Group Movement met under the leadership of Dr. Alois Münch, a lawyer. The student chaplain and future Bishop Dr. Hermann Dietzfelbinger was also in contact with Buchman and organised meetings with students.⁽²³⁾

After one such house party in Germany in 1927 Buchman wrote from London describing the variety of people who had attended: 'The work in Germany has caught on in such a wonderful way in all classes. We have had a woman who came to the house party who had to borrow clothes to come, a cigar-maker and the wife of a former A.D.C. to the late Kaiser. Princess Fugger is offering her castle, and we all had lunch with Princess Margaret of Hesse... They had heard

of the change of Countess Plessen, who was one of the miracles of the Wallingford house-party. The Germans did marvellously respond.'⁽²⁴⁾

In October 1931 Buchman was in Holland. After a house party held at the castle of the Bentinck family, he drove with several German friends to nearby Doorn where the former German Kaiser was living in exile. The ex-Kaiser was suspicious and wanted to know who this American was who wanted to see him. So he decided not to appear for tea himself but asked one of his house guests, Frau Anneliese von Cramon, to talk to the visitors and to find out why they had come.

'What kind of people are you?' she asked one of Buchman's companions. 'I really don't know', he replied. ('I took note of that' she wrote in her reminiscences. 'I knew precisely what I was.') 'Frank, what are we exactly?' Buchman replied 'We are very ordinary people, but we want to put into modern language the truths which turned the early Christians into revolutionaries.'⁽²⁵⁾

Empress Hermine was much interested by the visit of Buchman and his friends. The Kaiser, however, could not understand anyone speaking humorously and lightly about a subject as important as the Christian faith, and remained suspicious.⁽²⁶⁾

At this meeting in Doorn Buchman invited Anneliese von Cramon to be his guest at a house party in Oxford some months later. After her return to Germany she gathered an influential group of people around her in Silesia, and in September 1932 organised an Oxford Group meeting in Arnoldsühle which was attended by Buchman as well as by Theophil Spoerri, a professor at Zürich University. One of the participants, Ruth Bennett, wrote to Buchman beforehand about the effects of Frau von Cramon's work: 'The whole village, communists, Hitlerites and all have just been here for the evening and under Moni's leadership we have all been witnessing to the power of the living Christ and to the modern miracles we have seen and experienced.'⁽²⁷⁾

Groups of Germans had taken part in the big Oxford Group meetings in Oxford in the summers of 1931 and 1932. At the beginning of 1933 Buchman, who was considering the next steps for his work, wrote to Ferdinand Laun and Herbert von Krumhaar: 'I appreciate your thought about this important work [in Germany] and I wish I could be more definite but there is no question there is a revival on in Canada and we must center our thought and action there... I believe

we can do the same thing in Germany as has happened in Canada some day.²⁸) The Germans accepted that they would have to wait.

Notes:

1 Buchman's early interest in Asia is also significant, in view of his later work. In 1901 he noted in his diary that he would like to go to India. There were books in his library on Indian religion, Chinese philosophy and Japanese customs. See Theophil Spoerri: *Dynamic out of Silence* (Grosvenor, London 1976), p.15

2 *ibid.*, p.20.

It should be noted that Buchman never met Adolf Stoecker, the second person mentioned here. Of a different stamp from Bodelschwingh, Stoecker pursued a theological career and at a young age was appointed Court Chaplain (Hofprediger) in Berlin. He became active in politics at the time when German Chancellor Bismarck was beginning his 'social revolution from above'. Stoecker founded the Christian-Social Party in opposition to liberalism, capitalism and socialism. See *Evangelisches Soziallexikon* (Kreuz Verlag, Berlin 1980), p.285.

3 *Evangelisches Soziallexikon* (Kreuz Verlag, Berlin 1980).

4 *Friedrich von Bodelschwingh – eine Geschichte seines Lebens*, erzählt von Gustav von Bodelschwingh (Furche Verlag, Berlin 1924), p.203.

5 Gustav von Bodelschwingh, p.476-7.

6 F. B. to his mother, 29 August 1908. (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

7 F. von Bodelschwingh to F.B., 29.6.1911.

8 F. von Bodelschwingh to F.B., 2.7.1913.

9 F. B. To F. von Bodelschwingh, 8.10.1921 (Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne)

10 F. B. to Mrs Woolverton, 23.9.1920.

11 Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a life* (Constable, London 1985) p.89.

12 Gerhard Heine to F.B., 21.10.1921. (correspondence between Buchman and Heine in the Library of Congress, Washington DC). See Appendix, nr. 1.

13 Gerhard Heine to F.B., 9.11.1921.

14 F. B. to G. Heine, 14.12. 1921

15 F. B. to Gerhard Heine, 26.1.1922.

16 F. B. to Gerhard Heine, and to Ursula Bentinck, 1.9.1922

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17 F. B. to U. Bentinck, 8.10.1923.

18 F. B. to A. von Cramon, 9.10.1935. (Quoted in Morris Martin: unpublished manuscript, p.155)

19 J. F. Laun's thesis, published in 1929, was on 14th Century theologian Thomas Bradwardine (1290-1349), appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in June 1349 shortly before his death.

20 See also Prof. Dr. Allwohn: *Zum Gedenken an Justus Ferdinand Laun, 1899-1963 (Erinnerungsschrift)*.

21 Justus Ferdinand Laun: *Unter Gottes Führung* (Klotz Verlag, Gotha 1937); see also the letters of J.F. Laun to F.B. of 15.10.1929, 11.11.1929 and 22.4.1930.

22 Curt Georgi: *Christsein aus Erfahrung* (Schriftenmissions Verlag Gladbeck 1970), p.16.

23 *ibid.*, p.16.

24 F. B. to Mrs Tjader, 8 December 1927 (Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne)

[The Princess Fugger mentioned here would appear to be Princess Eleanora Fugger (1864-1945) (see Wikipedia), whose husband Karl, 5th Prince Fugger von Babenhausen (1861-1925) had been Chamberlain to the late Austrian Kaiser Franz Josef. Her son Georg, 6th Prince Fugger (1889-1834) married Countess Elisabeth Plessen (1891-1976) – possibly the Countess Plessen referred to in the letter. Elisabeth Plessen was a long-time friend of Ursula Bentinck.

Princess Margaret of Hesse (1872-1954) was born Margaret of Prussia, youngest sister of German Kaiser Wilhelm II. Through another sister, Queen Sophie of Greece, she met Buchman (see Garth Lean p.89). Her fifth son Prince Richard (1901-1969) remained a friend of Buchman and was present at his death in Freudenstadt (see Ch. VIII).

Margaret married Prince Friedrich of Hesse-Kassel (1868-1940). In 1918 the Finnish Parliament elected Friedrich King of Finland but he renounced the throne after two months following Germany's defeat and the abdication of the Kaiser.]

25 Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a life*, p.204. See also Frau von Cramon's unpublished reminiscences.

26 Letter of Ursula Bentinck to Buchman, 17.10 1931 (Bodleian Library). Her uncle Count Gothard Bentinck had provided refuge for the Kaiser in his home at Amerongen after the abdication in 1918 until the Kaiser moved to nearby Doorn. Gothard was the father of John (see later chapters). The various branches and members of the Bentinck family are listed at genealogieonline.nl.

27 Ruth Bennett to Frank Buchman, 3 September 1932; invitation to the

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Arnoldsmühle meeting, 27-28 September 1932 (See Appendix, nrs. 2 and 3). See also letter from Th. Spoerri to A. von Cramon, 1.10.1932 in: *Theophil Spoerri persönlich* (Caux Verlag, Luzern 1975), pp.196-7.

28 F. B. to Ferdinand Laun and Herbert von Krumhaar, 12.1.1933 (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress)

CHAPTER II

Hitler's first year in power – Buchman and the *Kirchenkampf*

When Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933, Buchman was in Canada with a large international 'task force' which included Anneliese von Cramon. Buchman's reaction to the news from Berlin is not recorded, but Nazi power cannot have come as a total surprise. His visits to Germany and correspondence with German friends kept him in touch with developments inside the country. He had personally witnessed violent clashes between right wing and left wing groups under the Weimar Republic. At an Oxford house party in July 1932 a German had spoken of 17,000 unemployed in one city alone, of a third of the population who were living below the poverty line and of 20 million people without enough to eat.⁽¹⁾

In other countries Buchman had been able to build up his work in relatively peaceful circumstances, but in Germany conditions were different from the start. Before long his German friends, too, were discussing whether methods might need be 'adapted for working in Germany'.⁽²⁾

While still looking for opportunities to hold the large house parties and public events that had been effective elsewhere, Buchman saw other ways to reach people in Germany. The first was to keep the channels open and seek to meet the country's leadership on a private and confidential basis, including people in government and in the governing Party. His view was that, in Germany as elsewhere, you can't influence the thinking and motivation of people if you are not ready to meet and talk with them.

A second way was through the printed word. One of Buchman's

first friends in Germany was Leopold Klotz, a publisher in Gotha. Up until 1936 the Klotz *Verlag* (Publishing House) published fourteen books and pamphlets about the *Gruppengewegung*. Other books were published by other publishers. Buchman said at one conference that Germany would be converted by a book.⁽³⁾ It was a book – *For Sinners Only* (in German: *Nur für Sünder*) by A.J. Russell – that first drew the attention of the Bishop of Württemberg, Dr Theophil Wurm, to the activities of the Oxford Group. Buchman suggested to Laun that Harold Begbie's *Life Changers* should also be available in German. This led to the publication of *Unter Gottes Führung* ('Under God's Leadership') which included a translation of several chapters of Begbie's book along with chapters from other sources. Laun's aim was to produce a book that made sense to contemporary Germans.⁽⁴⁾

A passage from the book conveys some of what Laun was wanting to express: '... [They] represent a new type of leader (*Führer*): a leader who is not seeking supporters but wants to lead people to Christ. This leader is not a personality in the individualistic sense, in the sense of a hero cult. That is why there is no leadership cult at [Oxford Group] house parties... That is why each one is called to be a leader...The leader does not step down from a pedestal to meet those below him, but all are lifted up to be leaders, as all have a direct access to the leading of the Holy Spirit.'⁽⁵⁾

Finally, Buchman tried to work through neighbouring countries where the spark of Oxford Group thinking was taking hold. The great campaigns which attracted thousands of people in Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia and Switzerland were commented on in great detail in the news media of those countries. Through the media, and through German participation in these campaigns, much of Buchman's thinking penetrated to Berlin and across Germany in the early 1930s.

Many of the Germans Buchman had got to know, whether in Germany or abroad, were theologians and leaders of the church. He now found himself confronted with complexities and divisions in the Christian camp which had been plunged into a profound crisis by Hitler's rise to power. The relationship between church and state in Germany had always been prone to deep

tensions, especially since the Reformation. In simple terms, Christians in Germany were always facing two temptations: to identify themselves wholly with the state; or to view political questions as being outside the churches' area of concern.

A new element in this complex situation was the 'German Christian' movement (*Glaubensbewegung Deutsche Christen*). A forerunner had been the German Church League (*Bund für Deutsche Kirche*), formed in 1921. The German Christians advocated 'positive Christianity', a faith 'conforming to the German spirit of Luther and heroic piety'. They saw in 'race, nationality and nation (Rasse, Volkstum und Nation) the living order given to us by God.' It was 'God's law to preserve it.'⁽⁶⁾

Knowing the power of the churches in Germany, Hitler made every effort early in his career not to upset church leaders or churchgoers. The National Socialist Party Program of 24 February, 1920 stated: 'The Party as such advocates the standpoint of a positive Christianity without taking the side of one confession or another. It fights against the Jewish-materialistic spirit in us and outside us and is convinced that a lasting recovery in our people can only happen growing from within, on the principle of common interest before self-interest.'⁽⁷⁾

In 1928 Dr. Arthur Dinter, a member of the NSDAP (full name translates as: National Socialist German Workers Party) lost his party membership because he wanted to replace the Christian faith with a German faith. In the same year Hitler declared: 'Our movement is actually Christian... In our ranks we do not tolerate anybody who offends against the ideas of Christianity.'⁽⁸⁾ In the twenties Hitler had met and been impressed by an army chaplain, Ludwig Müller, to whom he gave a number of official introductions. Müller became his close adviser on religious affairs.

From 1932 the National Socialists were trying to gain control of the Protestant Churches from the bottom up through the German Christians, whose growing influence was demonstrated in the church elections in Prussia that autumn.

One of the demands of the German Christians was to transform the loose association of 28 Protestant Churches into a

united *Reichskirche* (National Church). Other church leaders supported the idea. In April 1933 a committee of three was appointed to prepare this reform.⁽⁹⁾ One member of the committee was Bishop D. Marahrens, whom Buchman knew. And the committee's nominee for the post of *Reichsbischof* (National Bishop) was Buchman's old friend from Bethel, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh.

Pressures from Party and State, however, isolated von Bodelschwingh more and more, so that he gave up his post after only one month. This opened the way for the appointment of Ludwig Müller. Within weeks Müller had the new constitution of the *Reichskirche* approved by the government in Berlin and then called for elections to all church bodies. The result was a massive victory for the German Christians. Only in Württemberg, Bavaria and Hannover did the churches remain under the former leadership and thus 'intact'.

Things were moving on the Catholic side too. Soon after Hitler's official declaration of 23 March 1933, recognising both confessions as 'highly important factors in the preservation of our national character (*unseres Volkstums*)', the Catholic Bishops Conference in Fulda lifted its earlier bans and warnings against National Socialism.⁽¹⁰⁾ On 20 July a *Konkordat* between Hitler and the Vatican safeguarded the institutions and associations of the Catholic Church but put an end to any independent political activity by Catholics.

In this early period of National Socialist government few foresaw the terrible and tragic evolution that was to follow. Karl Barth, professor of theology in Basel and later one of the most inexorable enemies of the Third Reich, wrote in 1938: 'During its first phase in power National Socialism actually had the character of a political experiment like others... At that time the churches in Germany had – and this is still my conviction today – the right and the duty to give it, as a political experiment, time and opportunity.'⁽¹¹⁾

How did Buchman see the situation in the summer of 1933, and what steps did he take? First of all he invited a number of German friends to join him in Oxford at a large international

gathering. As at earlier house parties, some who came responded particularly to the 'personal message'; some were interested from a theological perspective⁽¹²⁾; others were thinking of possible political consequences. One participant in July 1933 was Bishop Heinrich Rendtorff of Mecklenburg, who shortly before his visit to Britain had spoken out in opposition to a *Staatskommissar* (State Commissar) appointed by the Berlin authorities.⁽¹³⁾ Another was Agnes von Grone, National President of the Protestant Women's Organisation (*Reichsführerin des Frauenwerkes der Evangelischen Kirche*).

In August Frau von Grone invited Buchman, who was travelling with a small group from Oxford to Berlin,⁽¹⁴⁾ to break the journey in Blankenburg where they would be guests of the Duke and Duchess of Brunswick (*Braunschweig*). It was an unforgettable visit for all.

The Duke suggested to Buchman: 'One evening we want to tell you what we have been doing here. And we want to hear what you have been doing. Which shall come first?' Buchman asked the Duke and Duchess to tell their story first. After dinner, the Duke called in all the family and the servants. One after another spoke of the condition of Germany and the need to back the strong man who was restoring purpose and greatness to Germany. They told the stories of their homes and the realities they had experienced.

The Duke told about the hunchback cobbler who at the end of the war had come with orders from the Communists to take over the castle, but who was so overawed by the company in which he found himself that he had to be encouraged by them to get out the news with which he had come.

One of the party described it as 'an extraordinarily democratic evening in the once feudal society of Northern Germany, the democracy born from a common sense of national need'.

The next evening Buchman and his friends told stories of radical changes that had taken place in people and situations, and the hope for nations that such experiences represent. Their host and hostess were so captivated that they asked them to stay on for another two nights.⁽¹⁵⁾

Two newspaper articles from August and September 1933 indicate how Buchman and his group were moving in different circles. At a *Tagung* (conference) in Sonderburg, a small town in North Schleswig, two thousand people gathered and heard news of developments in neighbouring Denmark and Norway.⁽¹⁶⁾ In Berlin Buchman and ten English friends attended a diplomatic *Bierabend* in the *Landwehrcasino*, also at the invitation of Duke Ernst August von Braunschweig, meeting mostly members of the diplomatic corps and National Socialists.⁽¹⁷⁾

The most important meetings during these months, however, took place in Bad Homburg, starting in June with a leadership training session and house party (*Führerschulung und Hauspartie*) with more than 250 participants. The invitation states the aim of the gathering: 'What we need most is a revolution of mind and heart – a radical deliverance from our ego with its pains and pleasures, and to become part of the living community of genuine love.' A government minister (unnamed) is quoted as saying: 'As a statesman I am convinced that only the influence which is exercised so powerfully through your mediation can save the world from destruction.'⁽¹⁸⁾

A week later Buchman met with a group of German colleagues in Bad Nauheim. They discussed 'the work done in Germany so far, the present situation and future tasks'. House parties and meetings had taken place all over the country and there was a need to agree on what would now have the maximum impact. The decision was to have one more large ten-day *Gruppentagung* (Oxford Group conference) in Bad Homburg from the middle of September. J. Ferdinand Laun was asked to pass on these decisions to a core group.⁽¹⁹⁾

An intensive correspondence followed amongst Buchman's German friends, and between them and Buchman. All felt that it was urgent to do something big and to do it together, and that this might be the last chance. When the large conference was postponed until 1934 and the September meeting became a *Rüstzeit* (Preparation/Training time)⁽²⁰⁾ many people in leadership positions still expressed the wish to participate. One of those responsible for planning the gathering, A. Günther, wrote to Erich von

Eicken: 'We are waiting every day for a final word from Buchman about Homburg... I have already given Herr Klotz the names of Professors Fezer, Odenwald, Heim and others as people interested in participating.'⁽²¹⁾

Klotz himself wrote to Buchman two days before the meeting: 'During my two-day visit to Berlin I succeeded in reaching the innermost circle of the new church government. I had half an hour's intensive conversation with the leading theologian of the German Christians, Professor Fezer. I could not resist an inner prompting to invite him to come to Homburg, at least for a day.' Klotz then says that he feels that a private meeting between Fezer, Buchman, Professor Emil Brunner (from Zürich) and Frau von Grone could be important.⁽²²⁾ Much was expected from Fezer's participation in Homburg as he was one of the few personalities trusted and respected by the Bishops of the 'intact' churches as well as by the German Christians.⁽²³⁾

When the *Rüstzeit* opened in Homburg an unusually mixed group had gathered. Various churches and confessional groups had sent their representatives⁽²⁴⁾ who produced many of the articles that appeared after the event, most importantly those by Martin Rade, one of Germany's best known liberal theologians. Others were by the *Jungreformer* Wilhelm Schlink who was deeply impacted⁽²⁵⁾, the *Herrnhuter* Johannes Vogt, the Methodist Herbert Schädelbach and the *Volksmissionar* Hans Pförtner.⁽²⁶⁾

German theologians Professor Rudolf Otto and Heinrich Hermelink were joined in Homburg by Professors Emil Brunner and Theophil Spoerri from Zürich. There was a large group from Britain. Considering the mixed gathering, the political situation in the summer of 1933 and the tension between Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and continental intellectualism it is not astonishing that there were some conflicts, in public and behind the scenes.

The tension is evident in some British and American accounts. One noted: '1933 house party at Bad Homburg – 300 people – they were very Christian – [Buchman] said very bluntly to them that the Church would have to reach to the nerve of the nation if it was to be effective. Pious Lutheranism was not enough, going to church on Sunday not enough.'⁽²⁷⁾ Another recalls: 'There must

have been about 150 people there, the most pious group I ever met. It was a real fight to wake them up. Frank didn't really get through to them. They were very intellectual, fortified behind an impregnable wall of theology. They looked down on National Socialism as something pagan, quite unrelated to the churches, and thought it would wear itself out. Frank was clear that, whether you liked it or not, it was there to stay, and that it was high time to try and win it for Christ. The clergy decided to do nothing.'

