

The Lighter Side of Life with Frank Buchman

Reflections by Jim Baynard-Smith

Some aspects and lessons from the lighter side of life with Frank Buchman, based on my diary notes, which covered a 5-year period 1952/1956, on five continents, as one of several young aides or personal assistants who were asked to help him, in his physical disability following a stroke when his right side had been severely limited. So there were tasks like writing letters, driving the car, packing a suitcase, etc. that required help especially when travelling – and always errands to run. A kind of apprenticeship, you might say, and a steep learning curve.

Many here will not have known him, while some certainly did. So bear with me if some of the terms used are either unfamiliar or too familiar! And when he uses the words “men, mankind,” etc., be assured that he was gender-inclusive at all times!

When attempting to share something like this, there is always the difficulty of appearing to idolise, in a man-centred way. That is definitely not what is intended here, as I simply hope to draw out some of his human traits, his essential spirit and sense of fun and enjoyment of life, with a few themes such as:

1) His care for his staff (or helpers), 2) Vision for us British, 3) Some examples of his personal work with people, 4) His sources and resources when dry and exhausted at the end of a day,.. some favourite verses that were like a wellspring of energy for him. 5) His attitude to Islam, 6) His surprising attitude to some “distinguished important” people. 7) An amusing personal incident in the Red Sea.

As he set out for India in '52 with a varied and relatively inexperienced team of 200 from 25 countries, he called us together: “ You will have mixed impressions and must learn to live by appreciation and not by comparison, and remember that ‘impression minus expression equals depression’, at times. So keep open and people-centred rather than programme centred or focussed on results. You may find you encompass only about a tenth of what cries out to be covered in a day. For tomorrow and its needs I do not pray – grant me strength, Lord, just for today. It will be a hot and exhausting schedule, but we must have more inspiration and less perspiration. From person to person, rather than plan to plan”.

His supreme statesmanship, for that’s what it was, was based on his intense personal work, his gift of perception and discernment of what was going on in the other’s heart and mind. “Never put your hay so high that the ordinary average mule can’t get at it!... keep it simple”.

CARE FOR HIS STAFF (helpers)

He enjoyed life and always wanted to include us on the fun things and big events that came his way. He loved parties, and always wanted you to have a good time. For several weeks in Morocco he was recovering health and mostly in his room, but would send us off to play golf and tennis with the two sons of the local Ruler, who then began to help their father in his key role in the reconciliation process leading to independence. So sport and fun was sometimes very much part of it...for instance, the Spanish

bullfight,, the Coronation in London. Also he was generous in sending me off on a needed period of home Leave, 3 weeks with my parents whom he knew were very ambitious and opposed to what they thought I was doing with my life. He sent them two of his precious tickets to see the Coronation and invited them to spend that night in his London home, which completely won their hearts and later their full support and understanding.

Another example was in the National theatre in Washington where he had been planning for weeks for the Premiere performance of one of our plays, to which Senators, Trade Union leaders, Military chiefs were coming. A young man from Scotland was working backstage getting it ready when someone brought him a message that Frank would like to see him in a small room nearby "I have just had word from Scotland that your father has died." He talked to the young man about his mother and his family, how she would be cared for, and then he took him in his car out to tea, and he began to tell him about the loss of his own parents. They had supper, spent the evening together and Buchman never got to that Premiere performance. Maybe thats what we are looking for – where we put the value of the person before any project or programme on which we are engaged.

Two of us Brits were asked to go out to Sudan with the first copies of the film Freedom. It was David Hind and myself, and we had almost no money. On the eve of departure from London we received this letter from him in Miami, enclosing a small start-up cheque. (quote letter)

...."you are going out to a needy part of the world and will have much to restore to the people you meet. There is no greater destiny for an Englishman in other people's countries than to be used by God; live that way and you will heal the wounds of the nations" Wow, what a sharp challenge as we set out that day!

HIS VISION FOR US BRITISH – "latent powers" -

He once gathered a room full of us and spoke candidly : He felt we were inclined to be man-pleasers and that our activism can be the death of faith. "What you need is that independent touch with God's Holy Spirit whereby you never more need to defer (flatter or suck up) to man, woman or a group. It begins with honesty and would release those latent powers which are often hid under a cover of false reserve, which you call national character! If those forces were released and mobilised it could change the thinking and living of the nation".

Exhausted at the end of a busy day he would sometimes ask us to repeat for him certain favourite verses to replenish his spirit.(and ours!) of which these are sample: 1. I would be true...2.Father forgive...now. 3.All the past...4.Plenteous grace...5Dare to be a Daniel...6.Let all your converse...7.How happy is he ...skill. 8.Teach us to look, in all our ends...

