

**A.A. and The Five C's
A Root from Soul Surgery**

by Dick B.

What's all this about?

I remember the first time I heard the expression "soul surgery" in an A.A. meeting, I thought the gal who mentioned it was a little daft. "Soul Surgery!" What in the heck was that about? Then I

saw it mentioned in *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*. Then I read the Master's Thesis by A.A.'s and my friend T. Willard Hunter and saw he spoke of Frank Buchman as the "old soul surgeon." Finally, as I dived into Oxford Group research. I saw the surgery come together piece by piece: (1) Sin was the problem. (2) Sin was anything that blocked you from God or other people. (3) To do God's will, you had to cut out sin. (4) The "art" of Soul Surgery, as Buchman called it, was to cut sin out of your life by an incisive "surgical" process that began with surrender of your life to God's care and direction and then utilizing the power of God to cut out sin. (5) You did that, said Buchman and his colleagues, by the Five C's—Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, and Conservation [later called "Continuance"]. (6) The process also involved making amends or restitution, seeking God's guidance, continuing with a daily surrender, passing it on, and living by the spiritual principles of the Bible.

It didn't take me long to see that these were the heart ideas of our Twelve Steps as Bill heard the instructions from Ebby Thacher, Rowland Hazard, Shep Cornell, Victor Kitchen, the Twitchells, Rev. and Mrs. W. Irving Harris, Sam Shoemaker, and Bill's other Oxford Group friends of the mid-1930's.

Your began, of course, with the unmanageable life [Oh, God, manage me because I cannot manage myself]. There was the willingness to believe and take action [John 7:17—Shoemaker's favorite verse]. Then you stood at the Turning Point [a William James expression]. Then you commenced the real surrender and soul surgery process that became our middle steps: (1) A decision. (2) Making the moral test [writing down the Four Absolutes and seeing how your life measured up]. (3) Confessing [letting God and another believer in on your discoveries]. [4] Becoming "Convicted" [an expression Lois Wilson and Anne Smith both used in their journals, and which meant being convinced that you had screwed up in God's eyes and were willing to "hate and forsake" your sins. [5] Conversion [the process prescribed by Jung, detailed by Shoemaker, used by Rowland Hazard and Ebby and Bill—which meant accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour and thereby being transformed into a new person—"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." You will see this verse from 2 Corinthians 5:17 in Oxford Group, Shoemaker, early A.A., Clarence Snyder, and other writings. This was the "changed life" that arose from being born again of the spirit of God. [6] Continuance [the process of surrendering your sins daily, taking a daily inventory, making a daily confession, becoming convicted of newly arising or returning shortcomings, relying on the power of God to change, and then getting back into fellowship with

God through Bible study, prayer, guidance, "passing it on" as Buchman called it, and living by the principles of 1 Corinthians 13 and the Four Absolutes, among others.

The Documentation

How do you verify all this? You can study Harold Begbie's *Life Changers* where Buchman is described as the "soul surgeon" and Begbie narrates the origin of the Five C's. You can read *Soul Surgery*, the important book published by H. A. Walter in 1919 in collaboration with Professor Henry Wright and Dr. Frank Buchman. There Walter explains each of the C's in detail. You can read about them in Sam Shoemaker's first significant *title—Realizing Religion*. And you can see that these techniques did not come out of a vacuum cleaner. Each was based on Biblical authority. Each was carefully explained. And each was later specifically defined by Sam Shoemaker's learned assistant Dr. Olive Jones in her book *Inspired Children*. As with the Four Absolutes, if you want the standards for truth that Shoemaker, Buchman, Dr. Bob and Bill used in the beginning, you turn to the Bible roots themselves. For Confidence, the many verses on witnessing. For Confession, James 5:16. For Conviction, the verses about iniquities prevailing against you. For Conversion, Romans 10:9—confessing Jesus as Lord and believing God raised him from the dead. For Continuance, the host of materials on prayer, Bible study, seeking God's guidance, witnessing, fellowship, and living by the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, and James—as well as others including the Ten Commandments.

The Analysis and Study

I've covered these Five C.'s from different viewpoints in various of my titles. In *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous* (<http://www.dickb.com/Akron.shtml>), I showed some of the uses of the C's. In *Anne Smith's Journal* (<http://www.dickb.com/annesm.shtml>), I quoted from the writing of Dr. Bob's wife where she devotes much time to discussing the Five C's. In *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous* (<http://www.dickb.com/Oxford.shtml>), I detailed the historical roots of the Five C's. In *New Light on Alcoholism* (<http://www.dickb.com/newlight.shtml>), I presented the Rev. Shoemaker discussions of these ideas. In *Good Morning!* (<http://www.dickb.com/goodmorn.shtml>), I provided the Biblical background for Quiet Time, including Bible study, prayer, listening, use of devotionals, journaling, etc. And I certainly did not leave out the necessity for accepting Christ—which so many recent writers have done in their statements about listening to God. This "surrender" concept is important to those who want the accurate picture. If you don't read or learn about Streeter's *The God Who Speaks*, Forde's *The Guidance of God*, Day's *The Principles of the Group*, Shoemaker's *National Awakening and Realizing Religion*, you just won't get it. "Continuance" didn't come out of a vacuum cleaner. Anne Smith was one who commented that turning to the "group" instead of "Christ" is a "funk hole." Good phrase—"funk hole." Shoemaker would, more delicately, have described it as using an "absurd name for God," relying on "self-made religion," and adopting "half-baked prayers." I'd call it trying to listen to a message without having a receiving set. So would Oxford Group writer Hallen Viney in his little pamphlet "How to Begin." Half a loaf is *not* better than none when it comes to following God's directions in the Good Book. Leave out the Good Book, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the teachings of Christ about salvation and the new birth, and you might as well be reading Grimm's Fairy Tales. You just won't get the picture.

Good Hunting

We have rich and easily understood treasures in our spiritual roots. Dr. Bob's library will tell you things about A.A. you have never heard. Anne Smith's Journal will explain things about A.A. you have never understood. The Oxford Group writings will illustrate the "practical program of action" that Joe and Charlie talk about in their Big Book Seminars. The Shoemaker writings will let you see what Bill Wilson was either hearing or reading or both. The Quiet Time books, including the Bible, will inform you of the whole process of "meditation and prayer" that early AAs used—becoming God's kids through the new birth from above, prayer, Bible study, listening, checking, studying "helpful books," and fellowship. It's a package, not a piecemeal offering. And a knowledge of the diversity of books early AAs read will help you recognize the sometimes conflicting materials AAs themselves try to merge into one—the Bible, New Age, New Thought, Roman Catholic expressions, humanist questions and terms, and so on. They just don't fit together. But they are history nonetheless. Good hunting!

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