But the first-time visitors to Germany were impressed by the German youth. On a Sunday morning they saw two bands of young men and women, dressed in a kind of scout uniform, marching to work, one on a big sewerage project, another draining a swamp. 'It was all on a voluntary basis and gave a great sense of dedication. Demoralisation seemed to have gone.'⁽²⁸⁾ The first adds: '[It is easy] to look back... years later – but you did feel there was a movement among people to revive a stricken nation.'⁽²⁹⁾ A third remembers: '[Buchman] could not understand why the Christian church should not galvanise the youth with the true gospel and why the Christian ideology should not permeate a nation and penetrate every heart and home on at least as great a scale as the idea of National Socialism. He was quite clear, and I remember him saying, "Be very clear on this, what we see here is not the Christian Revolution." But he felt that the Nazis were demanding more of the youth and of all people than the Christians were and that was partly why they won them.'⁽³⁰⁾

What was Buchman trying to achieve in his exchanges with the theologians? Maybe it is spelled out best by Hans Stroh, who found himself as a young theologian sitting in a car with Buchman on the autobahn four years after the meetings in Homburg. Stroh wrote about the conversation to his family: 'What you realise when you talk with Frank Buchman is how our Christianity is full of compromise. All my well-meaning attempts at church work crumble into insignificance when he asks: 'How many people have been transformed? The church should be able to tell about modern miracles, about the lives of renewed people. Then all polemics come to an end.' About the church he has said

again and again: 'You are defending something that needs no defense. But where the church is not able to speak about such miracles, it is dead. The church needs to find a new stature. Something revolutionary. Luther provided it for his time. Today the Group. The cross of Christ needs to be held up everywhere, not only preached about from the pulpit, but everywhere, by all kinds of people and in every way possible!'⁽³¹⁾

Buchman had a similar talk with Professor Karl Fezer whom he visited in Berlin after the Homburg gathering. Fezer remembered the talk in detail. Hans Stroh was Fezer's assistant in Tübingen at the time, and in 1976 gave this account of it: 'Buchman's talk with Fezer covered the task of the Group, the hopes that existed for Germany and the preconditions for a national change. Fezer was very much moved by this meeting, especially by the deep changes in the men sitting in front of him, their faith in guidance through listening to God and their vision for Germany. He told how after a time of quiet they had all knelt down to pray together in the hotel room.'⁽³²⁾

In late September and October tensions in the German church were becoming acute. On 21 September a meeting of the forces opposed to National Socialism set up the Pastors' Emergency League (*Pfarrernotbund*) and elected Pastor Martin Niemöller (who had at first supported Hitler) as president. A week later Ludwig Müller's appointment as *Reichsbischof* was confirmed by a National Synod in Wittenberg.

Soon after this Karl Fezer, who had been in Wittenberg, travelled to England with seven other Germans for a series of public Oxford Group events. When four well known figures of the German Protestant Church appeared among the foreign guests at a special Commissioning Service in St. Paul's Cathedral, the *Church of England Newspaper* wrote: 'It does not need much imagination to realise what it will mean to Germany – and therefore to the world – if the vital message of the Oxford Group permeates German thought and action.'⁽³³⁾ The four were: Professor Karl Fezer; *Kirchenrat* Dr. Krummacher (responsible for ecumenical questions in the Chancellery of the Protestant Church in Berlin); *Oberkonsistorialrat* Hans Wahl and Frau Agnes Grone.

Also part of the German group were Anneliese von Cramon and Baron von Maltzahn from the Press Department of the Foreign Office.

Fezer was so impressed by the events he attended and the conversations he had that he travelled straight back to Berlin to persuade the controversial leader of the German Christians, Bishop Hossenfelder, to come to London also, so that together they could 'assess the full meaning of the Groups for the German Church'.⁽³⁴⁾

Hossenfelder accepted the invitation with enthusiasm but his visit to England was anything but a success. Buchman gave Fezer and Hossenfelder several chances to express themselves and to hear opposing views, particularly from the English. But Hossenfelder did not make life easy for those who had been asked to look after him. One of them, Anneliese von Cramon, wrote later: 'This little, plump, cigar-smoking bishop with a big cross on his chest had no discipline, missed an appointment with the Bishop of Chichester and asked me to cancel an appointment with Archbishop Lang in Lambeth Palace. He was obviously more interested in finding a Bavarian *Bierstube* in which he felt at home with *weisswurst*, *sauerkraut* and beer.'⁽³⁵⁾ Another observer recalls that he 'insisted on slapping English bishops on the back.' On his return journey Hossenfelder told Fezer that he had enjoyed his visit but did not understand 'all they kept saying about change.'⁽³⁶⁾

The proposed Aryan Paragraph (*Arierparagraph*) – requiring the dismissal of church pastors with non-Aryan blood – was a central theme of discussion with the German churchmen on their visit to England. In *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* Klaus Scholder writes: 'To reassure the Anglo-Saxon churches in particular the *Reichsbischof* had even sent Fezer and Hossenfelder to England in mid-October with instructions "to explain to all authorities" with which they came into contact, "especially the Anglican Bishops but also the German Embassy and any other church gatherings the official position of the National Church government (*Reichskirchenregierung*): that there is no intention to apply the *Arierparagraph* in the German Protestant Church.'" The journey of these two prominent representatives of the

German Church to London, Oxford and Cambridge was a great success, especially because of this declaration and because of the active participation of Frank Buchman and the Oxford Group.^{'(37)}

Contrary to what Scholder writes, however, the driving force behind these meetings was not *Reichsbischof* Müller but Professor Fezer and, through his invitations, Frank Buchman. Their concern had been not only the particular issue of the *Arierparagraph* but the whole future direction of the German church.

Letters written to Buchman by some of the Germans after their visit to England give some impression of its effects. *Kirchenrat* Dr. Krummacher, writing in German, expressed the hope that 'the relationship between us which is now five years old will have been strengthened through these days, and that the newly formed ties will be a blessing to our peoples and our churches.'⁽³⁸⁾ In a second letter at the end of 1933 he spoke more concretely about what had happened since his return from London: 'I enclose Nr. 6 of the published laws (*die Nr. 6 des Gesetzblattes*) of the German Protestant Church. I assume it will be of special interest to you to read the new church law of 8.12.1933 about the legal position of pastors and officials of the church, as through this law all former church laws, including the *Arierparagraph*, have been rescinded.'⁽³⁹⁾

Hossenfelder in his letters just expressed general thanks. His report about London seems, however, to have frustrated the attempt by another influential clergyman, a Dr. Jäger, to get the Oxford Group banned in Germany.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Frau von Grone wrote on a more personal note: 'During the difficult time I have had to go through with the intrigues in Berlin, all my experiences with the Group have remained with me as my comfort. I was ashamed to write to you because I have to admit in honesty that I lost heart and was not a good fighter for Christ. I knew that you were praying for us unruly Germans, and that helped me again and again... The line which Hossenfelder is pursuing is a disastrous one, unfortunately, but the *Reichsbischof* is a man who would like to be still before God. The wildly irresponsible and superficial *Deutsche Christen* have no desire to be still but only want bustle and activity.'⁽⁴¹⁾

Frau von Grone continued to be the target of attacks and intrigues as she struggled to prevent the absorption of the Protestant Women (*Evangelisches Frauenwerk*) into the National Socialist Women's Organisation, which would mean full Nazi control. Finally she was expelled from the National Socialist Party and became an active member of the Confessing Church.⁽⁴²⁾

Buchman himself was attacked on all sides for his invitation to Bishop Hossenfelder. Laun wrote to him: 'As I have heard from many quarters, including from Otto and Hermelink, your being together several times with Hossenfelder and then especially your attempt to mediate between him and Fezer has left a bad impression in many circles of the church, especially amongst the so called Young Reformers (*Jungreformatoren*) who have now become quite prominent.'⁽⁴³⁾ Professors Emil Brunner and Karl Barth as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed similar strong views.⁽⁴⁴⁾

But Buchman was in no way prepared to regret what had happened. To Emil Brunner, who had accused him of wanting to 'mediate in the German church struggle' and deplored his contact with Hossenfelder, he wrote: 'Your danger is that you are still the Professor thundering from the pulpit and want the theologically perfect. But the German Church crisis will never be solved that way. Just think of your sentence, "Unfortunately this hopeless fellow Hossenfelder has damaged the reputation of the Groups." It sounds to me like associating with "publicans and sinners". Just keep your sense of humour and read the New Testament. The Groups in that sense have no reputation, and for myself, I have nothing to lose. I think it says something about that in the second chapter of Philipians. I would be proud to have Hossenfelder be in touch with such real Christianity that some day he would say, "Well, as a young man of thirty-two I made many mistakes, but I have seen a pattern of real Christianity." It is not a question of this man's past, but of his future. What might it mean for the future of Germany, if by the grace of God he could see a maximum message of Christ incarnate in you; and you might be the human instrument to effect that mighty change... Our aim is never to mediate, but to change lives and

unite them by making them life-changers – to build a united Christian front.⁴⁵

If October 1933 was a turbulent month for the German churches, November was more so. On 13 November the German Christians organised a mass meeting in the *Sportpalast* in Berlin. Bishop Hossenfelder was in the chair; the main speaker was a Dr. Krause. A resolution passed by all 20,000 people present – with one vote against! – listed a series of extreme positions including the demand that the Protestant Church should apply the *Arierparagraph* immediately and without any exceptions... The resolution said: ‘We expect our Church as a German People’s Church to rid itself of everything un-German in its confession and its services, especially the Old Testament and its Jewish morality of reward...’⁴⁶

These extreme theses cost the German Christians a large number of their supporters. There was widespread public protest. Even the *Reichsbischof* was forced to take a stand and to dismiss some members of the church government. Hossenfelder resigned from his public posts. In a letter to Buchman he just says that he has ‘put all his posts at the *Reichsbischof*’s disposal’ and that he has been granted, at his own request, ‘extended leave’.⁴⁷

Fezer describes a meeting with Buchman, Professor Arthur Weiser⁴⁸ and Hossenfelder on 21 November, one week after the *Sportpalast* disaster. He writes that Buchman had tried to keep the conversation going between the three men. As a result Hossenfelder sent a (probably half-hearted) telegram to Bishop Wurm. But it seemed obvious, Fezer continues, that the fundamental divergence of views had not been overcome.⁴⁹ This fact explains a telegram from Fezer to Buchman, two days later: ‘Best way to end confusion: Hossenfelder annul publicly *Sportpalast* remarks in Weimar’.⁵⁰ Two days later, Buchman received another message, this time from Fezer and Weiser: ‘Visit to you unfortunately no longer possible.’⁵¹

Besides Fezer and Weiser, Buchman also remained in contact with Bodelschwingh and the *Reichsbischof*. The latter asked him to have the book *What is the Oxford Group?*, which had just been published, translated into German as soon as possible.

Replying to Laun on 22 December 1933, Buchman took the opportunity to clarify, for himself and others, what his basic aim was in the struggle between the various camps in the church: 'The fact that I have tried to create peace I feel can only reflect credit on the Christmas season, even though some theologians may not believe that that is possible in daily life. So do not worry about that. There will be credit at least in heaven for that, even if those on earth are not yet willing to believe it as a present possibility... The Oxford Group is above parties, and seeks to bring peace and harmony among all and a maximum experience of Christ.'⁽⁵²⁾ ⁽⁵³⁾

The Zürich professors were still not quite satisfied, as shown by a letter written to Buchman in the same month by Theophil Spoerri: 'A long conversation [between Spoerri and Emil Brunner] has shown that the personal problem [the strained relationship between Brunner and Buchman] is a secondary one compared to the great problem of the Groups and Germany... Emil had no other intention with his letters than to ask you, Frank, to talk to us Swiss as well before you take decisive steps in Germany... We are ready for any sacrifice, but we want to be able to use our experience and our minds also... Emil is in constant contact with many Germans representing all camps... From this perspective we see what is happening in Germany now not as a fight between different points of view but a fight for the renewal of evangelical freedom on one hand or for the gravest spiritual slavery on the other. It is possible that we see only one side, but this side is important too.'⁽⁵⁴⁾

Not only differences of personality and experience made a common view difficult to achieve, but also different perspectives on events in Germany. And there was the tense relationship between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth – though they remained in close contact throughout their academic careers.

One evening in December 1933 Barth received Brunner, Theophil Spoerri and one or two other friends of the Oxford Group at his home in Basel. The discussion was energetic and at times heated. Brunner felt prompted next day to apologize to Barth for his part in the stormy discussion.

The exchange of letters that followed between Barth and Brunner brings out their different views on Frank Buchman, the Oxford Group and its work in Germany. Barth writes that at the last meeting with Brunner he had ‘to suppress a sentence’ which he had been tempted to use: ‘If you (Emil) were living in Germany, you would now be with the German Christians.’ Then he continues: ‘And what did my innocent baby-blue eyes see recently in the newspaper? A beautiful photo showing the group: Hossenfelder, Buchman, Fezer!... What conclusion do I draw? The conclusion – which now probably cannot be contested – that Buchman apparently has had the appropriate guidance and sees in these German Christians – probably first of all in the decent Fezer, but indirectly also in the less decent Hossenfelder – flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23) and spirit of his spirit.’⁽⁵⁵⁾

Brunner replied a few days later: ‘I am glad that there is at least one person who still believes in your innocent, baby-blue eyes. When I read your astonishing remarks, I was at first really rather perplexed. Not because of your conclusions about me... But because of [what you said concerning] Frank Buchman. Then I had to laugh.

‘You see, the child’s eyes are not yours but those of the American. He is childlike enough to believe that even a Fezer and a Hossenfelder belong to Christ. It is his habit to approach the great and the dangerous – like Ford in America and the tyre king Firestone whose son, instead of earning millions, is now travelling with the Groups as an evangelist. So I knew, partly from personal talks with Buchman, that he saw in Fezer one of his targets. Simply because he is – like Hossenfelder – a leading man in the Church. While we shout anathema he gets moving, travels to Berlin, gets close to the people he has in mind and then gets them to come to London, following the recipe: Come and see. (see John 1,46). Time will tell who is right: you and I who stand on the side line and curse, or he who dares to proclaim Christ even to these people so that they realize that they have to stop being what they have been. I have seen this approach at work in Homburg and have seen at a house party how hardboiled German Christians have softened, and how those who began with grand

words and cocky manners went away quietly at the end as people with broken hearts and sincere faith... Such things do not seem to happen, in my experience, too often around us.⁽⁵⁶⁾

The relationship between Brunner and Barth was also affected by this discussion. In his letter to Buchman Spoerri wrote: 'His (Brunner's) relationship to Barth is fundamentally altered. Emil is no longer bound to Barth by his fear of him. He has also taken great trouble to show Barth what he himself has found in the Oxford Group. For this, he earned a "thanks" (from Barth) in the form of a nasty personal remark in the last issue of the review *Zwischen den Zeiten*.'⁽⁵⁷⁾

But when there was an opportunity to do something significant for Germany the Zürich professors were still ready to be fully involved. Buchman had an inner sense that January 1934 would be the moment for another major public event in Germany.⁽⁵⁸⁾ From his contacts with all sides he now had a clearer idea of what his message needed to be. At the end of the year he wrote to one of the clergymen who felt responsible for the planned action: 'We need to demonstrate at this house party what a living Church really is, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. It is time to show... that people who have points of view are not going to be the instruments that the Holy Spirit uses as the evidence of an abiding Church... I have had experience with both sides, and I find that people do not have the necessary power to change difficult people and difficult situations. They plan to do it mostly through committees, and view-points. The time has now come to do a national work for the Church, and if it is God's will I know we will have the blessing of every right-minded person.'⁽⁵⁹⁾

Notes:

1 Morris Martin: unpublished manuscript (Oxford Group archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford UK).

2 J.F. Laun to F.B., 10.11.1929.

3 Th. Spoerri to F.B., Zürich, 30.6.1933.

4 J.F. Laun to Prälat D. Dr. Wilhelm Diehl, 4.2.1933.

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5 See Anders Jarlert: *The Oxford Group, Group Revivalism and the Churches in Northern Europe 1930-1945* (Lund University Press 1995) p.390.

6 *Richtlinien der Glaubensbewegung Deutscher Christen*, May 1932, quoted in Eberhard Röhm/Jörg Thierfelder: *Evangelische Kirche zwischen Kreuz und Hakenkreuz* (Calwer Verlag, Stuttgart 1981), p.25.

7 Röhm/Thierfelder, *ibid*, p.17.

8 Scholder, Klaus: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, Band 1 (Propyläen/Ullstein, Berlin 1977) p.123: Hitler's speech in Passau, 27.10.1928.

9 Röhm/Thierfelder, *ibid*, p.21.

10 *Katholische Kirche und NS-Staat*, herausgegeben von Monika Kringel-Kemen und Ludwig Lemhöfer (Knecht Verlag, Frankfurt 1981), p.20.

11 Karl Barth: *Eine Schweizer Stimme* (Zürich 1945) Address on 5.12.1938.

12 Professor Dr Karl Heim (1874-1958), Professor of Theology at Tübingen University, became interested in the Oxford Group in the 1930s. In 1936 he attended a house party in Oxford and reported his impressions in *Kirche im Angriff* (a newsletter edited by Prof. A. Allwohn). In *Eindrücke eines Theologen bei der Gruppentagung in Oxford*, Heim writes: 'No systematic or practical theologian, knowing from his profession what the church is and how revivals happen, would have thought possible what is happening before our eyes: endless groups of lay people, businessmen, politicians, lord mayors, officers, hotel employees, actors, young, blond people, ... people of all ranks, from Norway, Denmark, Holland and Canada have suddenly set out on the march together... We are experiencing here something of the power of the Holy Spirit to make the Gospel the property of the ordinary individual, to take a person from where he is to the place where he can perceive the mystery of justification and reconciliation...' (See Appendix, nr. 4). Heim was an initiator of public and academic discussions on the relationship between theology and natural sciences, and published a six volume study on 'The Protestant faith and contemporary thought'.

13 *Gegner des Nationalsozialismus*, Christoph Klessmann, Falk Pungel (Hg.) (Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York 1980) p.105.

14 Frau von Grone to F.B., Westerbrak, 19.8.1933.

15 Morris Martin: unpublished manuscript, pp.161-162.

[Duke Ernst August of Brunswick (1887-1953) was married to Victoria Luise, Princess of Prussia (1892-1980), the only daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Their wedding on 24 May, 1913 was the last occasion attended

by all the European royal families before the First World War. The marriage also ended the rift between the houses of Hannover and Hohenzollern which had followed the annexation of Hannover by Prussia at the end of the Austro-Prussian war in 1866. The Dukes of Brunswick had also been Electors and later Kings of Hannover.

One of the Duchess's brothers was Prince August Wilhelm ('AuWi', mentioned elsewhere in this text). Another, Crown Prince Wilhelm, joined the Nazi Party. Her husband the Duke never joined the Party but donated money and was close to some Nazi leaders.

Their daughter Frederica was later Queen of the Helenes (married to Paul) and mother of Sophia who became Queen of Spain.

The 'hunchback cobbler' in the story is August Merges, a left radical agitator and leader in the November Revolution of 1918 and President of the short-lived Socialist Republic of Brunswick. He was crippled with rickets as a child through malnutrition and was nicknamed 'crooked August'. On 8 November (one day before the Kaiser's abdication) he obtained the abdication of Duke Ernst August who went into exile in Austria with his family the next day. Later the Duke regained some of his family possessions through the courts. These included Blankenburg Castle where he returned to live in 1930, and other estates.

More details at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Augustus,_Duke_of_Brunswick]

16 *Nordschleswiger Tageszeitung*, No. 190, 19.8.1933 (Bundesarchiv Koblenz).

17 *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25.9.1933.

18 Persönliche Einladung zur Hauspartie von Juni 1933 (Personal Invitation to the June 1933 house party). (See Appendix, nr. 5).

19 Letter of J.F. Laun, 23.6.1933 (See Appendix, nr. 6).

20 Personal invitation to the *Rüstzeit* (Preparation/Training time), September 1933 (See Appendix, nr. 7).

21 A. Günther to Erich von Eicken, 15.8.1933. Relevant letters also from J.F. Laun to Erich von Eicken, 16.8.1933 and 8.9.1933.

