

Buchman — the man with a great vision for South Africa

A hundred years ago this week Dr Frank Buchman, initiator of Moral Re-Armament, was born. WILLIAM J PAGE, secretary/treasurer of MRA in South Africa for the last 10 years, assesses some of the achievements of the man and the movement.

Motivated by a vision he had in 1938 of "morally rearming" the world at a time when nations were arming for war, Dr Frank Buchman set out to convince men and women of the need to be guided by God, not only in personal issues but in every decision affecting the running of society.

That he gained remarkable success in putting this vision into practice — and in passing it on to future generations — is evidenced by the worldwide spread of his work and the events which marked the centenary of his birth.

In Britain, militant trade unionists staged a play about an alternative to class war; in Burma a hundred Buddhist monks assembled for a day of prayer; in Germany the Federal President was patron of an international assembly at Freudenstadt. It was in this typical Black Forest town, walking in the surrounding woods, that Buchman conceived the idea of a

movement for moral and spiritual re-armament. It was here too that he died in 1961 with the knowledge that his work had spread around the world.

At a service of thanksgiving on Sunday in Freudenstadt the Rev Arthur Kanodereka, a leading member of Bishop Muzorewa's United African National Council, was invited to preach on "an idea beyond race conflict." In their invitation the German hosts wrote: "The world is no longer Europe-centred. We need the voice of Africa." Mr Kanodereka was accompanied by Sir Cyril and Lady Hatty. Sir Cyril, now a farmer, was a former Rhodesian finance minister. Mr Kanodereka has himself been at the heart of the negotiations about Rhodesia's future.

These two men are typical of tens of thousands around the world whose lives have been touched either directly or indirectly by Buchman. It was only three years ago that Kanodereka was persuaded by his wife to attend an MRA conference in Salisbury planned by Dr Elliott Gabella, now co-minister of Information, Immigration and Tourism, and Alec Smith, son of the Prime Minister. It was a turning point in his life.

South Africa is represented at Freudenstadt by Mrs Lucy Mvubelo, the black trade unionist, and Mr and Mrs Bremer Hofmeyr of Johannesburg.



Frank Buchman . . . challenged narrow nationalism.

Buchman first visited South Africa in 1929 with a group of students, mostly from Oxford. A Cape Town newspaper dubbed them "the Oxford Group". The name stuck and many of those students continued to work with Buchman for the rest of their lives. Mr Hofmeyr was one of them.

Today hundreds of men and women in many countries are working full-time for the moral rearmament of mankind. Following Buchman's example, they receive no salary but live on faith. MRA has no single world headquarters. Each country decides on the action to be undertaken there and is respon-

sible for its own financing.

Perhaps the best known centre is at Caux, Switzerland. It was here in 1946 that the Swiss people, in gratitude for the suffering they had been spared in two world wars, provided a centre "to heal the hurts and hates of a war-torn world." It is situated high in the Swiss mountains above Montreux and can accommodate 1 200 people.

Many post-war leaders — Adenauer of Germany, Schuman of France and Kishi of Japan to name a few — came to Caux, met Buchman and remained close friends with him until his death. Adenauer acknowledged in a Press interview that MRA had played "an invisible but effective part" in many of the great post-war developments in Europe.

Buchman had a great vision for South Africa. He often said, "It can become the sounding board of an answer for the world." Many black and white South Africans have been to Caux since it was established. The late Dr William Nkomo of Pretoria, who found the Africa National Council too conservative and helped found the ANC Youth League, met at Caux what he called "a greater revolution." Afrikaner and African nationalists found in Buchman a man who challenged them to look beyond narrow nationalisms and take up the task of remaking the world.