(full quotes available)

The two or three of us on his personal staff at any time were all young and adaptable, as we had to be, because our energy would sometimes flag and there were always needed breaks and periods of leave when the schedule allowed. He was very considerate in this respect . We had to be on standby alert for long periods and we

took it in shifts in the 24 hours. In those days before computers the messages would come flooding in and out worldwide, by phone, by foot, by post, which had to be processed, discussed and acted upon. There were visitors and guests to be received, meals planned and table-plans discussed, programmes drawn up, travel plans and transport checked, meetings and speakers set up. Above all he had care and guidance for individuals and situations globally which had to be conveyed in some form. There were occasions when he might appear somewhat insensitive or demanding, when for instance you would be called in the night to take down some dictation which he might then expect to be typed up and ready for dispatch when he woke in the morning! But that would usually be because he was thinking of the recipients' need or a situation which was time-sensitive. He lived the listening way, relaxed and expectant that we would be sharing his professionalism and concern for the job or person in mind. A big 'expectation'!

Observing him with a visitor or colleague, concentrating on the person and the moment, there was always plenty of time, no clock-watching impatience, undivided attention and such intense interest in 'the other' which blocked out any pre-occupation with what that person might be thinking of him. Empathy. (and that is always a lesson for me). And there was a mischievous quirky humour which refused to allow people to take themselves too seriously. "You'll get more people changed by pulling their legs than by kicking their butts!", he would say. There was one prominent English visitor, quite defensive and verbally full of himself. Frank eventually politely stopped his flow and asked if he had ever seen a certain interesting tombstone inscribed "Here lies the body of Jonathan Day, who died maintaining his right of way. He was right, dead right as he sped along, but he's just as dead as if he was wrong"!

Another rather too serious interviewer asked "What is your routine, Dr. Buchman?" The reply, with a twinkle "Oh, routine is a God worshipped by Englishmen, and it has nothing to do with Guidance." One was always conscious of his alertness to the Inner Voice – the listening quality – like a bird on the bough. On occasions willing to look 'at a loss', rather than always confidently in control.

His attitude to opposition which inevitably came his way: I remember his view that if opposition comes from a predictable quarter and is on the right issue then we can understand and even maybe welcome it. Although once after a hurtful and untrue press story, he shared "That was like a knife in the heart". He felt real pain and sadness where people were thus given a false steer and prevented from knowing the truth. Regarding opposition, there were two metaphors he would quote, - - the dead dog (well, nobody throws stones at a dead dog) and the dead fish (any dead fish can float down the river, it takes a good fighting fish to swim upstream against the tide)

ON PERSONAL WORK:

"Be real and use your sins. Drive your mistakes like a team of horses". Some of the mass evangelism he had seen in China and India was "like hunting rabbits with a brass band" and he used another metaphor: "It's not much use throwing eye medicine out of the window onto the patient below, when what he needs is drop-by-drop in the eye". "Is your life such that people can take you aside and confide things about their own life that they can't or haven't told anyone else, and then together you listen and pray and find God's answer? well is it? If so then you are on the way to real living and true satisfaction." "Dull and 'respectable' Christianity will not do it. But a core of young

people who reflect God in their attractiveness and radiate His love, by the caring and energy of positive purity this is what is needed.” He loved theatre and really enjoyed and deployed the inspirational music, songs and sketches that carried the message, the joy, and the wow factor of change. His views on temptation: 1) Crows are black...etc... 2) A bad head for heights? Don't walk too near the edge 3) If you cut the nerve of your instinctive actions and reactions by obeying the Spirit then you are on track and on the way to real living”, he would declare passionately

At one stage he discerned my own spiritual need quite clearly and tackled it very directly in the following way: After five years of exciting work in exotic places, being included on meetings with Heads of State etc., we returned to the London centre and a lot of relatively boring physical work behind the scenes had to be done,.. cleaning, preparing and serving meals, late night wash-ups, looking after the car etc., and one evening I was asked to take a supper tray up to his bedroom, and I appeared with my apron on, hoping to impress how hard I was working down below. Of course he saw right through that, and said very firmly “Hey, don't ever try that again.” Next morning he sent for me and said, “Now, a complete change for you. How about East London where I would like you to get to know the other side of your own country.” For the next two years I lived in East London homes, based with the 'labour and industry team' visiting the dockers and factory workers and their families,...a real privilege and great lesson, and for that period I was not expected to take part in any occasions in the West End or in the Berkeley Square centre. You see, he sensed that I had got quite a skewed view of what this work was all about, and needed a total redirection to learn how to serve God before man – that was a painful but decisive turning point for me, as my personal faith was tested and grew deeper.

HIS ATTITUDE TO SOME ' IMPORTANT PEOPLE'

He never wanted to meet people simply because they were distinguished. “You've got to learn to read people like a page of print.” I think of three examples of his skill of discernment:

- 1) When his host was keen for him to meet Anthony Eden, who was our PM and responsible for leading us into that disastrous invasion of Egypt and the Suez Canal . “Oh, it is not our job to help lame dogs over styles” he said.
- 2) And again on Alger Hiss, the high- flying advisor to President Roosevelt. Everyone was sucking up to that man for access to the President, and when he passed by us in a hotel lobby Frank remarked “Lets be watchful of that man, there is something quite wrong with him” He had not yet been revealed as a morally corrupt spy for the Soviets, and became a notorious case.
- 3) When we were in Delhi for Christmas, Frank said “Make no move with Nehru (PM at the time) he will come to you at the right time in his own time. We sometimes need intelligent restraint and a nonchalant reserve.” Eventually Nehru came, and sat silently round the Christmas tree in Jaipur House, just listening to songs and absorbing the spirit. Two years later Nehru remarked to the President of India,.....I believe the human mind is hungry for something deeper than material development. I have been trying the daily time of quiet reflection”.