22 Leopold Klotz to F.B., 13.9.1933 (See Appendix, nr. 8).

23 *Kirchenrat* Dr Hans Stroh, for many years student chaplain at Tübingen University and one of Buchman's friends both in the thirties and after the Second World War, writes about Professor Fezer with whom he worked closely for several years: 'Karl Fezer (*1891) became in 1929 Professor (*Ordinarius*) of Practical Theology at Tübingen University and acquired an extraordinary place in his field in the Protestant Christian world. Politically he was against the National Socialists until March 1933 and closer to the German Nationalist camp. But in March 1933 he changed his position. The

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NS government was now the recognized authority. It was totalitarian. So the choice was either cooperation or a life-and-death struggle. Hitler won his respect through the ceremony on the day of his accession in Potsdam. On 27.4.1933 Fezer was unanimously elected by an extraordinary meeting of the theological faculties to be their representative to help prepare solutions 'for the questions to be resolved concerning the church'. But Fezer was completely inexperienced in church politics. Month by month he lost the confidence of most serious Christians. *The Deutsche Christen* never really trusted him but made calculated use of him...' See also Klaus Scholder: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich* Band I, p.402ff.

24 See also Curt Georgi: *Christsein aus Erfahrung* (Schriftenmissionsverlag Gladbeck 1970) p.17.

25 *Hessisches evangelisches Sonntagsblatt*, 17.12.1933 (See Appendix, nr. 9).

26 Georgi, *ibid.*, pp.58 and 59.

27 Roland Wilson interviewed by Graham Turner 1976 (Pierre Spoerri papers, Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne).

28 Garrett Stearly quoted in Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a Life* (Constable, London 1985) p.207-208.

29 Roland Wilson, *ibid.*

30 Notes by Reginald Holme (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, copy in Oxford Group archives, Bodleian Library, UK)

31 Hans Stroh to his family, 13.4.1937.

32 Conversation of P. Spoerri with Hans Stroh , 2.3.1976.

33 *Church of England Newspaper*, 13. 10. 1933. See Garth Lean, p.210.

34 F.B. to Carl Ritter, 20.10. 1933.

35 Unpublished account of Anneliese von Cramon.

36 Hans Stroh to P. Spoerri.

37 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.* p.67

38 Dr Krummacher to F.B., 17.10. 1933 (Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne, Spoerri papers)

39 Dr Krummacher to F.B., 28.12.1933

40 Garth Lean, *ibid.*, p.211.

41 Frau von Grone to F.B., 18.11.1933.

42 Minutes of the party trial of the NSDAP against Frau von Grone (Document Center, Berlin).

43 J.F. Laun to F.B., 20.12.1933.

44 See Eberhard Bethge's biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See also Garth Lean, *ibid.*, p.211-2

45 F.B. to Emil Brunner, quoted in Garth Lean, pp.212-213, and in Theophil Spoerri: *Dynamik aus der Stille* (Caux Verlag, Luzern 1971), pp. 124-5.

46 Röhm/Thierfelder, *ibid.*, p.40.

47 Hossenfelder to F.B., 20.1.1934.

48 Professor Arthur Weiser was a colleague of Fezer in Tübingen.

49 Report of Professor Fezer, 8 December 1933, quoted in Gerhard Schäfer: *Die Evangelische Kirche in Württemberg und der Nationalsozialismus*, Band 2, pp.858, 882, 937, 939.

50 Telegram of Fezer to F.B., 23.11.1933.

51 Telegram of Fezer and Weiser to F.B., 25.11.1933.

52 F.B. to J.F. Laun, 22.12.1933. (Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne)

53 Hans Stroh comments on Buchman's attempts to 'make peace' as follows: 'The discussion related not mainly to Hossenfelder but to Buchman's attempts to reconcile the Tübingen professors (besides Fezer there were also Rückert and Weiser whom the former had to take with him as 'witnesses') and *Reichsbischof* Müller so that they kept in contact. It was the relationship between Fezer and Müller (not that between Fezer and Hossenfelder) that was of significance in church politics. When Fezer and his friends publicly broke off relations with Müller on December 2, 1933 it was a clear signal. Two days before, Fezer on his return from Berlin came to my room and said: 'You were right: there in Berlin, everything was rotten.' This was an acknowledgement of Buchman's efforts to base teamwork between Fezer and Müller on honesty rather than on insincere church politics.' (Hans Stroh in conversation with P. Spoerri, 30.4.1984.)

54 Th. Spoerri to F.B. (in German), 27.12.1933. (Theophil Spoerri papers, Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne)

55 Karl Barth to Emil Brunner, 22.10.1933.

56 Emil Brunner to Karl Barth, 27.10.1933.

57 Th. Spoerri to F.B., 27.12.1933.

58 F.B. to Theophil Spoerri, 4.12.1933. (Oxford Group archives, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

59 F.B. To Pfarrer W. Oehler, 4.12.1933. (Oxford Group archives, Oxford)

CHAPTER III

1934: A year of opening and closing doors

Hitler's accession to power had created a new situation in Germany. But Buchman had a simple attitude to people in power – perhaps especially to those seen as needing drastic change. He was ready to talk to anyone and to share his own fundamental experience of a life 'under God's guidance'. It was not his way to view any case as hopeless.

Buchman saw some doors closing to him but continued to hope for the day when they would reopen. While he saw no virtue in forcing his way in, one of his favourite hymns ended with the refrain: 'Reveal the open door, Saviour, to me.'

Voices both inside and outside Germany were encouraging him to seek a meeting with Hitler. At each press conference he gave in London the correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, Miss Isitt, would ask him: 'Haven't you changed Hitler yet?' ⁽¹⁾

In 1932 Buchman had visited the *Braune Haus* (headquarters of the National Socialist Party in Munich) to seek an appointment with Hitler. On the table in a secretary's office he saw a telegram from Prince August Wilhelm, a son of the ex-Kaiser (known by his nick-name 'Au-Wi'), giving strict directions that no meeting should be permitted between Buchman and Hitler. Buchman had met the Prince in the difficult years after the First World War and had agreed to sell a few of the Prince's pictures in the US when he saw that the latter was in real need. Why the Prince intervened to prevent a meeting between Buchman and Hitler is not known. ⁽²⁾

Baron von Maltzahn of the Foreign Office, one of the

Germans who had visited England the year before at Buchman's invitation, tried several times to arrange for Buchman to meet Hitler.⁽³⁾ Friends in the church also tried. In October 1933 Pastor Hans Stroh was in Vienna and spoke on the telephone to his boss, Professor Fezer, in Berlin. Fezer said to Stroh: 'Pray for me to-morrow morning! We shall have an audience with Hitler: Frank Buchman, *Reichsbischof* Müller and I.' Next day Hitler spoke in the *Reichstag* announcing that Germany would quit the League of Nations. The audience was cancelled at short notice.⁽⁴⁾

In 1934 Buchman was in Berlin with his friend and colleague Sherwood Day. He had taken a room in the hotel immediately opposite the *Reichskanzlei* (Reich Chancellery) and sent an official request for an audience. After waiting two weeks for an answer he concluded that no answer would come. It was Buchman's last attempt to reach Hitler directly. He would have to find other ways to get his message through.⁽⁵⁾

In the summer of 1935 he called together some German friends who had come to Oxford and said to them: 'I have five ways now to get to Hitler if I want to. Should I try?' He suggested a moment of silence in order to find, if possible, a clear answer to this question. After the silence he asked Fezer: 'What did you think?' Fezer replied: 'I had a No.' John Bentinck and Stroh also said 'No'. Finally, Buchman himself said: 'I, too, had a No.'⁽⁶⁾ So this door had been closed for good.

Meanwhile, in an extraordinary way, a door opened to one of the foremost figures in the National Socialist regime. Since her first contacts with Buchman in Doorn, Arnoldsühle and Berlin Frau Anneliese von Cramon (known as 'Moni' to her friends) had taken part in several campaigns of the Oxford Group outside Germany, especially in North America. During her absence she had lent her house in Silesia to a neighbouring family, not knowing that one of the daughters was working for the Gestapo and had been asked to search the house. She found an anti-Nazi pamphlet which Frau von Cramon had been given by a French friend in Geneva and which she had stuffed away in one of her book shelves. Its cover showed a swastika with the hooked ends chopped off so that a simple cross remained. The Gestapo also

found letters Frau von Cramon had received from Professor Fezer and other theologians.⁽⁷⁾

Before she could be arrested Frau von Cramon was visited by a childhood friend, Udo von Woysch, who was high up in the SS in Silesia.⁽⁸⁾ He was hoping to marry her husband's niece and was wanting her support. Von Woysch then told the local police authorities that the 'Cramon case' had to be decided at a higher level and brought her directly to Himmler in Berlin.

In her reminiscences she describes her conversation with the SS leader. 'Himmler received me standing. He had a document in his hand which seemed to contain information about myself. His questions were roughly as follows:

1. "How long have you been in contact with the Oxford Group Movement?"
2. "What is the Group Movement's attitude to the Jews?"
3. "What is your attitude to the Jews?"
4. "How often have you been in England this year?" I: "Three times, I think." H. opened the document and answered: "You are wrong; you have been in England four times in the past year."
5. "Who gave you the money for the journey?" I: "I sold my grand piano, but I believe that God guides people and that he gives them what they need to carry out his work." H. looked at me seriously and said: "I also believe in God. I even believe in miracles. I am Party Comrade No 2. There were seven of us who believed in the National Socialist ideology. Now we have taken over the government. Isn't that a miracle...?" H. said he would like to hear more about a life under God's guidance and would send for me again to continue the interrogation.⁽⁹⁾

Some weeks later Frau von Cramon met Himmler again at Udo von Woysch's house. Everyone was sitting around one table and the atmosphere was more conducive to conversation than in Himmler's office. Frau von Cramon was able to pass on news about the work of Buchman and his team around the world. Himmler seemed to listen 'with interest'. Feeling that 'God only gives such a chance once' she told him in detail about the deep

change that had taken place in her own living and thinking. She talked of the significance for individuals, nations and the world when God's plan is put into practice.⁽¹⁰⁾

Frau von Cramon's accounts of the Oxford Group's activities in Germany were not the only ones to reach Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. At the large public gathering in Stuttgart in January 1934 the organisers soon realized that members of the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst* or *SD*) were present on every occasion. Surveillance had probably been ordered because some prominent people were taking part including two professors from Zürich, Theophil Spoerri and theologian Emil Brunner. Buchman himself was not present.⁽¹¹⁾

A German participant wrote to Buchman: 'Brunner made a noteworthy speech which will soon be printed... He also had a good touch with Bishop Wurm, who attended a number of events. Almost fifty students were there, most of them from Tübingen.'⁽¹²⁾

Buchman visited Stuttgart at the beginning of March. Bishop Wurm and Professor Fezer were present at an evening occasion in the Rudolph-Sophien-Stift. Some participants have written accounts of it.⁽¹³⁾ In the diary which Bishop Wurm and his wife kept of the *Kirchenkampf* period Frau Wurm writes (3 March, 1934): 'We took a walk to the *'Schatten'*, and on the way back dropped in at the Rudolph-Sophien-Stift to meet with the Group. It was excellent. Frank Buchman was there, spoke at length and greeted Father very warmly. Father also spoke at the end and closed with a short prayer. Father felt strongly prompted to speak out openly for the church. He is now absolutely clear on what he has to do. He is going to Berlin with Meiser.'⁽¹⁴⁾

In the next day's entry Frau Wurm describes how her husband is writing a pastoral letter to be read in all the churches. He reads it to Professor Fezer whose only comment is: 'I cannot counsel you against it.'⁽¹⁵⁾

The main subject of Wurm's conversation with Buchman was the responsibility of the Church in a totalitarian state. Buchman always avoided telling his German colleagues what they should do. As Hans Stroh remembers, on that occasion in Stuttgart

Buchman spoke mainly about France and a French group whom he had met a few days before. He adds, however: 'It was quite clear why he talked about miracles happening in France.'⁽¹⁶⁾

The first months of 1934 – the time between the Stuttgart gathering and Buchman's talk with Wurm – had been stormy ones for the German church. On 4 January Hitler had angrily told an old war comrade that he wanted nothing more to do with the Protestant Church and that he would receive neither the bishops nor even the *Reichsbischof*.⁽¹⁷⁾ The decisive meeting between Hitler and the heads of the Protestant Church then took place on 25 January. Scholder writes: 'At about 1300 hours Hitler and the Protestant Church representatives met in the reception hall of the *Reichskanzlei*. Hitler stood at the front of the room, with Goering, Lammers, Frick and Buttman beside him. The *Reichsbischof*, too, stood with the government. Those who had been summoned, now grown to a group of eighteen, stood opposite them in a semi-circle.'⁽¹⁸⁾ Amongst them were Bishops Wurm, Meiser and Marahrens and Professor Fezer. Scholder continues: 'Nothing could have demonstrated better the unique position that Hitler had come to occupy, and the changes that had happened in Germany, than the fact that all the leading bishops and theologians of the Protestant Church were expecting church problems to be resolved by a man who saw the question of the church only from a political angle and was, besides, a Catholic. Such a thing would have been unthinkable just one year earlier under a Chancellor of the [Weimar] Republic.'⁽¹⁹⁾

The meeting did not lead, as the Protestant leaders had hoped, to Hitler abandoning the *Reichsbischof*. Hitler even used an open confrontation with Pastor Niemöller to reassert the *Reichsbischof*'s position. (A phone conversation between Niemöller and a friend had been recorded that morning by the secret service. The conversation was then read out to the whole group meeting with Hitler.) As a result, in the next few days the leaders of the Protestant Church all publicly acknowledged the authority of *Reichsbischof* Müller.⁽²⁰⁾

The journey to Berlin predicted by Frau Wurm in her diary on 3 March (above) took place two days later. On 13 March

Bishops Wurm and Meiser were received by Hitler. As at the previous meeting between Hitler and the protestant leaders, the discussion was heated. When the bishops protested against attempts at intimidation by ecclesiastical and political officials Hitler became furious and said: 'I wanted to make the Protestant Church great. Are you not with me?' Wurm replied: 'If you wanted to make the Protestant Church great you chose the least suitable instrument for it in Ludwig Müller.'⁽²¹⁾ During the meeting Hitler revealed his own fundamental position on the Church: 'The Church has to get used to the doctrine of blood and race... If it does not recognize this, history will simply pass it by.'⁽²²⁾

As the year proceeded the 'strong man' in the Reich Church administration, August Jäger, made increased efforts to bring all the churches into line, especially those of South Germany which had resisted Berlin's edicts. At the same time the voices of resistance, the Pastors' Emergency League (*Pfarrernotbund*) and the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), became stronger. The Barmen Confessional Synod (*Bekennnissynode*) opened in Barmen-Gemarke on 29 May. On 31 May 1934 it published the Barmen Theological Declaration (*Barmer Theologische Erklärung*) which from then on played a decisive role in church-state relations.⁽²³⁾

Meanwhile Buchman's German friends often did not know how much longer they would be free to spread their Oxford Group ideas and convictions. In Munich, for instance, an active group had sprung up around a judge, Alo Münch, and his wife. Dr Hermann Dietzfelbinger, later Bishop of Bavaria and President of the Council of the German Protestant Church (EKD), wrote about this group in his 1983 memoirs: 'What we value so highly today as *Gruppenarbeit* and *Gruppenerfahrung* ('group work' and 'group experience'), and try so hard to learn, was a matter of course in that group (in the thirties) . It was drawn directly from the New Testament... For several years I took part in the meetings of the *Gruppenbewegung* in Munich. It was amazing how many families spontaneously offered the use of their homes.'⁽²⁴⁾ These meetings were not without risk for

those concerned. An entry in Frau Münch's diary in April 1934 describes how her husband was interrogated for two and a half hours by the political police.⁽²⁵⁾ The Münchs had invited some so-called 'non-Aryans' (Jewish Christians) to their meetings and this had apparently been passed on to the security organs by an informer.

It was becoming clearer to Oxford Group friends inside and outside Germany that nothing could be said or done without the authorities learning about it. When Frau von Cramon telephoned from Oxford to Breslau in June 1934 because she was worried about her son – as a young army officer he was to be deployed as part of Hitler's 'night of the long knives' which saw the SA leadership destroyed by the SS – she was taken to task by Buchman. He said to her: 'There is not only the SS. There is also the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst* or Security Service) which watches your every step.'⁽²⁶⁾ When several Germans took part in an Oxford Group house party in Thun (Switzerland), their statements at the meeting were known in Berlin within a few hours.⁽²⁷⁾

In August 1934 Buchman was again in Germany. President Paul von Hindenburg had died on 2 August and Buchman attended the state funeral. He was also invited to the induction of Ludwig Müller as *Reichsbischof*, planned for 23 September. Both Frau von Grone⁽²⁸⁾ and Leopold Klotz⁽²⁹⁾ advised Buchman not to participate in that event. In the same month Frau von Cramon was invited by Himmler to the Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg and arranged for Buchman and a few of his team to be invited also. She and Buchman then sat next to Himmler at an informal lunch. Their talk was once more about seeking the guidance of God, and Buchman spoke of the moral and spiritual pre-conditions involved. In the middle of the meal, Frau von Cramon was called to the telephone. It was her son to tell her of the death of her divorced husband. She returned to the table much distressed. Although her husband had been legally the guilty party, she had now realised the part her self-righteousness had played in the break-up of the marriage. She told Himmler this. 'If only you could hate this man who broke loyalty with you, you would not suffer so much', he said. 'This brought us back to talking about God's absolute

demands', Frau von Cramon recalled. Then lunch broke up. Buchman's comment at this time was, 'We should have a greater commitment than these fellows.'⁽³⁰⁾

During the autumn of 1934 both *Reichsbischof* Müller and his opponents seemed interested in staying in touch with Buchman. Frau von Cramon wrote to him that she had met Frau von Grone who had asked her to see Friedrich von Bodelschwing 'who is here for important decisions which concern the Church.' She continued: 'During our talk which lasted for an hour, I was very much impressed by his personality. He will write you and ask you to see him before you go to Berlin. Frau von Grone is lunching with the *Reichsbischof* today to try to convince him not to have his "induction" now, as things are more serious than ever. Bodelschwing, too, is trying to mediate an agreement but they all want your help.'⁽³¹⁾

This letter was written while August Jäger was in Stuttgart making a last attempt using police to force Bishop Wurm and the Württemberg Church to capitulate.⁽³²⁾ A similar move was planned in Munich against Bishop Meiser and the Bavarian Church.⁽³³⁾

One of the young Englishmen who accompanied Buchman on his visits to Germany, Francis Goulding, recorded his impressions of this escalation in the church struggle:

'A great fuss in München. The Bishop Meiser who is likely to be thrust out just as Wurm has been in Württemberg, preached how we must stick up for the Church. The congregation, after singing '*Ein Feste Burg*' ['A mighty fortress is our God'] marched thru the streets and sang outside the Bishop's Palace and Brown House [headquarters of the National Socialist Party]...

'On the doorway of the S. Matthäus Kirche which is the biggest Protestant Church are various texts with this sign – *Gottes Wort über alles* [God's Word above all]. One text read: *Fürcht nicht, kleine Herde* ['Fear not, little flock...'] Bavaria and Württemberg are solid (so far as their Protestant churches are concerned) not against Nazi but pro an independent and wholly Christian Church. This makes them refuse the oath to [*Reichsbischof*] Müller in fear that various Nordic doctrines and myths will be thrust on them.'⁽³⁴⁾

Although under house arrest, Bishop Meiser and Bishop Wurm did not yield. The massive public support they enjoyed forced the ecclesiastical and political authorities in Munich, Stuttgart and Berlin to rethink their attitude and their strategy. On 23 and 24 October – when the defeat of the opposition was to have been sealed with the solemn confirmation of the *Reichsbischof* by Hitler – there was instead a complete change of course. Jäger had to resign, and on 30 October Hitler received, instead of the *Reichsbischof*, the three *renitent* ('refractory') bishops Wurm, Meiser and Marahrens. Hitler also withdrew from the confirmation of the *Reichsbischof*.⁽³⁵⁾

A letter from one of Buchman's close German colleagues during these years, Count John Bentinck, describes the atmosphere he found in South Germany in October 1934: 'The condition in Germany is more than serious. I see the heathen and anti christian part of the nation gaining in power rapidly. While the economic condition is growing desperate the church conflict has come to a stage that it is actually undermining the foundations of the 3rd Reich. The greater and best part of the christian population is losing faith in H. [Hitler] and the devil is using the Party to accomplish this process... I never thought this state of affairs could come so soon, I thought we had a year or two before us. It shows, how fast things are developing in Germany... H. and his friends don't see where this trouble is leading. It is time their eyes get opened...'⁽³⁶⁾

1934 ended with many uncertainties. Some doors had opened to Buchman, some had closed and some remained half open. In the course of the church struggle the *Reichsbischof* had lost most of his influence, while the bishops of the three 'intact churches' and the Confessing Church had consolidated their position. The National Socialist Party machine continued to treat Buchman with distrust as a figure who could not be bought nor easily classified. Buchman remained determined to use every opportunity to offer his German friends and the German nation his concept of a Christianity without compromise. He saw no other way to save peace in Europe.

Notes:

1 Interview with R.W. Wilson, 1976 (Pierre Spoerri papers, Vaud Cantonal Archives, Lausanne)

2 See Ch I. Prince August Wilhelm, the ex-Kaiser's fourth son, seems to have pursued some of his own personal and political aims with Hitler. See Ernst Hanfstaengl: *15 Jahre mit Hitler* (Piper Verlag, München 1970), p.228 ff.

3 Baron von Maltzahn to F.B., 25.8.1933.

4 Conversation of P. Spoerri with Hans Stroh, 2.3.1976, p.4.

5 Willard Hunter: *World Changing through Life Changing: The Frank Buchman Revolution* (Claremont, California. Regina Press 2009), Chapter 8.

6 Conversation with Hans Stroh, *ibid.*, p.2.

7 Unpublished account by Frau Anneliese von Cramon.

8 The Berlin Document Center contains a file on Udo von Woysch.

9 Account of A. von Cramon, p.21. See also Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman*, p.203.

10 Account of A. von Cramon *ibid.*, p.23.

11 Invitation to the *Gruppen-Tagung*, Stuttgart, 6-7 January 1934; and article in the *Stuttgarter Neues Tageblatt*, 4.1.1934 (See Appendix, nrs. 10, 11).

12 H. von Krumhaar to F.B., 7.1.1934

13 Alfred Günther to J. F. Laun, 9.3.1934.

14 D. Theophil Wurm: *Tagebuchaufzeichnungen aus der Zeit des Kirchenkampfes*, 4.3.1934

15 D. Theophil Wurm, *ibid.*, 4.3.1934.

16 Conversation with Hans Stroh, *ibid.*, p.7.

17 See also Kurt Zentner: *Illustrierte Geschichte des Widerstandes in Deutschland und Europa* (Südwest Verlag, München 1983), p.59

18 Klaus Scholder: *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich, Band 2 – Das Jahr der Ernüchterung 1934 – Barmen und Rom* (Siedler Verlag, Berlin 1985), p.59.

19 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.53.

20 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, pp.63-66.

21 Kurt Zentner, *ibid.*, p.125.

22 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.96.

23 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.172.

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24 D. Hermann Dietzfelbinger: *Lehrjahre. Der frühere Landesbischof schreibt seine Erinnerungen*. Süddeutsche Zeitung, 19.2.1983.

25 Diary (unpublished) of Frau Elisabeth Münch.

26 Account of Anneliese von Cramon. The SD was in fact the secret intelligence arm of the SS and came under Himmler as *Reichsführer SS* (Head of the SS)

27 A. von Cramon to F.B., 20.9.1934.

28 A. von Cramon to F.B., 20.9.1934.

29 Leopold Klotz to F.B., 21.9. 1934.

30 See Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman*, p.233

31 A. von Cramon to F.B., 13.9.1934.

32 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.311.

33 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.316.

34 Francis Goulding unpublished journal entry, 16 September 1934. (Copy in Pierre Spoerri papers, Vaud Cantonal Archives) [Some German spelling corrected – PT/Ed.]

35 Klaus Scholder, *ibid.*, p.351.

36 John Bentinck to F.B. (in English), 22.10.1934.(Vaud Cantonal Archives)

CHAPTER IV

1935-1936: Is there still a way through?

Buchman's sense of urgency continued to increase in 1935. The time was running out when someone from abroad could offer new ideas to Germany. As early as 1933 he had observed signs of reviving militarism and remarked to Frau von Cramon: 'It smells of war.'⁽¹⁾

Buchman was still ready to go through doors opened to him by German friends, but he no longer thought of planning big campaigns. He worked with people at different levels but kept these contacts separate to avoid surveillance. Where he had high-level touches he sought to maintain them. The production of books and publications which could reach the leadership and the public became a major focus. Finally, he worked to prepare his German friends for the looming inevitable crisis, often by inviting them abroad to join campaigns in neighbouring countries. When visiting Germany he stayed outside the main cities, preferring places like Baden-Baden, Freudenstadt or Garmisch where he could see people quietly without attracting attention.

To begin with, however, he had to assist Frau von Cramon with a far-reaching decision. While working with Buchman in Norway and Denmark she had fallen ill. The hospital diagnosed – wrongly as it proved – a brain tumour. After she was brought home to Silesia, a telegram arrived from Himmler: 'The *Reichsführer* expects you on Tuesday at 10.00 am.' 'My brother wanted me to refuse to go', wrote Frau von Cramon. 'I trembled at what might happen, but I remembered the commission which God had given me to bring a message to the leaders of Germany.' So she went to Berlin.

At the SS headquarters in Prinz Albrechtstrasse she was kept

waiting alone in a basement room lit only by a window near the ceiling, from ten in the morning until evening. At 7pm Himmler's ADC, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Karl Wolff, came in and said: 'The *Reichsführer* will see you.' Himmler greeted her amicably and said: 'You're going to be a guest of the State.' 'In other words, arrested? Am I going to a concentration camp?' Himmler: 'You'll see. Wolff, take Frau von Cramon to my car; the driver knows where to go.'

Frau von Cramon's account continues: 'The car stopped outside Berlin at a garden gate. An SS sentry opened it on being given a password. An unknown woman came forward and welcomed me in a reserved manner. "I am Frau von Cramon, who are you?" "I am Frau Himmler." "Where am I?" "Didn't my husband tell you? A poor joke. He telephoned me to say you were to be our guest for a few days." So my arrest meant that I was an involuntary guest in Himmler's home.'

She describes the conversation that followed: 'The three of us sat together till late at night as Himmler repeatedly put the question, "Tell me, who is Christ?" His objection was always the same: "It is Jewish to make someone else responsible for your guilt. That's why I don't need Christ." My question: "But *Reichsführer*, what do you do with your sins when nobody can relieve you of them and you cannot restore for them?" His answer: "I can manage that too without Christ. Christ is the Church, and my church has excommunicated me." Frau Himmler did not engage in the conversation but listened with interest. That night I wrote down the conversation so as not to forget it.'⁽²⁾

It is interesting to note that such thoughts preoccupied Himmler in the early years of Nazi power. F. Kersten in his book *Totenkopf und Treue* quotes a speech in which the *Reichsführer* says: 'It accords with Germanic thinking not to be dependent on Grace but to know that what you have done here will be used for or against you; you will not escape. But you have the chance through your own strength to alter your destiny in a new life.'⁽³⁾ In an essay on the creed of the SS, John M. Steiner writes: 'The National Socialist God was not the God of Christian teaching. He was not the God of love and mercy, to whom the strong and

the weak look up equally. The National Socialist God was partisan, hard and cruel... The fight for survival was considered the most fundamental of all eternal laws... The one who survives over centuries is necessarily always the better and the stronger.’⁽⁴⁾

‘On the third evening,’ Frau von Cramon continues, ‘Himmler said: “Now I will tell you why I brought you here. I wanted first to test you again to see if you are a sincere person... I want to ask you whether you would take up a responsible position where you would be directly under my orders.” “I can’t do that because there are three things about me that make it impossible for me to work in the SS.” “What do you mean?” “Firstly I’m from the nobility and you don’t like that. Secondly I’m not in the Party and will never join it.” His answer: “That doesn’t bother me. If anyone pesters you about that tell them that you were born National Socialist so you don’t need to join National Socialism.” “Thirdly, I’m a convinced Christian and you have no use for Christians.” H: “Why not? If you have a good connection to heaven it can only help us... I want you to organise the welfare system for all the wives and children of the SS.” “I can’t give you a definite answer because I am part of Frank Buchman’s team. I don’t know if he would release me for that, because it depends what God says about it.” “Are you so bound to this foreigner and to the Group?” “Yes, I have accepted God’s total claim on my life.” H: “Well, if you want, ask Buchman first.”⁽⁵⁾

Frau von Cramon talked with Buchman by telephone. As usual he did not give her a clear yes or no, only trying to clarify what an acceptance of Himmler’s offer would mean for her but not advising her against it. So, despite resistance from her family and her own inner reluctance, she took the job.

It quickly became apparent that her freedom of action was tightly restricted. She was cut off from contact with her friends. Although she was in charge of the whole northern part of the country, all her phone calls and letters were monitored. There was no further contact with Himmler. The *Reichsführerin* (national head) of the National Socialist women of Germany, Frau Scholtz-Klink, interrogated her at length and told her that

as a German woman she owed total obedience to Hitler. Frau von Cramon maintained her refusal to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler or to join the National Socialist Party. After eighteen months (during which she had actually worked for just five months) she asked to be relieved of her duties and her resignation was accepted.⁽⁶⁾

During the Oxford house party in the summer of 1935 Buchman told Hans Stroh he 'feared that Himmler had closed his heart'. From today's perspective it would seem unlikely that Himmler had ever had an open heart. But Buchman knew that there had been in him an unease about his lost faith, so he was not ready to give up quickly. He said: 'People will say I'm pro-Nazi if I pursue this, but I am not worried.'⁽⁷⁾

Frau von Cramon's painful experience showed Buchman that his own freedom of action in Germany would also be strictly limited. Tension grew when it came to light that a Dutch girl who had attended some Oxford Group meetings had fallen in love with an SS officer and made allegations which supported Gestapo suspicions that the Oxford Group was a spy network.

From Geneva, however, Buchman still accepted an invitation to the Nuremberg Rally in August 1935 and asked B.H. Streeter, the Oxford theologian, to accompany him. This was the first Nuremberg Rally in which detachments of the German army took part, and Buchman and Streeter were struck by the massive mobilisation it represented. At a reception Streeter met Dr. Joachim von Ribbentrop who had just been appointed German ambassador to London.⁽⁸⁾

From now on Buchman's priority was to help his German friends individually to stand on their own feet and to live according to their own inner conviction. As Hans Stroh describes, people in the Groups were following two strategies during this period. For one group the strategy was to 'change the National Socialists', while another took a different approach: 'Let us go wherever God leads us, whether in the church or elsewhere.' The two 'tendencies' were not mutually exclusive. To theologians like J.F. Laun, Theodor Haug and others it seemed natural to use the relative freedom they still had to be active

within the framework of the Church in the form of a *Volksmission* (outreach mission). For others like J. Bentinck and Frau von Cramon the first concern remained to reach the leadership of the country with their convictions for as long as this was possible.

Buchman took no sides, and the Germans taking part in the large Scandinavian campaigns and the Oxford conferences that year represented both groups.⁽⁹⁾

On 19 November 1935 *Berlingske Tidende* of Copenhagen printed Himmler's photo with the headline 'Nazi confesses his faith in living God', and other papers reported that Frau Himmler had been influenced by the Oxford Group.

An unexpected result of the Oxford Group campaign in Denmark was an invitation by Bishop Marahrens of Hanover, one of the central figures in German church politics, to the Bishop of Copenhagen, Fuglsang-Damgaard, to speak in December at a national conference of Lutherans in Berlin. One of the main themes of his talk was the work of the Oxford Group.⁽¹⁰⁾ When one of Buchman's friends in Munich, Frau Katharine Hanfs-taengl, sent Bishop Marahrens a printed copy of the Danish Bishop's speech, he thanked her and wrote: 'My personal contact with the Bishop of Copenhagen as well as with leading men of the Oxford [Group] movement has given me a longstanding interest in this movement.' He referred to the impression that Fuglsang-Darmgaard's speech had made at the conference in Berlin, where he had been in the chair.⁽¹¹⁾

The Danish bishop's speech was one of 14 books and brochures on the Oxford Group published in a four-year period by the Leopold Klotz Verlag in Gotha. From 1935 the importation of Oxford Group literature was banned, so the only way to reach the country with new thinking was through books published inside Germany.

Buchman made his last 'official' visit to the capital of the Reich during the 1936 Olympic Games. Shortly before this, on 1 August, he had invited John Bentinck and a young Frenchman, Roger Faure – later killed in action during the first months of the war – to speak together at an assembly in Oxford. Goulding's

journal describes these speeches as ‘so statesmanlike that every prejudice was removed and new conviction was born... It also became obvious that change on both sides was necessary.’⁽¹²⁾ Then from 10 to 18 August Buchman was in Berlin with a large international group. He visited Himmler and asked some young Danes and English in the group to accompany him.

A Danish journalist, Jacob Kronika, had been stationed in Berlin since 1932 as correspondent of the Danish daily *Nationaltidende*. He was also the accredited spokesman of the Danish minority living south of the German-Danish border.⁽¹³⁾ Kronika met Frank Buchman in Ollerup in 1935 and then brought twenty Berliners to a major assembly in Denmark. He kept in touch with Buchman till the end of the Second World War.

Years later in an article in the paper *Flensborg Avis* Kronika described his meeting with Buchman during the Berlin Olympic Games:

‘During the Hitler years Frank Buchman used to stay at the Hotel Esplanade whenever he was in Berlin. One day we had lunch together. In the afternoon he was to have a conversation with the *SS-Führer* Himmler who had invited Dr Buchman to come and see him.

‘The conversation, of course, became a complete fiasco. Himmler was unable, as he had intended, to exploit the ‘absolute obedience’ of the MRA people towards God for his own purpose, to make them obedient slaves of the SS and the Nazis.

‘Frank Buchman was much burdened by the development in Germany under Hitler, for he was deeply attached to this land and this people.

‘He said during this meal at the Esplanade: “Germany has come under the dominion of a terrible demoniac force. A counteraction is urgent. We must ask God for guidance and strength to start an anti-demoniac counteraction under the sign of the Cross of Christ in the democratic countries bordering on Germany, especially in the small neighbouring countries.” But the Hitler demonism had to spend its rage. Neither Frank Buchman nor any other person could prevent that...’⁽¹⁴⁾

Whether in order to encourage his friend or because he knew that letters from Berlin would be read by the security police, Buchman wrote B.H. Streeter a highly optimistic letter during the Olympic Games describing how cordially he had been received. He also responded positively to Streeter's suggestion that he (Streeter) call on Ambassador von Ribbentrop as soon as the latter took up residence in London.⁽¹⁵⁾ A month later Streeter, in hospital with bloodpoisoning from an infected foot, wrote to Buchman that he felt Buchman should continue to seek a personal meeting with Hitler. He suggested that Hitler might invite the Oxford Group to Germany and that members of the Hitler Youth could take part in an Oxford Group rally in the UK with young people from other countries.⁽¹⁶⁾ How Buchman responded to these ideas after his latest experience in Berlin is not recorded. He and Streeter differed on one major point. While Buchman saw communism as the world's most dangerous ideology, Streeter saw a greater danger in fascism. In late 1935 Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and forcibly incorporated it into the Italian Empire.⁽¹⁷⁾

After Berlin Buchman returned to America, sailing on 19 August and arriving in New York. Like other personalities who had been on the ship he was interviewed by journalists. When he held a press conference at Calvary House where he was staying the reporter of the afternoon paper, the *New York World-Telegram*, arrived late and asked for a special interview. With several of his colleagues in the room, Buchman answered the reporter's questions. Those present were amazed next afternoon to read the front page banner headline and the lead paragraphs of the story in the paper: 'Hitler or any fascist leader controlled by God could cure all ills of world, Buchman believes.'⁽¹⁸⁾

For many years a single phrase purportedly taken from this report was quoted around the world whenever the subject of Frank Buchman came up: 'Thank God for Hitler'. The phrase does not occur in the report. Nor does it represent the tenor of the interview, according to others who were present. What Buchman seems to have said comes through in parts of the interview itself:

‘My barber in London told me Hitler saved Europe from Communism. That’s how he felt. Of course, I don’t condone everything the Nazis do. Anti-Semitism? Bad, naturally. I suppose Hitler sees a Karl Marx in every Jew.

‘But think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to the control of God.’

In the final part of the interview Buchman gave his vision of what America could do for the world and told the reporter his experience of the Cross of Christ as a Power strong enough to remove hatred from his own life and, he believed, to change anyone and control even a dictator.⁽¹⁹⁾

In 1936 and 1937 different views were still being expressed in Western Europe and North America concerning Hitler’s personality. On 17 September 1936 in the *Daily Express* the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Lloyd George, described Hitler as ‘the George Washington of Germany’ and as a ‘born leader of men, a magnetic, dynamic personality with a resolute will, one clear aim and a fearless heart.’⁽²⁰⁾ Churchill wrote in a letter to *The Times* in 1938: ‘I have always said that if Britain were defeated in war, I hope we would find a Hitler to lead us back to our rightful place among the nations.’

For Buchman, the visit to Berlin in the summer of 1936 was the end of a chapter, though he returned to Germany several more times. The Gestapo and the security agencies let the leaders of the Groups in Germany know that ‘international connections’ would no longer be tolerated. Count Bentinck travelled to Utrecht in the spring of 1937 to inform Buchman that contact between his international team and the German Groups would have to cease. Some individuals who still took part in international conferences in Rheinfelden and Caux paid for their courage when they returned home. For the Germans who had worked with Buchman and the Oxford Group, whether at home or abroad, there now came a time of trial.

Notes:

- 1 Account of Frau Anneliese von Cramon, p.29; see also Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a Life*, p.208
- 2 Cramon, p.27; Lean, pp.234-6; and letter of Frau A. Jank to F.B., 27.10.1936.
- 3 F. Kersten: *Totenkopf und Treue* (Hamburg 1952), p.184.
- 4 John M. Steiner: *Über das Glaubensbekenntnis der SS*, in Bracker/Funke/Jakobsen (Hrsg.) *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933 – 1945* (Band 192, Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung).
- 5 Von Cramon account, p.28
- 6 Von Cramon account; Frau A. Jank to Buchman, Munich 27.10.1936
- 7 Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman*, p.236
- 8 Philip Boobbyer: *B. H. Streeter and the Oxford Group*. In *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol.61, Cambridge 2010. See pp.555-557
- 9 Conversation of P. Spoerri with Hans Stroh, 2.3.1976.
- 10 Telegram to F.B., 28.11.1935.
- 11 Letter of Bishop Marahrens to Frau K. von Hanfstaengl, Hannover, 20.3.1937. Frau Katharine Sedgwick von Hanfstaengl, an American, lived with her family in Uffing near Munich. She was the mother of the first head of the Foreign Press Department under Hitler, 'Putzi' von Hanfstaengl. Frau von Hanfstaengl remained in close contact with Buchman and his team for thirty years.
- 12 Journal entry of Francis Goulding, 1.8.1936. This may have been the Assembly attended by Prof. Karl Heim, see Ch II, Note 12.
- 13 Interview of Jacob Kronika with Advokat Torsten Hvidt, 21.10.1981.
- 14 *Flensborg Avis*, 2 January 1962. See Garth Lean, *ibid.* p.238
- 15 F.B. to B.H. Streeter, 14.8.1936 (quoted in Jarlert, *ibid.* p.407).
- 16 From notes by Morris Martin, cited by Jarlert.
- 17 In a letter to Buchman, 4.8.1936, Streeter discusses the relative 'demerits' of Communism and Fascism, but concludes: 'I see no hope for civilization except in a moral and religious revival which can keep permanently above the antithesis Communism-Fascism.' (Vaud Cantonal Archives) See also Boobbyer, *ibid.*
- 18 *New York World-Telegram*, 25.8.1936.
- 19 See also Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman*, p.239.
- 20 *Daily Express*, 17 September 1936. (Some references give 17 November 1936)
- 21 *The Times*, 7 November 1938. Lean: *Frank Buchman*, p.241

CHAPTER V

The clash of total claims

When Count Helmuth James von Moltke was on trial in January 1945, the President of the *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court), Roland Freisler, shouted at him: 'We and Christianity are the same in only one way: we demand the whole person!' Moltke wrote to his wife: 'It was a kind of dialogue – a spiritual dialogue between Freisler and me... Of the whole gang only Freisler sees me clearly, and he is the only one of the whole gang who knows why he has to kill me... It was in deadly earnest: "From whom do you take your orders? From the next world or from Adolf Hitler?" "Who has your loyalty; in whom to you put your faith?" All rhetorical questions, of course.'⁽¹⁾

From the start, the *Totalitätsanspruch* (total claim) was the central issue underlying the encounter between Buchman and the Oxford Group on one side and the National Socialist leadership and their ideology on the other. During the first years of National Socialist power there were some in both camps who hoped not only to win over individuals but to change the direction of the other side. With time it became clear, however, that the ideologues and apparatchiks of the NSDAP were determined to stifle any hint of deviation. Today we can see in the archives of the Third Reich how the surveillance, and then persecution, of people active in the Oxford Group was intensified step by step.