On the other hand in the case of two distinguished men who were suffering in exile, having lost their countries, he gave enormous personal care, respectively, to King Michael of Rumania and the Ethiopian Emperor – Haile Selassie. And, by the

way, this was why we were invited to start up the work in Eritrea 25 years later (still Ethiopia then). It was in recognition of the care and friendship that FB gave the Emperor during his hard times of exile and rejection in London.

F.B. AND ISLAM

An ancestor of his was Rector of Zurich University (when the Turks were turned back in the 16th Century), who declared at that time "We must understand the idea which fired their hearts", - that man was one of the first scholars to translate the Koran, "to put their spiritual riches within the grasp of Europe". Frank was always proud of this and used it often when he received Moslem leaders. There was one memorable dialogue when he spoke these words... "The truths of MRA are readily perceived and acceptable to the far-flung Moslem world, which is a mighty spiritual belt that spans the globe from Morocco to Indonesia. What a call and what a destiny! We will focus our common efforts to answer the divisive materialism we both face." A very senior Imam from Iran was present and replied "Here in Caux is the place where, after many centuries, the hand of Islam stretched out to the West and was grasped in friendship."

THE SURRIENTO. A final story, from the good ship Surriento, on which he was sailing from Italy to Australia with a party of 20.

He gave much time and personal care to his cabin steward and other crew members. The ship was full of Italian workers bound for Queensland as sugar-cane cutters. They were packed on the fore-deck in the daytime, very crowded and sulky. Frank asked the Colwell brothers, a brilliant instrumental trio travelling with us, to sing to them in Italian. The Captain was so grateful that he allowed us to use the ship's sound system whenever we wanted, and the whole spirit of the ship was soon lifted. Later the Captain showed his appreciation by getting us into Perth on time through thick fog to fulfil a prepared schedule there.

It was during this voyage that I shared with him my feelings for a certain young lady who was also in the travelling party on board. Frank took this in thoughtfully, and replied with an encouraging twinkle, "Oh, that sounds FINE,... but best not have any flirting on this trip!. Just now I want you to look after my SENIOR friends!". Among those was Sally's father - Colonel Hore-Ruthven, and Prince Richard of Hesse and others. The Red Sea passage was very hot, so we sometimes slept out on deck. One night I happened to be down alongside the colonel, when he placed his false teeth in a little pot for safe-keeping beside the mattress. Well, a storm got up in the night with lots of rain, and as I awoke in the morning I saw this precious set of teeth floating with the roll of the ship, in the drain at our feet. So I rescued them. It was a few years later that I asked the Colonel for the hand of his daughter in marriage, and he remembered!! (Frank had passed on by then, but I reckon he had a happy hand in it and chuckled!)

Well, I hope all this may have cast a few sidelights on the man who, as founder and initiator of this amazing global work with all its pressures, yet kept a merry heart within him. And so I suppose we all owe him, in different ways,.....I know that the two of us certainly do, and his light-hearted and passionate spirit lives on!

Reflections by Sally Baynard-Smith

I was also fortunate to know Frank, and travelled and worked with him for a while. I wish I had kept more notes as my memory now is not good!

I would just like to add a couple of observations of his very thoughtful care for individuals, through attention to detail.

At Caux he would often go ahead and check the rooms of his guests to see if everything was correct and that the flowers were just right. One day when in America, I even personally received a bunch of red roses. I can't actually remember if or what I had done right or whether I was just in need of cheering up, but I do know he cared. There was a moment on what turned out to be his last departure from Caux on his way to Freudstadt where he died, when some friends came to say 'goodbye' to him, he found the strength to pick up a vase of red roses at the bedside and gave one to each person present.

The other thing - Frank's dinner parties at Caux: They were specially memorable. A long table for 24 in the small dining room. Every meal was an experience – good food, good service and great conversation. He personally checked the seating arrangements in detail to be sure that every person at that long table was sitting near or next to someone they would enjoy meeting. He also reviewed the menus. There were many times when he himself would reflect in peaceful silence while others continued fruitful discussions around him.

The personal challenge he gave me was, after working and travelling with him for some months, he sensed that I had come to rely too much on his approval and direction, and he also instinctively knew that I was suffering from excessive daydreaming about the man I wanted to marry! What I needed, and he helped me to find, was a personal powerful touch with God that did not depend on anyone else in my life – especially himself or my family or a future husband. Around Frank however hard one worked, whether cooking, typing, serving, or whatever, and believe me we did work hard, yet that was never all he expected of you.

His legacy in my experience is that amongst all the great work he did, he expected each of us to develop and help individuals, whether statesmen, royalty, waiter or whoever - or whoever - a teenager or a person in their 70s.