Surveillance by the security organs was already happening at the January 1934 Stuttgart gathering (see chapter III) and in connection with the activities of the Alo Münch group in Munich. As time went by public ideological attacks began to be made on the Oxford Group, one by the chief ideologist of the NSDAP,

Alfred Rosenberg, and another by the First World War hero, General Erich Ludendorff. Rosenberg attacked the 'political pretensions' of the Oxford Group which 'like a second Freemasonry tries to establish itself in scattered groups and prayer communities in every country and to have its representatives officially received in many states.'⁽²⁾ In February 1936 the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Aftenavis* quoted an article in Ludendorff's bi-monthly magazine and commented: 'Ludendorff has now discovered that the Oxford Group, together with the Jews, Freemasons, the Pope and the League of Nations constitutes a supernatural power which wants to kill the German spirit. What has enraged him is the official dinner given in Geneva by the current President of the League, Dr. Benesch. It was said at this dinner that the aim of the movement was to win the world – and Ludendorff's instantaneous reaction is: "Here are the Powers of Darkness who want to control the world! Beware!"'⁽³⁾

In August 1935 a classified report had been issued by Himmler as *Reichsführer der SS* (National Head of the SS) and Chief of the *Sicherheitshauptamt* (Security Head Office). Entitled *Der Weg des Protestantismus nach Rom* ('Protestantism's road to Rome'), the report discussed the issue of competing 'total claims': 'In order to be able to require everything from its members in this contest, and to convince them of its need to do so, the Protestant Church, following the lead of the Catholic Church, has recently been emphasising its "God-conferred total claim".' As evidence the report quoted from a book by the Protestant theologian, Prof Dr Kurt Dietrich Schmidt of the University of Kiel: 'Since the National Socialist movement is claiming total allegiance (*den Anspruch auf Totalität erhebt*) the Christian Churches are forced to confront the total claim of the National Socialist state with God's total claim by which their own message stands or falls.'⁽⁴⁾

On 26 February 1936 the confidential *Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage* (Bulletin on the ideological situation), from the office for the ideological education of the NSDAP, contained a five-page report headed: *Die 'Gruppenbewegung' in Deutschland* (The 'Group Movement' in Germany). The report begins with a

fairly objective summary of the movement and continues: ‘What is remarkable in this movement is its socialist trait (underlined in original). It counts each human being as a brother. Its aim is “one new world order for Christ, the King!” The Oxford Group movement operates in churches of all denominations...’

Quoting an article in the Danish National Socialist paper the report asserts: ‘The Oxford movement operates underground in Germany...’ and continues: ‘It fundamentally denies the concept of race by consciously blurring all racial differences by means of its liberalist idea of humanity and a pacifist delusion about the union of peoples. In addition there are the movement’s international involvements’ (underlined in original).⁽⁵⁾

Instructions to police departments between 1935 and 1938 show Berlin’s awareness of the activities and focuses of the ‘Group Movement’. On 21 July 1936 police departments in Bavaria were asked to report ‘about the activities of the Oxford Group Movement in their area’ and ‘in particular to determine how many members there are and the circles from which they come.’⁽⁶⁾

The most important document of this period is the *Leitheft* (instruction manual) entitled *Die Oxford- oder Gruppenbewegung* (‘The Oxford or Group Movement’) issued by Himmler’s Security Headquarters in November 1936, a few months after Himmler’s last meeting with Buchman. The first ten pages of the document include a history of the movement and its ‘nature, propagation and influence’ inside and outside Germany. Two appendices record some typical experiences of change, by Germans and foreigners. A third appendix lists all books published in German about the *Oxfordbewegung*. In Part II of the document there are specific instructions for gathering intelligence on the movement.

Buchman’s work in Scandinavia particularly attracted the attention of the Berlin authorities. In the *Leitheft* we read: ‘If the Oxford movement has so far not come out much in public, this is not a sign that the movement is being rejected in Germany. Rather it is evidence of the tactical approach of its leader, Buchman. Following his directive, the movement works undercover

in Germany – as the *Nordschleswig'sche Korrespondenz* of November 19, 1935 reports – since in current conditions any false move could have fateful consequences for it. Buchman himself, it is said, wishes to keep a certain distance from Germany in order first to establish a solid basis for the movement in Scandinavia. “Anything Scandinavian is well regarded in Germany; if Oxford were to arrive with tall, blond Scandinavians who have grown up in the same Lutheran tradition, the movement would gain much easier access to their southern neighbours.”

The writer of the document regards as ‘exceptionally informative’ an article in the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* which mentions the invitation to the Bishop of Copenhagen, Dr. Fuglsang-Damgaard, from the leaders of the Evangelical-Lutheran Conference to speak about the Oxford Group to a national conference of Protestant clergy in Berlin (see Chapter IV).

In Part II the executive summary states: ‘Although the Oxford movement ostensibly aims merely to bring about a religious revolution, it is in fact a political force... The Oxford movement will signify a deepening of the oriental-Christian spirit. For National Socialism it is therefore a new and dangerous enemy.’

Intelligence gathering instructions include:

‘1. The responsible regional office (*Oberabschnitt*) is to observe closely the output of the Leopold Klotz Verlag in Gotha, and possibly ascertain through the introduction of a *V-Mann* (government informer) who are the recipients of the literature of this publishing house.

‘2. In each region a *V-Mann* is to be placed inside the Oxford movement to take part in the meetings and to report on the work and on those who take part.’⁽⁷⁾

The source of much of the information reaching Berlin was one such *V-Mann*. At the end of the Second World War he was tried and convicted for his membership of the Security Service (SD). Because his work had saved more lives than it had imperilled, however, he escaped with a nominal sentence. He lived later in South Germany where in 1976 the author and some friends were able to interview him at length. At the time he asked that

his name not be published but he can now be identified as Arthur Demuth.

The story Demuth told us began with a phone call that he received in February 1937, summoning him to report the same day to an unfamiliar office. 'I did not know who had called me. So I just went along. There was no name on the door, only a bell. I rang, the door opened. "Mr Demuth? You are expected in Room 17." I was received by a rather ominous-looking gentleman, a former pastor who later became the head of the Security Service. In 1945 he shot himself and his wife. When he received me he said: "We know a lot about you. Your favourite subjects are child psychology and theology. Your work record is excellent. That is why you must work with us." "Who are you?" "We are a government department which assesses the forces at work (*Kräfteverhältnis*) inside Germany." "What is the department called?" "First, you have to sign this paper." Then I signed. "Now you have been accepted as a *V-Mann* in the Security Service. If you are ever unfaithful to our cause we will crucify you." It was lucky for me that a secretary was present at this interview with whom I later shared my imprisonment.'

After this induction Demuth was told his main task: "We want you to monitor a religious group, the so-called Oxford Group. We have heard that there will be a meeting in Grötzingen." So I had to make the initial contact. They did not tell me how.⁷⁽⁸⁾

The meeting in Grötzingen had been organised by a plucky group of Protestant Christians led by *Pfarrer* (Pastor) Herbert Fuchs. Fuchs had participated in the Oxford Group conference in Stuttgart in January 1934, along with the leading Communist of his parish whom he had brought to faith in God. Three years later Fuchs was wanting to do something to mobilise his whole parish. In 1976 he told the story: 'In 1937 we were planning a big campaign (*Grossangriff*) in our parish. It was in the midst of the Third Reich. Pastor Laun had been invited to give some talks but arrived with some very tame subjects. He had not fought the political battle as we had and had never frontally tackled a whole parish. I said to him: "Dear Ferdi, you need to include another theme in your lecture series." We had this theme displayed in

bright red on every pillar: "Christ's victory over Nordic people." I was wise enough not to mention it at the Mayor's Office when I applied for the rent of the hall.'

The Grötzingen church paper (January and February 1937) featured the theme on its front page, and carried an article by well-known theologian Dr. Paulus Scharpff about Frank Buchman, especially his work in Scandinavia. A series of talks was held in the parish 11-22 February 1937 with the title: 'Yes to life! Pointers to positive Christianity'.⁽⁹⁾

On the first evening of the campaign the three front rows were occupied by SA men in uniform⁽¹⁰⁾ who made such a noise that the speaker could not be heard. Finally *Pfarrer* Fuchs stood up in front and said he was not allowed to hold a public discussion. If they wanted a discussion, they were invited to come to the parsonage after the evening's talk. Demuth was sitting in the middle of this group.

At the parsonage, according to Fuchs, 'The first encounter ended in a draw. It took us all night, until 3 am. We had invited eight people from the parish, as there were eight of them. Demuth emerged as the spokesman for the group and seemed the cleverest. For instance he said one thing which I can still quote verbatim: "I am a certified mountain guide. I have rescued a number of people, but never saw a sign of God or Jesus Christ. He did not rescue them – I did." In the course of the evening our impression of the group was that these were the people that we really wanted, our first genuine opponents, not the clowns in uniform. Later Demuth admitted to me that he and his colleagues had the same impression of us: "At last we have people in our sights who are worth getting to grips with." It was the time when the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) were making compromise after compromise; first they gave up the Old Testament, then the New Testament, St Paul and St Peter; there was hardly anything left. Those were the miserable types that our opponents were having to work with! Whereas we gave the full message: nothing was left out. That was the reason for the impression that we made on each other.'⁽¹¹⁾

The Security people had tried to prepare Demuth for his task.

They gave him a confidential report (*Geheimericht*) to read which stated that the Oxford Group was a secret organisation like the Freemasons and that its aim was to soften up National Socialism, working in the background and influencing people to give up their ideology. The report also contained something about sexual excesses and group sex. Demuth commented: 'It all seemed like lies to me. But the document was classified as "top secret". I was not allowed to make notes. There were few personal details in the report, only guesswork. It was the work of an informer.'

'Then I was instructed to convert and go through an experience of "change" with *Pfarrer* Adler, so as to get as close as possible to the centre of things. It was very interesting psychologically. Politically I was under orders, but personally I found my way back to Christ. That was hard to sustain, and a long process.' During those years Demuth had two personal meetings with Buchman and was afraid that he would know that he was an agent, but nobody seems to have suspected him. He continues: 'The decisive moment for me was in Rheinfelden [in Switzerland, where an international meeting of the Oxford Group took place in 1937]. I saw there the contrast between National Socialism and the Group. A Jew who was a German citizen sat beside me and poured out his troubles. It gave me a lot to think about. Then came the experience of Interlaken. [Demuth had been asked in 1938 to represent the Groups of his city at an international conference of the Oxford Group in Interlaken, Switzerland. His name is listed amongst the participants. *Author.*] There, a phrase of Frank Buchman's stuck in my memory: "Listen to God, or listen to guns". Inwardly I was very troubled. In Germany we did not believe there would be a war. And even as member of the SD I was not informed about what was happening in the concentration camps. I only learned about that as a soldier on my way to prisoner-of-war camp.'⁽¹²⁾

Demuth's friends in the Group, Fuchs and Adler, did not know that he was an agent but they guessed that the SD had managed to infiltrate their circle. Once Fuchs met Demuth at the station in Ruppur and said: 'Arthur, you are a spy!' Demuth answered:

‘Herbert, I cannot answer your question now. But the war will end one day and then you will realise that I was the mountain guide who saved your lives.’⁽¹³⁾

At first Demuth’s concern was to write his regular reports in such a way that they matched the truth but did not increase his friends’ danger.⁽¹⁴⁾ ‘My reports went straight to Berlin to the Security Head Office. They followed a set pattern. One column was headed: Character and Personality. Once I took the liberty of writing: “I have met so many (*intakte Persönlichkeiten*) individuals of integrity and spiritual quality that the National Socialists would congratulate themselves if they had people like that in their ranks.” Nothing happened as a result.’

Two weeks before the outbreak of war Demuth received a list of twenty names from his superiors which included all the leaders of the Groups in Southern Germany. He was asked which of these people represented a danger to the state and should therefore be interned. He struggled with his conscience, knowing that a concentration camp sentence was not justified for any of the men on the list but also fearing for himself. Finally he went to the person in charge and told him that he had got to know these men well and that he could not recommend the arrest of any of them. When war broke out Demuth joined the army, which brought his work with the SD to an end.

Other South German groups had similar experiences with ‘their’ SD agents. Some were still in contact during the early years of the Federal Republic. But we have no other written accounts.

Intelligence documents from the immediate pre-war and wartime years show that the Berlin authorities were surprisingly well informed about Buchman’s and the Groups’ activities, even if they hugely overestimated their organisational strength. In a letter dated 20 May 1937, the SD chief of the SS North-West region (*Oberabschnitt*) writes to the offices in Kiel, Bremen, Braunschweig, Harburg and Hamburg: ‘The *Reichsführer-SS* has ordered the strictest observation of this movement. The Group movement is starting to have success in spreading across Germany and is trying, also with apparent success, to gain influence in Party circles.’⁽¹⁵⁾

In a further letter to the same recipients (3 December 1937) the SD chief refers to the 'extremely careful and sophisticated operating tactics' which had allegedly been developed at a conference in Schmie: 'The Group movement [believes it] has received from Christ an almost overwhelming (*fast erdrückend*) task. The Church must be filled with the Group spirit, so that the church struggle (*Kirchenkampf*) will cease... In the Party itself there are sure to be people who have a 'chink in their armour' (*die an einem 'schwachen Punkt' leiden*), and that is where a Group member has to start the work of enlistment.'⁽¹⁶⁾

Instructions sent from the Head of Security in the *SS-Oberabschnitt Süd-West* (SS South-West Region) to several district offices in February 1938 included the following points concerning the Oxford Group:

'a) Special attention must be paid to obtaining incriminating material; also to signs of the possible influence of Pacifism, Marxism, Judaism etc...

c) A *V-Mann* (informer) is to be infiltrated into each known Group...

e) After a careful sifting process, discreet mail and telephone surveillance of the most important members of the Group and precise observation of the other members is to commence....

g) The influence of the Oxford movement in State and Party circles is to be observed...'⁽¹⁷⁾

While the ability of the Groups to work freely, to organise meetings or to meet with foreign friends was being steadily reduced, the nervousness and the strong reactions of the security organs were growing in inverse proportion. In secret instructions from the *SS-Oberabschnitt Nord-West* on 4 March 1938 there is the expectation that 'the movement will launch a major public offensive this year...' Again agents are referred to the manual *Die Oxford- oder Gruppenbewegung* and urgently required to inform their offices about the tactics of the movement. 'As the fight against the Group movement is one of the primary tasks which has been entrusted to the SD, we once again stress the need for close study of the *Leitheft* (manual).'⁽¹⁸⁾

The serious concern of the Berlin authorities about the work

of the Groups is also apparent in some of the monthly, quarterly and annual reports of the *Zentralabteilung II 1 des Sicherheitshauptamtes* (Department II 1 of the Security Head Office). Of these longer reports only the 1938 annual report, the monthly report for January 1938 and the first quarterly report of 1939 seem to have survived the bombing of Berlin and the destruction by the SD of files at the end of the war.⁽¹⁹⁾ In the report for January 1938 we read: ‘The so-called Oxford Group or Group movement is proving to be a very serious attempt by the political churches to win back and influence the mass of church people. Internal meetings during January have indicated that this movement, which until now has worked with great success in countries outside Germany, is planning to launch a major offensive (*Generalangriff*). The watchword for 1938 is: ‘camouflage’ (*Tarnung*). It will avoid any direct attack on the National Socialist State or its ideology in order to gain influence in state and party circles.’⁽²⁰⁾ Similar assessments are to be found in the 1938 annual report (*Jahreslagebericht*)⁽²¹⁾ and in the first quarterly report for 1939.⁽²²⁾

Despite the limitations on the German Groups’ public activity, especially after a meeting in Eisenach in May 1938 (see next chapter), the attacks on the Oxford Group did not end. A further report published by Himmler’s office on 20 October 1939, immediately after the outbreak of war, on the current attitudes of churches and sects, again discusses the international connections of the Oxford Group: ‘The international Oxford Group movement is developing a special kind of activity. The slogan coined by its founder, the American Frank Buchman, of a “moral rearmament of the nations” has been taken up by politicians of the Western Powers, in particular Britain, and used as a cover for the encirclement attempts of the “Peace Front”. Very informative in this regard is a collection of newspaper articles under the headline “Moral Re-Armament”, signed by members of the Royal household and the British aristocracy and by high-ranking officers (*Generalität*), as well as by members of the British parliament and governments close to Britain. Although in Germany the Group movement has officially declared its separation from

the international Groups, the closest relations still exist between its German and foreign leaders.’⁽²³⁾

The final ban was still to come. On 21 October 1942 the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht issued an order that ‘any active or passive participation in activities of the “Oxford Group movement”... is forbidden’ for members of the armed forces.⁽²⁴⁾ On 30 October Martin Bormann endorsed the order and extended the ban to include members of the National Socialist party and its organisations.⁽²⁵⁾

In the same year, 1942, Himmler’s Security headquarters published its final verdict in a document of 125 pages with the plain title *Die Oxford-Gruppenbewegung* (The Oxford Group Movement)⁽²⁶⁾. Here once more the irreconcilability of National Socialism with lived Christianity is formulated in clear terms: ‘The Oxford Group strives after a revolution in the life of the individual and the nation with the aim of a new world order under the “dictatorship of the Saviour”... The Oxford Group provides a Christian-religious cover for the democracies’ world aims... It preaches revolution against the national state and has quite evidently become its opponent in Christian-religious guise, not only in its approach and methods but in the very goals it works for.’

And: ‘The Oxford Group preaches the equality of all men... No other Christian movement has underlined so strongly the character of Christianity as being supernational and independent of all racial barriers... It tries fanatically to make all men into brothers.’⁽²⁷⁾

Notes:

1 Freya von Moltke/Michael Balfour/Julian Frisby: *Helmuth James von Moltke* (Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, Stuttgart 1975) p.312.

2 Alfred Rosenberg: *Protestantische Rompilger – der Verrat an Luther und der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München 1937), 3. Auflage, p.69.

3 *Berlingske Aftenavis*, 25 February 1936; see also *Ludendorffs Halbmonatsschrift*, München, February 20.2.1936, and *Daily Telegraph*, London, 24 February 1937.

4 Sonderbericht des Reichsführers SS: *Der Weg des Protestantismus nach Rom*, August 1935, p.18 (Document Center, Berlin). (See Appendix, nr.12)

5 *Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage*, Nr.7/2. Jahrg., 26 February 1936. (For facsimile of some pages see Appendix, nr.13)

6 Letter of the Bavarian Political Police, Munich, 21 July 1936 (Document Center, Berlin). (See Appendix, nr.14)

7 Leitheft: *Die Oxford- oder Gruppenbewegung*. November 1936 (herausgegeben vom Reichsführer SS und Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes, Exemplar No. 1 (Document Center, Berlin). (For facsimile of five of the most significant pages see Appendix, nr.15)

8 Interview with Demuth, 1 March 1976.

9 See Appendix, nrs. 16 and 17: Pages of Grötzingen parish paper and invitation to lecture series.

10 The SA (*Sturmabteilung*) was the original Nazi paramilitary organisation, also known as the Brownshirts. It lost influence after its leaders were purged by Hitler and the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) in the 'night of the long knives', 29 June 1934.]

11 Interview with Pfarrer Herbert Fuchs on 3 March 1976. See also Herbert Fuchs: *Nur einer kann helfen* (Brunnquellverlag, Metzingen 1975).

12 Conversation with Demuth, 1 March 1976. .

13 Interview with Herbert Fuchs, 3 March 1976.

14 Demuth's reports to the SD (Security) headquarters have not been found. Most of the SD archives were destroyed during the bombing of Berlin. Demuth was not allowed to make copies of his reports.

15 Letter of the SD Chief of the *SS-Oberabschnitt Nord-West*, Hamburg, 20 May 1937. (For a certified copy of this letter see Appendix nr. 18.)

16 Letter of the SD Chief, *SS-Oberabschnitt Nord-West*, 3 December 1937.

17 *Sicherheitsdienst RFSS, Oberabschnitt Süd-West, Arbeitsanweisungen für II 113*, Stuttgart, 10 February 1938. (See Appendix, nrs.19 and 20)

18 *SD-Führer des SS-Oberabschnittes Nord-West*, Hamburg, 4 March 1938.

19 H. Boberach, *Berichte des SD und der GESTAPO über Kirche und Kirchenvolk in Deutschland 1934 – 1944* (Matthias Grünewald Verlag, Mainz 1962) pp.xxx/xxxix

20 *Lagebericht der Zentralabteilung II 1 des Sicherheitshauptamtes für Januar 1938* (Bundesarchiv Koblenz). See also Boberach, *ibid*, p.274 ff.

21 *Jahreslagebericht 1938*, *ibid*, p.73 (Bundesarchiv Koblenz). (See Appendix, nr. 21).

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22 Boberach, *ibid*, pp.330, 334

23 H. Boberach, *ibid*, pp.352, 361.

24 Order [number 674] of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, 21 October 1942. (For transcript see Appendix, nr. 22).

25 Official letter from the NS party headquarters, signed by Martin Bormann, 30 October 1942. (See Appendix, nr. 23).

26 *Die Oxford-Gruppenbewegung*. Gedruckt im Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Printed in the Security Head Office), 1942. (Copies in Document Center, Berlin; Bundesarchiv Koblenz; Archives cantonales du Canton de Vaud, Lausanne). (See Appendix, nr. 24 for facsimile of cover and contents pages.)

27 Lean: *Frank Buchman – a Life*, p.243

CHAPTER VI

Years of Isolation

By the late 1930s the National Socialist Government, Party and Gestapo were systematically discouraging and disrupting contact between German citizens and foreigners. This caused particular difficulties for the Oxford group and its supporters. But Buchman continued working to stay in communication with his German friends and to strengthen their faith through personal visits.

His visits to Germany in the winter and spring of 1937/38 had three main purposes: 1. to deepen the personal contact with certain individuals; 2. to distribute the newly published pictorial magazine *Rising Tide* (German: *Steigende Flut*) to friends and confidants; 3. to seek fresh perspectives on the world situation as seen from Germany.

Buchman was conscious that his movements were observed and his mail and phone-calls checked by the police. His letters and those of his colleagues in this period betray few private thoughts. Rather than visiting people he would invite them to call on him, individually or in groups, wherever he might be staying (see Chapter IV).

Through the distribution of *Steigende Flut*, however, he still hoped to reach out more widely. Buchman had spent months creating a publication that would be modern and arresting and of artistic quality. He had observed the propaganda methods developed by the Nazis, for which the Western nations had no equivalent. He imagined the impact that such a publication might have on the life of individuals or of a nation if available in large numbers at the right place and time.

In the midst of this difficult enterprise some of his colleagues in America took the step of agreeing to cuts and making concessions to suit American tastes, changing the original concept of

the magazine. The news of the changes reached Buchman in Garmisch just as he was preparing to celebrate a traditional German Christmas with dozens of friends. He was so bitterly disappointed that he called off the Christmas festivities and withdrew to his bedroom. Gloom descended on the small team accompanying him. Then as Christmas Day approached a young Scot in the group had the thought to go into Buchman's room, kneel down and simply pray: 'Dear God, give Frank and all of us a happy Christmas!' This was apparently the right medicine for the patient. Buchman rose from his bed, reissued his Christmas invitations and took up his work where he had left off, in a spirit of forgiveness.

One and a half million copies of *Rising Tide* were printed in eight languages. But the importation of Oxford Group publications into Germany had been banned, and *Steigende Flut* had to be smuggled in in small quantities. On one occasion a member of Buchman's team, Morris Martin, had broken his leg skiing in Switzerland. On the return trip to Germany by car, the leg had to be kept raised. What better way to prop it up than with several packages of *Steigende Flut*? The border officials checked the whole car and its contents but missed the 'medical' hiding place.

Steigende Flut / *Rising Tide* went beyond generalities. It stated: 'People believe that their leaders (German: *Führer*) should be guided by God – but the rank and file must be guided too. A God-guided public opinion is the strength of the leaders. This is the dictatorship of the living Spirit of God which gives every man the inner discipline he needs and the inner security he desires.'

In March 1938 the magazine was officially banned.⁽¹⁾ Prior to that announcement Buchman was distributing it left and right to all his friends and acquaintances. From Partenkirchen he wrote to John Bentinck: 'You will be interested to know what a tremendous effect *Steigende Flut* is having. One of the leaders of the Party here has taken fifty copies. A postman has come for an extra copy to circulate amongst all the postmen. Another person has ordered 66 copies. It does its own work if you give it a chance. But you've doubtless been having the same experience, so it's unnecessary for me to enlarge on it.'⁽²⁾

On 12 May, however, Bentinck wrote to Buchman: 'In order to avoid future difficulties I strongly advise you not to take Germans to Sweden. As a result of your action with regard to *Rising Tide* it was forbidden, this has done a lot of harm. I am sorry to have to give advice again as I realised in our recent correspondence, that you did not like taking advice (in the R.Tide matter) unasked for.'⁽³⁾ Buchman seems not to have been greatly affected by such reproaches. He replied: 'Good to hear from you again. I hear you are going great guns. Thank the Lord for 'R.T.' What a lot of good it has released: one finds its influence everywhere... The Swedish edition of 'R.T.' has just arrived, and what a vision for this country!... Think of two million homes having this positive message about the cause that is so dear to your and my heart!... With every good wish for you and your coming book which I know will liberate nations.'⁽⁴⁾

While Buchman and Bentinck were exchanging these letters an important Group meeting took place in Eisenach (referred to in Chapter V). Under pressure from the government, the purpose of the meeting was, firstly, to divide the work of the Oxford Group in Germany into two sectors and, secondly, to sever connections formally with the international work. The two groups which emerged from this process were the *Deutsche Gruppe* ('German Group') and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge* ('Pastoral Work Fellowship'), or AGS.

A *Mitteilung* (Notification) dated 2 February 1939 sets out the decisions of the Eisenach meeting, notes the formation of the AGS on 30 December 1938 and gives the names of those responsible for each of the two groups. The key sentence is: 'The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge* sees its task more in renewal within the church, while the *Deutsche Gruppe* stands for a free work of lay people.'⁽⁵⁾

Despite this attempt to separate the activities of the two groups, however, the bonds of friendship were too close to allow a real division between them. Members of both groups pursued largely the same spiritual aims, even while accepting the necessity in current circumstances to have different frames of reference.

J.F. Laun summarised the Eisenach decisions in several points, including:

‘... 3. The work of the *Deutsche Gruppe* – this is now the official name since the term *Bewegung* (movement) may no longer be used [*Bewegung* was now only for use by the National Socialist Movement. *Author*] – is clearly separated from the Oxford Group. Hence there is no longer any kind of foreign dependence. This has been communicated to Frank Buchman. The separation is not without love and gratitude; rather it is like the separation of a daughter from her mother after she has established her own independent household.

4. All work done outside the church should be checked with friends John Bentinck, Walther Helmes, Erwin Bücher and Werner Sack who are responsible to the state for the work of the German Group.’

Thus a work that had grown up over several years had to be restructured from one day to the next, following instructions ‘from above’ and under observation by the Gestapo.⁽⁶⁾

How did people around the country react to the Eisenach decisions? A letter to Buchman from Anna Jank, one of the Munich Group leaders, expresses the inner conflict some Germans felt:

‘About a week ago,’ this lady writes, ‘Frieda Müller called me up and told me that she had been to a Group meeting at Eisenach which she had not been allowed to mention sooner; she said that she was going to send me something written by John B... The papers by John B. contained first a warning that it was ‘verboten’ to copy... what they contained; that every person receiving them was responsible for their not becoming publicly known.

‘Then there was a communication from John B. saying that he and the three other men had felt it necessary to present the Geheime Staatspolizei with an explanation about what were the German Groups and their aims. This explanation was divided (sic) into eleven ‘Punkte’. After having read them I felt that they certainly contained good thoughts and I appreciated

those four men's sense of responsibility and their trying to get guidance about what to do in our present situation... But I also felt quite definitely that the 11 points were not as simple nor as strong nor breathing the glorious catching faith we would like such a very important document to convey. They were too complicated, too sophisticated and intellectual, trying so hard to make things acceptable...

'After the eleven points... we were told that a resolution had been accepted for the German Groups to work all alone in the future, without connection or influence by the foreign team!.. I have been fighting a terrible inclination to be depressed about all this; and I feel I have been helped already as I am clinging to the fact that Christ is stronger and that He can save Germany in spite of all these human mistakes...' ⁽⁷⁾

May 1938 – the month of Eisenach – was also the month when Buchman, on a walk in the Black Forest near Freudenstadt, had the thought that 'the next great movement in the world will be a movement of moral (and spiritual) rearmament for all nations'.⁽⁸⁾ His sense of urgency sprang not only from Germany's internal situation but from the realisation that armed conflict between the world's great powers was becoming inevitable. On 29 May in East London, Moral Re-Armament was officially launched as a world-wide action programme. Freudenstadt had been Buchman's last stopping-point on German soil before the outbreak of the Second World War. He did not return until 1948.

Early in 1938 Buchman asked Anneliese von Cramon (whose meetings with Himmler are described in Chapter III) to meet him in Esbjerg in Denmark. Her daughter who went with her describes the occasion: 'We met Frank on the ship sailing to England. He said to us, "War is coming and we won't see each other for a very long time. You will go through hard times, but never forget, we are not alone." We knelt down and prayed, then we went back down to the quay and the ship went out, and Frank stood on the deck and made the sign of the Cross for us and for Europe, and that was the last we saw of him.'⁽⁹⁾

Meanwhile those who remained in Germany faced increasing

political oppression. Following the decisions at Eisenach and the cutting of relations with Buchman and the international movement, they reached a variety of conclusions about themselves and their work. Trying to analyse their experience many decades later, we can see that people adopted four more or less distinct approaches:

The first group tried to pass on all they had learned and absorbed from Buchman as energetically as they could within the National Socialist state. They thought that a change of the system from within – even if the chances seemed small – was much preferable to a violent collapse provoked from outside. Those who represented this view called themselves and their work *Deutsche Gruppe*.

The second group, under the name *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge (AGS)* ⁽¹⁰⁾, saw their task as working for the renewal of the church and its members.

A third ‘group’ comprised those individuals who were convinced that Hitler and his idea were a demoniac force that must be frontally opposed. This led them to take part in various forms of active or passive resistance.

Finally there were those who concluded, in the extreme pressures of the late 1930s, that they had to give priority to survival for themselves and their families. Some thought of the huge tasks that would remain after the catastrophe, needing people with faith and conviction. Buchman said to Frau von Cramon in 1938: ‘A big war is coming. You yourself keep completely quiet.’ ⁽¹¹⁾

Looking back, it is easy to make judgments. One of the problems in an emergency situation is that people react in different ways and also have different callings. Not everyone is called to take up arms against the dictator or to make the ultimate sacrifice. The danger is that one group can become intolerant and not accept the other person’s or group’s decision. Thus those who want to bring change ‘inside the system’ can be condemned as ‘collaborators’ while those who take the risk of offering active resistance can be called ‘adventurers’ or ‘dreamers’ – especially if the resistance seems futile. Those who want to withdraw from active struggle and focus on the inner life to be ready for what comes ‘after’ can be branded as cowards.

The letters of this period, and first-hand accounts afterwards, do not reveal open clashes over these questions between Buchman's friends in Germany. There were some incipient criticisms between the members of the *Deutsche Gruppe* and the AGS, but the boundaries were often fluid and contact was never broken off between members of the different groups. The Nazis were not fooled either. For them it was the substance that counted, not the outside form. And this 'substance' was really the same in the various camps. So it is significant that in Security Service reports and in the final ban of 1942 'front organisations' are mentioned alongside the Oxford Group movement itself.

Those in the AGS, who operated mostly in a church framework, had the best chance to keep on pursuing their original aims, though here, too, there were different tendencies. A co-founder of the AGS, Erich von Eicken, defined his aims as follows: 'We no longer needed to wear ourselves out in futile church political disputes but were able to devote ourselves fully to the re-awakening of the church at the level of parish life, through outreach missions (*Volksmission*), in pastors' meetings, and above all in pastoral care for individuals.'⁽¹²⁾

But even if some in the AGS hoped that they could withdraw purely into pastoral care, they were often confronted with the reality of people's situations under the Nazi regime and were forced by circumstances to take a clear position.

In the spring of 1939, for instance, a youth gathering of the AGS took place in Potsdam. It was held in a place where a well-known pastor of the German Christians, Pastor Baumgarten, had his house. This man passed the group regularly while they were holding their open air Bible studies and nobody could ignore his hostile attitude.

On the second or third day the leader of the gathering, Pastor Arno Ehrhardt of Gollma, received a summons to the Gestapo headquarters in Halle. His wife Martel found herself suddenly left in charge. She had had a thought that morning in her quiet time that she should visit Pastor Baumgarten, but dismissed it. As she led the Bible study in her husband's absence she was unable to concentrate because the thought about Baumgarten

kept going round in her mind. Finally she shared the thought with the whole group and after a time of quiet together they all felt that such a strong inner call should not be ignored.

When she knocked at the door of the pastor's house a hostile woman assistant tried to stop her entering. But finally she got in and entered the pastor's study, where a whole wall was covered by a giant picture of Hitler. (Telling the story forty years later Frau Ehrhardt said: 'A year earlier I would have been unable to stop myself vomiting at such a picture.') When Baumgarten asked her why she had come, she answered with another question: 'Why are you against us?' Baumgarten: 'Isn't it obvious?' Finally Frau Ehrhardt told him how up until a year previously she had been completely blocked by her negative attitude to Hitler and to people generally, and how she had found her way back to a positive attitude to God and to people. She added that this was also what she wanted to pass on to the young people who were meeting there.

At first Baumgarten was speechless. Then he said that this was exactly what he himself felt was needed. At that moment the door opened and a youngish man in a leather coat walked in with two dogs. Frau Ehrhardt had previously noticed him a few times in the meeting room, in the kitchen in conversation with the staff and elsewhere, and had guessed – correctly – that he was from the Gestapo.

Baumgarten introduced him as Dr. Berg and asked Frau Ehrhardt to tell her story again. When Dr. Berg heard that Frau Ehrhardt's husband Arno had been summoned to Halle by the Gestapo he openly expressed annoyance and said that the Halle office had received no such instructions. After Frau Ehrhardt had finished telling her story Dr. Berg exploded: 'The Gestapo are swine. They all denounce each other. Often I can hardly stand it.' He then said that he would have to continue to observe the gathering for the next few days but asked her, if they met, not to let anyone see that she knew him.

Later in the year the Ehrhardts received a message from an officer acquaintance telling them that Dr. Berg had been killed in the Polish campaign.

In 1982 Frau Ehrhardt – whose husband by then had died – was visited by a friend who had just returned from the German Democratic Republic (DDR). He said that a certain Pastor Baumgarten had asked him to pass on special greetings to her. Baumgarten had spent several years in Russian prison camps after the war. He asked his friend to tell Frau Ehrhardt that he would not have survived his years in Russia without all that the Ehrhardts had given him in 1939.

There are dozens of such stories from those years.

In late 1938 or early 1939 a major AGS conference was convened in Southern Germany. Participants were expected from all over the country. Attending such ‘national’ conferences involved many difficulties and people only undertook long railway journeys when it was absolutely necessary. On this occasion, when the participants arrived Gestapo officials were standing at the door of the building saying: ‘The conference is prohibited (*verboten*).’ Pastor Herbert Fuchs (who told the story some years later to a journalist) tried to explain to one of the officials that many of the arrivals were refugees and that they had come a long way. Could they at least introduce themselves? The answer was: ‘Not in the building.’ ‘Can we go into the forest?’ ‘Only if I come with you.’ ‘With pleasure. You are most welcome.’

The fifty or sixty people attending went into the forest. The elders sat on a tree-trunk, the rest stood. ‘Then we introduced ourselves – at length, from Adam and Eve to the Second Coming of Christ!’ From time to time the official shouted: ‘Shorter, shorter!’ But there was not much more he could do. The whole thing lasted two hours. At the end everyone said: ‘This was the best conference we have ever had!’⁽¹³⁾

Other meetings did not end so pleasantly. Adolf Scheu describes what happened to him and other Group friends in Leipzig in June 1942:

‘We met up and found that two complete strangers had joined us. One of them took charge of the meeting and said that he had been instructed by the Gestapo that we were all to go with him. The 25 of us, men and women, were given the choice either to be arrested on the spot or to go quietly on foot

to the Wächterstrasse (Gestapo headquarters in Central Germany). There we were seated on a long bench and had to wait for several hours.

‘Then I was fetched out. I did not know that the others were being individually interrogated and then released. We had agreed beforehand on many points so that if we were arrested our statements would match. I did not see some of those friends again for several years. Next morning – having not slept – I was interrogated continuously for another 24 hours, day and night, with interrogators taking it in turns. I was shown document after document. What frustrated them most was the fact that they were hearing nothing different from me than from the rest of the 25.

‘Then for 36 hours they forced me to sing the *Horst Wessel-Lied* [famous Nazi song] and *Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles* [“Germany, Germany, above everything”. Scheu told us in 1976 that he still found it difficult to sing the German national anthem. *Author*] Then I had a nervous collapse. Finally I was taken off to prison.

‘I was transferred to Halle to be interrogated by more senior SS and police officers. One of them was unusually friendly to me. He congratulated me on my work, knew about the four absolute standards [of the Oxford group] and about a talk I had given to Party leaders. He said: “Frankly, we have come to the end with our ideology (*Weltanschauung*). This whole concept of a Germanic faith is not working any more. Every clear-sighted person knows that a different basis is needed. I have a proposition for you: take charge semi-officially of the ideological training of the regional SS. You can keep the four absolute standards, but you must leave out Christ.” I was not tempted to accept. Finally, I had to sign an undertaking to tell nobody where I had been, not even my firm, and to leave Central Germany within a month. That is how I came to Wuppertal.’⁽¹⁴⁾

A friend of Scheu’s in Northern Germany, writing after the war, remembers another experience with the Gestapo:

‘The meetings and outreach missions (*Volksmissionen*) which

took place up and down Germany attracted great attention in church circles. The work also acted as a decontaminant in church and national life... Many of our friends were put in touch with official people and especially with National Socialists. In our North-West team there was a man who was taking the first steps of teamwork [with us]. It was only through his obituary at the beginning of the Second World War that we discovered he had been the head of the Gestapo in the Weser-Ems District (*Gau*). We knew that he had been struggling to find personal clarity. It was only after his death that we saw the connection, and why the crass persecutions had stopped in our district after we met him.’⁽¹⁵⁾

These examples show how the labels ‘AGS’ or ‘*Deutsche Gruppe*’ mattered less than the fact that individuals stood up for their beliefs. Those in church circles tried to be open to those with a more secular approach. In a circular letter to AGS friends in January 1940 we read: ‘The breadth of our work needs to be preserved and consciously aimed for... Keeping our eye on the great task frees us from one-sided concepts. The work of awakening, redirecting and caring for outsiders cannot be separated from renewal and reform within religion and Christianity. Attempting to work by ourselves would doom us to becoming a sect. Limiting ourselves to the church context would make us a church body.’⁽¹⁶⁾

Many of the young men who had worked with the Groups were called up during the war, serving in different units and on different fronts. All had to swear allegiance to Hitler. In some units they encountered officers who opposed any expression of religious faith. To overcome their frequent isolation a few men who had not been called up organised a round-robin letter.

A number of the letters have survived. One comes from Dr Sieger Ernst with his experiences on the Russian front. He describes the impact of a book by Paul Tournier, the Geneva GP and author, on him and his unit. Another, dated September 1942, is from Dietrich Goller whose story is below. The letters avoid political subjects but the young men have many thoughts to express. Theologian Eberhard Stammler who survived the war

and was one of the first Germans to cross the border into Switzerland in 1946 (see Chapter VII) writes on 20 June 1944: ‘We are full of suspense as we see the war entering its final phase. We are approaching the decisive climax. Are we ready for what lies beyond it?’ In a letter dated 22 September 1944, Hermann Sommer writes from a prisoner-of-war camp in England. In the last letter, written on 26 January 1945, Paul Bausch, a former member of the Reichstag who had met Buchman in 1934 after the Stuttgart conference, shares the thoughts from his quiet time following news of the death of his son-in-law, Dieter Goller, at the front. He mentions other Group friends around Germany or in the army whose fate at that moment is unknown.⁽¹⁷⁾

Dietrich Goller, one of many who did not survive the war, had encountered Buchman’s ideas at a Group meeting near Tübingen, where he also met Paul Bausch’s daughter Hedwig. After studying at the Institute of Technology he joined the army and took part in the Spanish campaign. He had a deep faith in Jesus Christ, while also believing it was his duty to serve the *Führer*.

Goller was a First Lieutenant commanding a Flak (anti-aircraft) battery, stationed first in Berlin and then in the far north of Norway. There he had a superior officer who was a fierce Nazi and fanatically opposed to Christianity. One Sunday Goller was sitting with twenty of his men in a dug-out conducting a group Bible study when the officer came and asked what they were doing. Goller told him that he was a convinced Christian. Fourteen days later he was suddenly transferred and put in charge of a company of army engineers – though he had never been a sapper. He was killed in January 1945 during the Ardennes Offensive.⁽¹⁸⁾

Helene Adler, whose husband Walter was part of the younger group that started applying Oxford Group ideas in 1933 and 1934, estimated that about two thirds of the close-knit team of students from Stuttgart and Tübingen did not survive the war. Many of them, she said, had been transferred to other units because of their faith and several even sent to penal units (where the risk of death was greater).⁽¹⁹⁾

Amongst the allied prisoners of war in Germany there were

also active Oxford Group people. Andrew Strang, a Scotsman who had been captured in Denmark when the Germans invaded, spent several years in various *Stalags* (prisoner of war camps). As a civilian prisoner he was permitted to have an operation for an abscess in a civilian hospital (in Gleiwitz, 1942). The operating surgeon was so impressed by the faith and attitude of his patient that the two men soon became friends despite the strict Gestapo supervision. After the war when the surgeon was denounced by a personal enemy he managed to reach Strang with a message smuggled out of Germany and just addressed to 'Andrew Strang, Scotland'. The former prisoner flew back to Germany and succeeded in saving his friend from being put on trial. There was a further happy end to the story: some years later Strang married the surgeon's daughter.

In 1943 an American visitor to prisoner-of-war camps in Germany wrote a report describing the influence of the Oxford Group in a camp for convalescent prisoners.⁽²⁰⁾

What was the attitude in the German Groups towards the persecution of the Jews, and what did they know? In Chapter III we saw that some Jewish Christians actively participated in the Munich Group and the same was true of the Berlin Group. Dr Hans Stroh, a pastor in Stuttgart, encountered this issue during the war and wrote about it later:

'The deportation of our Jewish citizens – those who had no mixed-blood children – started on 1 December 1941. I heard nothing about it. I do not know whether Jewish citizens living in the Waldkirche area were affected by this deportation which ended in a mass grave. By accident I had something to do with the deportation of 26 April 1942. On my way home from a confirmation class I helped two elderly people to carry two heavy suitcases, and then a third, a few hundred meters to the tram stop. Sadly they pointed to the yellow Star of David on their chest to warn me. I did not know that they were on their way to the Killesberg assembly camp, from where two days later they would be transported to the extermination camps.

'My small act of charity was denounced to the authorities. When during the interrogation I refused to regret my

“unpatriotic behaviour” my case was referred to Berlin. From there I was given a flexible sentence “from eight days in prison to concentration camp”. After a short period in custody I was released unharmed.

“The important thing for me was the talks with the Gestapo officials before and after my imprisonment. Although I was still unaware of the murderous nature of the anti-Jewish measures, the talks revealed to me the determination of the NS Party to keep the operation against the Jews completely secret... Silence was maintained (*breitete sich*) concerning the reason for my punishment. This meant silence about the treatment of the Jews amongst us.’⁽²¹⁾

Records of conversations between Jews and non-Jews are rare during this period. One account comes from Danish journalist Jacob Kronika (mentioned in Chapter IV) who spent most of the war in Berlin. His book *Der Untergang Berlins* (The Fall of Berlin) quotes his diary on 7 March 1945:

‘Yesterday evening a group of friends gathered at the home of Dr. L. [Dr. Lessing was a ‘non-Aryan’. This fact is gathered from Kronika’s additional notes. *Author*] We discussed the chances of building a new Germany after the final collapse of the Hitler-regime...’

Then on 11 April:

‘I met with some Germans from the Oxford Group Movement. Yes, this movement actually exists in Nazi Germany – it is still alive. It has another name, however: *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge*, or A.G.S. for short... For years the Nazi leadership has been setting the Gestapo on all Oxford [Group] people, Germans as well as foreigners...

‘Of course we were soon talking about the whole German problem: “In my opinion too many of us were blinded by the power of National Socialism as if by the power of Satan, and thought for a while that it was all right to believe in Hitler,” said one of those present. “Despite themselves people are fascinated by the demoniac power of the Nazi dictatorship... If we did not know it before, Germany’s misfortune since 1933 has taught us that there really are demons; that evil spirits can

take possession of people and that this demonic possession can be transmitted from one person to the other...”

“We were silent for a while. Then one of the ladies said: “We don’t dare to hope that any nation on earth will want to have anything more to do with us Germans. How could the countries that we have invaded, mistreated and plundered forget the evil we have done to them through the war?” “And the Jews?” someone else brought up.

“Then a young Dutchman started to speak. His answer is hard to forget: “Madam, you have just said what has to be said. For us foreigners your attitude is the bridge leading back to a transformed German people. Where evil is recognised, confessed and repented of, it can also be forgiven and forgotten. If the German nation comes to think as you do, the way can be opened to a new community with other nations.”

“Besides sincerely wanting to recognise and repent our sins we must be resolved to do all we can to make restitution to other nations for the suffering we have caused them,” said one who in earlier years had believed there was something good in National Socialism.

“We well understand that Germany’s sin must arouse hatred – we hate this sin ourselves,” said another. “But we hope that the hatred will not be directed against the German sinner who from the bottom of his heart is ready to do penance.”

““You Germans who have struggled through to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ represent for us foreigners the other Germany that we have been looking for for so long,” the Dutchman commented.

““This ‘other Germany’ has not yet arisen, nevertheless it is an idea that will not die,” commented the leader of the meeting. “So far, there are only ‘other Germans’ dispersed around our country, unfortunately. But they will raise that ‘other Germany’ over the ruins of the Prussian ideal and of National Socialism.”’ (22)

There were doubtless other such conversations across Germany during the last months of the war, but not always a Kronika present to write them down.

This chapter would not be complete without the story of a

successful penetration of Germany's isolation. In February 1940 a senior Swiss cleric at the Vatican, Canon de Bavier, told Philippe Mottu, an associate of Buchman, about a German diplomat called Herbert Blankenhorn who had been in touch with Moral Re-Armament in the United States and was now Counsellor at the German Embassy in Berne. Mottu at that time held a senior position in the Department of Information of the Swiss Army and had to ask for a special permission to see the German diplomat. He then paid him a courtesy visit at the Berne embassy. At this first meeting Blankenhorn seemed cool and uninterested.

A few days later Blankenhorn phoned Mottu and suggested continuing their conversation on a walk in the forest. This time the German diplomat revealed a wholly different side. He told Mottu he was convinced that Germany would lose the war and spoke of his own participation in the German Resistance.

Through Blankenhorn Mottu met another member of the German Resistance, Adam von Trott zu Solz. The Rector of Geneva University, William Rappard, tried on this occasion to arrange a meeting for von Trott with US diplomat Allen Dulles. No direct meeting took place but Dulles sent one of his officials to talk with von Trott. The latter asked that his request for help receive urgent attention, 'as the resistance fighters could turn in desperation to the Russians'.⁽²³⁾ The details of what happened during these years in Berne are not fully known even today. One fact is that Kim Philby, the British SIS officer and double agent, visited Berne several times and did all he could to frustrate contacts between allied agencies and the German Resistance.⁽²⁴⁾

Von Trott asked Mottu if he could consider visiting Berlin, as it was becoming more and more difficult for the men running the Resistance to cross the Swiss frontier. In November 1942 Mottu got some friends to invite him to give a lecture in Finland. The outward and homeward journeys included stopovers in Berlin, on a transit visa arranged by Blankenhorn. In Berlin during a heavy bombing raid Mottu had a three hour conversation with the diplomat and resistance leader Hans Bernd von Haefthen.⁽²⁵⁾ A major subject of their talk was the attitude of a Christian to tyrannicide. Years later Mottu remembered many details of the

conversation which included the difference between Calvinist and Lutheran standpoints on certain political questions. 'From that evening on,' he wrote later, 'I knew that a plot followed by a coup d'état was being prepared in Germany to get rid of Hitler and the National-Socialist regime.'⁽²⁶⁾

In 1944 Mottu was invited by Buchman to visit him in the United States to discuss post-war plans. Von Trott succeeded in obtaining permission for Mottu to travel via Germany and Portugal. In Adam von Trott's biography the last meeting of von Trott, his wife Clarita, Eugen Gerstenmaier, Hans Schönfeld and Mottu is described in detail.⁽²⁷⁾ Mottu took with him a series of documents which he was asked to deliver in Washington 'as soon as news of the overthrow of the regime in Germany comes out'. Mottu arrived in the United States in June and passed on details about the planned coup d'état and the list of the proposed new government to a group of officials in the State Department. A week before the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life Dulles also sent a message to Washington predicting 'dramatic events'. Yet there was no change in Washington's attitude towards the German Resistance. The formula of 'unconditional surrender' announced at the Casablanca Conference remained unaltered.⁽²⁸⁾

In the months of the Reich's final collapse nobody would have dared to predict that soon Germans would be invited to meet with their former enemies and to take their place again in the family of nations. Suddenly, the years of isolation were coming to an end.

Notes:

1 The ban was published in the *Deutsche Reichsanzeiger und Preussischer Staatsanzeiger*, 12 March 1938; see also C. Georgi: *Christsein aus Erfahrung*, p.59.

2 F.B. To John Bentinck, Garmisch, 16 January 1938.

3 John Bentinck to F.B. (English original), 12 May 1938.

4 F.B. to John Bentinck, 14 May 1938.

5 *Mitteilung*, signed in Heidelberg on 2 February 1939 by J. Bentinck, W. Helmes and Adolf Scheu for the *Deutsche Gruppe*, and by J. F. Laun, Adolf

Allwohn and Otto Rieker for the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge*. (See Appendix, nr. 25)

6 D. Hans Stroh commented on the effect of the Eisenach decisions in a conversation in 1976: 'The *Deutsche Gruppe* was deeply influenced by a fear that came mainly from John Bentinck. It was a fear that was justified – as we now know. The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge* (AGS) had the advantage of operating in the framework of the Church and could even meet in hotels, as it did in Wimpfen in 1940. The AGS was more courageous and took the mission (as expressed by Buchman) 'to lead men to Christ' more seriously. There were many AGS meetings and conferences until its dissolution in November 1942, when Theo Haug, accompanied by Adolf Scheu, personally called on the Security officer in charge saying that their mission, to lead people to Christ, could not be given up [but that under the circumstances the work could no longer be carried on]. My own conscience was satisfied by the statement of Haug and Scheu.'

7 Frau Anna Jank to Buchman (English original), Munich, 2.6.1938. (Vaud Cantonal Archives)

8 Frank N.D. Buchman: *Remaking the World* (Blandford Press, London 1961), p.185

9 Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a life*, p.241/242.

10 See Curt Georgi, *ibid.*, p.26.

11 Note by Hans Stroh, 30 April 1984.

12 Curt Georgi, *ibid.*, p.26.

13 Conversation with Pfarrer Herbert Fuchs, 3 March 1976.

14 Conversation with Adolf Scheu, 6 March 1976. See also C. Georgi, *ibid.*, pp 22/23.

15 Ludwig Heinemeyer: *Frank Buchmans Herausforderung* (unpublished manuscript), p.2.

16 C. Georgi, *ibid.*, p.66.

17 The six letters quoted here are reproduced in Appendix, nrs. 26-31.

18 Paul Bausch: *Lebenserinnerungen und Erkenntnisse eines schwäbischen Abgeordneten* (im Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Korntal 1969), p.138. (See also Goller's letter in Appendix, nr. 27)

19 Conversation with Frau Helene Adler, June 1983.

Hans Stroh notes that punitive transfer to another unit was called in German a *Himmelfahrtskommando* (a posting to heaven) and could be decided by the superior officer secretly, without reference to a military court. Goller, Stammeler and Siegfried Ernst were punished in this way.

Transfer to a *Strafkompanie* (punishment company) on the other hand was formally ordered by a military court.

20 Chr. Christiansen, YMCA War Prisoners' Aid, New York. Report on STALAG III D, Detachment 517. October 6, 1943. (See Appendix, nr. 32).

21 See Hans Stroh: *Jahre der Entscheidung*, and in conversation in Stuttgart, 8 August 1978. More details in *Juden und Christen – schwierige Partner* (Quell Verlag, Stuttgart 1982) pp.79-102.

22 Jacob Kronika: *Der Untergang Berlins* (Verlagshaus Christian Wolff, Flensburg und Hamburg 1946) pp.41, 99-102.

23 Leonard Mosley: *Dulles* (Dell Publishing Co., New York 1979) p.155.

24 Andrew Boyle: *The Climate of Treason* (Coronet Books, 1980) p.259 ff

25 Von Haeften was a member of the *Kreisauer Kreis* (Kreisau Circle) and had the task of liaising with different groups of the German Resistance. See also H. Rothfels: *The German Opposition to Hitler*, p.111.

26 Conversation with Philippe Mottu, June 1981. Also lecture by Philippe Mottu, *Caux is the place!*, Caux, 30 June 1996.

27 C. Sykes: *Troubled Loyalty*, p.425. Hans Schönfeld worked at the World Council of Churches in Geneva during the Second World War and was simultaneously an important liaison person for the German Resistance. Dr. Eugen Gerstenmaier worked within the Protestant Church and with various Resistance groups. He was arrested after July 20, 1944 but his direct involvement with the plot could not be proved. After the War he was elected to the Bundestag and became its President.

28 See also David J. Price: *The Moral Re-Armament Movement and Postwar European Reconstruction* (MA Dissertation, Oxford, October 1979).

CHAPTER VII

Through reopening doors

‘Someone, some day, is going to have to win the peace,’ was Buchman’s response in 1939 when the stunning news of the outbreak of war reached him in Los Angeles.⁽¹⁾ With Germany’s capitulation in 1945 his impatience to cross the Atlantic and return to Europe can be imagined.

First, however, he had to wait till those of his core team who had been called up to serve in various theatres of war were demobilized. Peter Howard was with him and described the return of one such group:

‘Frank Buchman stood at the American airfield as they flew in. He stood there with a crowd of his friends in the glare of the searchlight and the shadows of the moon. Across the concrete runway they came towards him, and there for a minute they stood in stillness together. Hardly a word was said.

‘But the tears rolled down Frank Buchman’s face, and he was not alone in that. Then he turned towards the waiting cars saying, “Well, you’re home. And now let’s get on with the fight.”’⁽²⁾

It was many months more before Buchman was able to meet the Germans who had been active with the Oxford Group, and who were now frequently facing personal difficulties. Many of the men were prisoners-of-war, in the West or in Russia. Some families did not know whether husbands, sons or nephews had survived or where the war’s end had found them. Paul Bausch’s family lost a member in the last weeks of the fighting (see Ch. VI). Buchman’s friends Cecil and Dina von Hahn were among the Baltic German families who had been resettled in Poland after the Hitler-Stalin Treaty, then had to flee again to the West before the advancing Soviet troops.

An early renewal of contact between German and Swiss friends of the Oxford Group took place at the Swiss-German border where a Swiss industrialist, Paul Suter, had worked on the German side all through the war while returning at night to his home in Trasadingen, Switzerland. This enabled him to arrange for Dr. Siegfried Ernst from Ulm and Dr. Erich Peyer, one of the founders of the conference centre in Caux, to meet at the border and have a good long talk across the barbed wire.

When the war ended it was not possible at first for Germans to contact people abroad. But within the country those who had worked closely together in the Groups set about reviving their networks, first in their own occupation zones and then across the zone boundaries. Prisoners of war like Eberhard Stammeler and Ferdi Laun – in camps in France and Britain – sought contact with international friends while waiting for their release. Stammeler wrote to Theophil Spoerri: 'How the face of the world has changed since we last met in Oxford and Partenkirchen! God's judgment has swept over the German people like a fierce hurricane and left a vast expanse of ruins.'⁽³⁾ The collapse of the Hitler regime meant first and foremost the end of a painful chapter. Nobody was yet daring to make predictions for the future.

The survivors – whether at home or in the forces – had questions to wrestle with: What were the lessons to be learned (*aufarbeiten*) from each very personal experience of National Socialism and of the war? Could such a past ever be 'overcome' (*bewältigt*) or even, at some point, healed? Should groups as well as individuals try to evaluate this past and draw lessons from it? When would be the right moment to get in touch again with friends outside Germany? Would those 'outside' initiate such contacts, or would they be hesitant to talk with Germans again?

Adolf Scheu's letter of November 1945 renewing contact with Ursula Bentinck, a first cousin of John's living in London⁽⁴⁾, and her answer⁽⁵⁾ contain reflections on the recent past but also start to look to the future. Scheu recalls how when they last met seven years earlier 'the dreadful mistakes regarding the Jews in Germany' had been discussed. 'How much Christians everywhere now have to restore for... In various occupation zones we have

restarted the Group's work which had been completely broken up by the Gestapo during the war.' He asks: 'Are you able to work again in England?.. Is it true, as I heard here from some British officers, that Frank and his team went to the United States at the outbreak of the war?'

In her reply Ursula Bentinck gives news of the 1942 Gestapo report (see Chapter V.) which had been found by occupation troops in Alsace: 'Some secret reports of the Gestapo have just been discovered. In them the Group is condemned as very dangerous and needing to be eradicated along with the Church. The Group wants to replace the Swastika with the Cross of Christ. This has now been published in some English newspapers .' At the end she expresses the hope that she will find 'the means and ways to return to Germany.'

Two letters written just after the war by Siegfried Ernst from Ulm to friends in the Netherlands⁽⁶⁾ and Switzerland show a determination to re-establish pre-war contacts and to recommence working together. 'Now that the so-called philosophy of National Socialism has been laid low and all the anti-Christian constraints are gone, and we no longer need to be afraid of the Gestapo, and also because we sense a huge uncertainty and confusion in people, we think that the time has come to work so that Germany does not remain open to Communism which is already at work everywhere... I am convinced that we have been granted only a short time in the great struggle between Christ and the Anti-Christ...' writes Ernst in the first letter. He tells how during the war he had been compulsorily transferred three times to other units – against the rules – because of 'Christian activities'. In early 1944 he had been demoted on Himmler's direct orders to the rank of private. These measures clearly aimed to get rid of active Christians by putting them in harm's way on the battlefield.

To his Swiss friend Ernst writes that despite the difficult conditions he and his colleagues have already managed to organize a gathering of one hundred people: 'We were quite fearful as we travelled to the meeting since only very few of us have come back, around 10%, and most of us younger ones have been killed.'⁽⁷⁾

Those who had come through the war were thinking again in terms of the patterns and methods they had learnt from Buchman and his team in the thirties. They talked about conferences and get-togethers (*Tagungen, Freizeiten*) as in the old days. They thought of republishing the original Oxford Group books. Adolf Scheu asked the publisher Leopold Klotz if he could send him a supply of the book *For Sinners Only*.⁽⁸⁾ Klotz answered that the ‘sinners’ book’ had been officially banned from sale during the war and that nearly all the the remaining stocks had been destroyed in the bombing of Leipzig in December 1943.⁽⁹⁾ The fact that Scheu was living in the British Zone and Klotz in the Soviet Zone seems not (yet) to have hindered communication between them.

There was the question of legal and external structures for the revived work. The first meeting of ‘responsible members of the team in the three Western Zones’ took place in Marburg, 11-14 February 1946. On behalf of a group of these leaders, mainly pastors and theologians from the former *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge (AGS)* Adolf Scheu then wrote the *Team Brief No.1* (Team Letter No. 1)⁽¹⁰⁾ of which only an English translation is still available. The letter reads: ‘We see the original task of the Groups with a new clarity: it is to find a way to reach the millions of people who have no faith and who are not open to the message of the Church. While doing this, we must not forget what has most occupied our minds in the last few years: the task of reawakening the Church.’

The Dean of Herrenberg, Theodor Haug, played a central role in this new beginning. His letter of 16 March 1946 to twelve colleagues sets out clearly some practical and personal aspects of re-establishing the work.⁽¹¹⁾

Along with the new beginning there were continuing reminders of the past, whether through external political factors like de-nazification and the ban on fraternisation between the occupiers and the population, or in personal conversations and letters. Pastor Arno Ehrhardt’s letter to the same colleagues is a remarkable document of this period.⁽¹²⁾ In it he discusses frankly a painful issue that had arisen at a meeting in Schmie (possibly the 1937 confer-

ence referred to by a SD official in Chapter V) where John Bentinck had insisted on a positive attitude towards the Third Reich and where Ehrhardt and his wife had voted against the proposal. The issue of having a 'positive attitude' not only towards God and towards people in general, but also towards the politically powerful, led to a struggle of conscience for many, as the story of the Ehrhardts in Potsdam (see Chapter VI) shows.

In the same letter Ehrhardt supports the idea of a second Group meeting in Marburg and suggests that the opportunity be taken to reach out by inviting new people to join the conference. Looking outward together will also help the Group's internal processes of clarification and unity.

Meanwhile Buchman and an international team were on their way back to Europe. They were preceded by new books and publications as well as by several Europeans who had been in the United States during the war and were returning to prepare a major international conference planned for mid-1946. In early May Scheu wrote to Klotz: 'In the last few weeks we have received some good, completely new Group literature from England and America, and several people are currently hard at work translating it... Apart from that, our own German material will need to grow out of our experiences in recent months and out of the tasks that lie ahead of us. This is not only true of our literature. The whole of Group work in Germany needs to develop afresh, and it all depends very much on us having open eyes for new ways and open ears for God.'⁽¹³⁾

One of the first Germans to receive an exit permit and thus meet the 'outside world' was Pastor Eberhard Stammeler from Blaubeuren. With three others he travelled to Switzerland to attend a European planning conference in April 1946 in Interlaken. The Chaplain-General of the French Army of Occupation helped open the way for these early foreign visits by Germans. The conference ran for two weeks and was attended by 600 people. It led to the final decision by a group of Swiss families to purchase the derelict Caux Palace hotel near Montreux as a permanent conference centre for Moral Re-Armament (MRA) – the name of Buchman's global work for the next 55 years.⁽¹⁴⁾

Bishop Wurm from Stuttgart (see Chapter III) had given his full support for Stammler and the three others to go.⁽¹⁵⁾ This was followed by the first major gathering of the *Gruppenbewegung* in Germany after the war, held in Bad Boll (15-20 May 1946) with the theme: 'Our way out of the ruins'.⁽¹⁶⁾ Along with the other Europeans, the Germans were preparing themselves for a renewed dialogue and teamwork with Frank Buchman and the international team arriving from America. Their mood is expressed in a telegram sent to Buchman from Interlaken, which Stammler put at the end of his report in the official bulletin of the German Protestant Church: 'In Interlaken we found the way to European rebirth through national repentance.'⁽¹⁷⁾

After the Bad Boll gathering Stammler wrote in his personal report to *Landesbischof* Wurm: 'When our friends from Switzerland took their leave they admitted that they had rarely experienced a meeting in any other country of such depth and efficacy, and we ourselves felt transported back to the golden days of 1934. We had the strong impression that the door had opened again to a new beginning of Group work, the work that, as an extended arm of the church, seeks to save people from disaster and bring them into the light of the living God.'⁽¹⁸⁾

Along with rebuilding the original work there were some special initiatives in the immediate post-war years. In late 1946 a group of men who had been active in the German Group were asked to take their message into a political internment camp where former officials of the Third Reich (not, however, those being tried in Nuremberg) were being held. For ten days the group of twelve were free to speak to any of the 13,000 prisoners. Adolf Scheu had one memorable encounter. He had addressed a group of internees in a tent and was visiting them again. On each visit he noticed a man who tried to slip out behind him when he entered the tent. The second time Scheu stopped the man and asked him what was troubling him. The answer: 'I was part of the Security Service and was given the job of shadowing you. My life is in your hands.' For many years Scheu cared for this man who after the end of his prison term came to live in Wuppertal where Scheu also lived.^(19, 20)

In July 1946 Buchman opened the first World Conference for Moral Re-Armament in the newly acquired buildings in Caux, on the mountainside above the Lake of Geneva. On his arrival in the entrance hall of Mountain House, he put an unexpected question to the Europeans assembled to welcome him: 'Where are the Germans?'

Today we forget how unexpected, even revolutionary such a question was at that historical juncture. The significance of Buchman's initiative – to get the greatest possible number of Germans quickly to Caux where they could be reintegrated into the 'family of nations' – is highlighted when one reads letters written at the time by the man who was to become the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer. On 8 April 1946 he wrote to a foreign friend: 'To separate essential territories from Germany would lead to a withering of the rest of Germany and create an infection in the heart of Europe.'⁽²¹⁾ On 16 January 1947 he wrote: 'I am looking ahead to 1947 with much apprehension – not only as a German but also as a European and as a man deeply imbued with the importance of the Occident for the whole of humanity. I fear that the mistake made in 1918 is being repeated on a much greater scale, even though I am completely clear in my own mind about the guilt of the majority of the German nation... But I am of the view that people must be found in the Allied countries who will think for the future and for future generations.'⁽²²⁾

Writers and historians on both sides of the Rhine have described the results of Buchman's thought in July 1946 and of the initiatives that followed.⁽²³⁾ A first group of 16 Germans arrived in Caux in the autumn of 1946; in the summer of 1947 150 Germans attended; over 400 came in 1948 and still larger groups in subsequent years. Buchman was officially invited to visit several of Germany's main cities with a large international team.

Notes:

- 1 Garth Lean: *Frank Buchman – a life*. p.287
- 2 Anne Wolrige-Gordon, *Peter Howard – Life and Letters* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1969), p.147.
- 3 Eberhard Stammler to Theophil Spoerri, 16 June 1945 (See Appendix, nr. 33).
- 4 Adolf Scheu to Countess Ursula Bentinck, 23 November 1945 (See Appendix, nr. 34).
- 5 Ursula Bentinck to Adolf Scheu, 15 December 1945 (See Appendix, nr. 35).
- 6 Siegfried Ernst to Albert van der Woude, 8 June 1945.
- 7 Siegfried Ernst to Erich Peyer, 18 November 1945 (See Appendix, nr. 36).
- 8 Adolf Scheu to Leopold Klotz, 23 January 1946
- 9 Leopold Klotz to Adolf Scheu, 11 February 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 37).
- 10 Team Letter No. 1, Wuppertal, 20 February 1946.
- 11 Theodor Haug to Adler, Allwohn et al., Herrenberg, 16 March 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 38).
- 12 Arno Ehrhardt to Adler, Allwohn, et al. Gleidingen, 12 April 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 39).
- 13 Adolf Scheu to Leopold Klotz, 4 May 1946.
- 14 See lecture by Philippe Mottu: *Caux is the place!*, Caux, 30 June 1996.
- 15 E. Stammler to A. Scheu, 30 April 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 41).
- 16 See Appendix, nr. 40.
- 17 From the *Verordnungs- und Nachrichtenblatt* (official organ of the Protestant Church in Gemany), 27 August 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 42).
- 18 E. Stammler to Bishop Wurm, 26 May 1946 (See Appendix, nr. 43).
- 19 Adolf Scheu to U. Bentinck, 23 January 1947 (See Appendix, nr. 44).
- 20 Conversation with Adolf Scheu, 6 March 1976.
- 21 Konrad Adenauer, *Briefe 1945-1947* (Rhöndorfer Ausgabe, Siedler Verlag, München 1983), p.20.
- 22 Konrad Adenauer, *ibid.*, p.417.
- 23 Literature about the beginnings of Caux and the new start of MRA work in Germany:
Theophil Spoerri: *Dynamik aus der Stille* (Caux Verlag, Luzern 1971);

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H.W. Austin: *Frank Buchman as I knew him* (Grosvenor Books, London 1975), p.131 ff;

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EPILOGUE:

Fulfilment and a new chapter

In 1948 the Ministers-President of three German *Länder* (states): Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg – soon to be part of the new Federal Republic – invited Buchman to visit their cities with an international team and the musical review *The Good Road*.

Buchman had turned seventy that year. In the post-war decade-and-a-half up to his death in 1961 he saw a harvest sprouting in Germany, often from seeds he and his friends had sown before the war.

His simple concepts – that the material reconstruction of Europe had to be preceded and complemented by a moral and spiritual one; and that without the full inclusion of Germany a new Europe would remain an illusion – were widely accepted in principle. In practice, nonetheless, hesitant and strongly negative attitudes also persisted for a long time.

The post-war conferences in Caux, bringing together hundreds of Germans, French, British, Scandinavians and other Europeans, helped to create the basis of relationships on which new international agreements and supra-national institutions could be built. These included the historic Schuman Plan (1951), a first step in peaceful economic integration which led to the European Community and later the European Union. Buchman was decorated by the French government with the *Légion d'Honneur*, presented to him on German soil on the occasion of a large international assembly in Gelsenkirchen at Whitsun 1950⁽¹⁾, and by the German government with the *Grosses Verdienstkreuz* (presented in New Delhi in December 1952).

Talks in Caux and on the ground also bore fruit in areas of German domestic policy. A new culture of consultation and trust

between workers and management in key companies of the Ruhr mining industry helped prepare the ground for the powersharing structures introduced by the Co-Determination Law (*Mitbestimmungsgesetz*) of 1951. This law ended the absolute control of the 'Ruhr barons' over their companies and gave workers a share in the running of enterprises.

Legislation to facilitate the integration of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Germany's Eastern provinces – now occupied by Poland and Russia – was substantially influenced by men who had been at the Caux conferences. The *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* (Equalization of Burdens Act), was passed in the *Bundestag* on 14 August 1952 and made it possible for refugees to have an immediate part in the reconstruction of their country. Part of this law was a tax of 50% (above a certain threshold) on all properties in West Germany that had been untouched by the war.⁽²⁾

As Buchman and his team contributed to the emergence of the new democratic Germany, Buchman himself gained new inspiration and ideas from post-war German experiences. A document written in February 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen⁽³⁾ records him talking to a group of colleagues. The notes express a depth and a density of thought at a time when Buchman's work in Germany was spreading explosively. A central theme is the issue of freedom:

'Dearth of new thinking in the world. A new thinking is derived from a new mentality and that grows as slow as an oak. Reviewing his capital of ideas. Freedom is one of the major notions... The freedom to understand things for their own sake. The Cross as an alternative to living by the book... What one man can do is to experience deliverance from evil... Frank [Buchman] says: "I need this kind of freedom as much as I need guidance. That would be the experience adequate for Moscow. Freedom of sincerity."'

Another statement that reflects experiences in Germany is Buchman's address at Whitsun 1950 in Gelsenkirchen, in the heart of the Ruhr industrial area:

'Marxists are finding a new thinking in a day of crisis. The class struggle is being superseded... Can Marxists be changed?... Can Marxists pave the way for a greater ideology?'⁽⁴⁾

With Buchman the broad concepts are frequently connected with specific people. Here they relate to his friendship with two coal miners from the Ruhr, Max Bladeck and Paul Kurowski, who had been works council chairmen and militant Communists.

In a similar way, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman had a central place in his hopes and visions for the future of Europe. A series of letters, meetings and messages testifies to the mutual regard between Buchman and Adenauer. Adenauer's hand-written message to the Whitsun rally in Gelsenkirchen opens with the phrase: 'Start with yourself...' which the German Chancellor evaluates as the 'most essential message (*Mahnruf*) of Caux'.⁽⁵⁾ Wherever Buchman found himself in the world he maintained contact with his team in Germany and with men like Adenauer, Kurowski and Bladeck.

So it was natural for him in the summer of 1961, feeling unwell and tired amongst the hundreds of people gathered in Caux, to withdraw to his familiar Freudenstadt in the Black Forest. As in pre-war days he stayed at the Hotel *Waldlust*, cared for by the Luz family. Soon he was feeling better. On the second morning in Freudenstadt he dictated some thoughts to his colleague and secretary, Morris Martin: 'This is where God first talked to you about the picture of the world's problems. You will be mightily used. First you must get well.' On the third day his first visitor arrived: Prince Richard of Hesse. At 3.00am that morning he had been awake and dictated to his doctor, Paul Campbell: 'Here God first spoke to you. He will speak again. Make this a centre for the world work. Here you will lay down your life and die. You can see large vistas from here. All Germany will rise up...'

A few days later came the heart attack. As Buchman hovered between life and death his favourite passages from the Bible were read. When Prince Richard read Psalm 23 Buchman caught the sound of his voice and smiled. Not long after, he slipped into unconsciousness. That evening his last breath left him.

A final message to his friends around the world had taken him half an hour, at times interrupted by pain, to utter: 'I want Britain to be governed by men governed by God. I want to see the world

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governed by men governed by God. Why not let God run the whole world?⁶

The Freudenstadt city church was packed as people came from all over Germany to take leave of Frank Buchman. The same church was filled again to the last seat on 4 June 1978 as Buchman's birth centennial was celebrated. By now a new generation had assumed responsibility in Germany and in Europe.

Notes:

1 See H.W. Austin: *Frank Buchman as I knew him* (Grosvenor, London 1975) p.131ff; Anne Wolrige-Gordon, *ibid.*, p.155; Frank Buchman: *Remaking the world* (Blandford Press, London 1961), p.185

2 See Garth Lean, *ibid.*, p.372.

3 See Appendix, nr. 45.

4 Frank Buchman: *Remaking the world*, p.177

5 See Appendix, nr. 46.

The following is a list (not exhaustive) of letters and messages from Chancellor Adenauer to Buchman as well as face-to-face meetings: Caux, September 1948; letter 22.9.1948; Königswinter, 4.1.1949; letter 13.6.1949; letter 28.4.1950; hand-written letter 28.5.1950; letter 28.5.1951; letter 31.5.1958; reception in London, 20.11.1959; Los Angeles, March 1960; telegram 9.8.1961 (on the occasion of Buchman's death).

6 See Garth Lean, *ibid.*, p.528.

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See Chapter Notes.

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of several other persons who were active in the Oxford Group and Moral Re-Armament in Germany, including J.F. Laun. Catalogue (*Findbuch*) at:

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Appendix: Documents

The Appendix containing the following transcripts and facsimiles is included in the on line edition and can be read at:

<http://www.iofc.org/publications>

Chapter I

1. Letter from Gerhard Heine to Buchman, 21 October 1921 (Note 12) SF p1-3
2. Letter from Ruth Bennett to Buchman, 3 September 1932 (Note 27) (incomplete photocopy) SF p4
3. Invitation to meeting of the *Gruppenbewegung*, Arnoldsmühle, 27-28 September 1932 (Note 27) SF p5-6

Chapter II

4. Karl Heim: *Eindrücke eines Theologen bei der Gruppentagung in Oxford* (undated but presumably 1936) (Note 12) SF p7-8
5. Invitation to house party in Bad Homburg, 9-15 June 1933 (Note 18) SF p9-10
6. Letter from J. Ferdinand Laun to Group friends, 23 June 1933 (Note 19) SF p11
7. Invitation to *Rüstzeit* (Training gathering) 15-25 September 1933 (Note 20) SF p12
8. Letter from Leopold Klotz to Buchman, 13 September 1933 (Note 22) SF p13
9. *Hessisches Evangelisches Sonntagsblatt* 10 and 17 December 1933. Article by Prof. Schlink: *Von der deutschen Gruppenbewegung* (Note 25) SF p14-15

Chapter III

10. Invitation to Group conference, 6-7 January 1934, Stuttgart (Note 11) SF p16-17
11. *Stuttgarter Neues Tagblatt*, 4 January 1934. Article: *Die Gruppenbewegung kommt nach Stuttgart*. (Note 11) (imperfect photocopy) SF p18

Chapter V

12. Extract from *Der Weg des Protestantismus nach Rom*, published August 1935 as *Geheimsache* by the *Reichsführer SS und Chef des Sicherheitshauptamtes*, showing quotation from Dr Kurt Dietrich Schmidt. (Note 4) SF p19

13. *Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage* (NSDAP confidential bulletin), 26 February 1936: extracts from article: *Die "Gruppenbewegung" in Deutschland*. (Note 5) SF p20-21

14. *Bayerische Politische Polizei, München, 21 Juli 1936*. Order to local authorities to report on the *Oxford-Gruppenbewegung*. (Note 6) SF p22

15. Five pages from the Security manual *Die Oxford- oder Gruppenbewegung*. (Note 7) SF p23-27

16. Three pages from the parish newsletter *Evangelischer Gemeindebote Grötzingen*, January and February 1937. (Note 9) SF p28-30

17. Invitation to a series of talks in the Grötzingen parish. (Note 9) SF p31

18. Transcript: SS Security Service, North-West area, Hamburg, 20 May 1937. Order to local offices to report on Oxford Group Movement activities by 15 June 1937. (Note 15) SF p32

19. SS Security Service, South-West area, 10 February 1938. (Date visible on original, edges missing on this copy.) Secret order to build up *V-Mann* network, break up confessional associations. (Note 17) SF p33-34

20. SS Security Service, South West area: Detailed instructions (referred to in order) for surveillance of the *Oxford-Bewegung*. (Note 17) SF p35

21. Extract from *Jahreslagebericht 1938 des Sicherheitshauptamtes*. (Note 21) SF p36

22. Transcript: Order from the German High Command, 21 October 1942. Members of the *Wehrmacht* may not participate in activities of the Oxford Group movement, the AGS or other aliases. (Note 24) SF p37

23. Order from NSDAP head office, 30 October 1942: The same ban is extended to all members of the Party and its organisations. (Note 25) SF p38

24. Title page and contents pages from Reich Security headquarters report (1942): *Die Oxford-Gruppenbewegung*. (Note 26) SF p39-41

Chapter VI

25. *Mitteilung* (communiqué), Heidelberg, 2 February 1939. Announcing the formation of the *Deutsche Gruppe* (lay work) and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Seelsorge* (church renewal), independent of the international Oxford Group. Signed by leaders of the two groups. (Note 5) SF p42

(Nrs. 26-31 are referred to in Note 17):

26. *Rundbrief* (extract). Letter from Dr Sieger Ernst, 4 July 1942 SF p43-44

27. *Rundbrief* (extract). Letter from Dietrich Goller, September 1942. (Note 18) SF p45-46

28. *Rundbrief* (extract). Letter from Eberhard Stammler, 20 June 1944. SF p47-48

29. *Rundbrief* (extract). Letter from Hermann Sommer, 22 June 1944. SF p49

30. Letter of 22 January 1945, announcing the death of Dietrich Goller. SF p50

31. *Rundbrief* (extract). Letter from Paul Bausch (father-in-law of D. Goller), 26 January 1945. SF p51

32. War Prisoners' Aid (YMCA) Report on STALAG III D, Detachment 517, Germany, by Chr. Christiansen, 6 October 1943. (Note 20) SF p52-53

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33. Letter from Eberhard Stammler (to Theophil Spoerri), 16 June 1945. (Note 3) SF p54

34. Letter from Adolf Scheu to Ursula Bentinck, 23 November 1945. (Note 4) SF p55

35. Letter from Ursula Bentinck to Adolf Scheu, 15 December 1945. (Note 5) SF p56

36. Letter from Sieger Ernst to Erich Peyer, 18 November 1945. (Note 7) SF p57

37. Letter from Leopold Klotz to Adolf Scheu, 11 February 1946. (Note 9) SF p58

38. Letter to friends from Theodor Haug, 16 March 1946. (Note 11) SF p59

39. Letter to friends (same group) from Pastor Arno Ehrhardt, 12 April 1946. (Note 12) SF p60-62
40. Invitation to *Gruppenbewegung / AGS* conference in Bad Boll, 15-20 May 1946. (Note 16) SF p63
41. Letter from Eberhard Stammler to Adolf Scheu, 30 April 1946. (Note 15) SF 64-65
42. Transcript: Article reporting on Easter 1946 conference at Interlaken in *Verordnungs- und Nachrichtenblatt* (official paper of the German Protestant Church), 27 August 1946, by Pastor E. Stammler, Blaubeuren. (Note 17) SF p66-67
43. Letter from Eberhard Stammler to Bishop Wurm, 26 May 1946, reporting on the Bad Boll conference. (Note 18) SF p68-69
44. Letter from Adolf Scheu to Ursula Bentinck, 23 January 1947. (Note 19) SF p70

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