

# The “Cure of Souls”

## *Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, Conservation*

The beginnings of the method that would prove to work so well on those suffering from disease was “*Life-Changing*,” made possible through the power imparted to one who had been shown a path out of the darkness, in turn helping another kindred soul find their way to faith, onto *The Golden Road of Devotion*.

The 5C’s, which could lead to the cure of souls, arose out of an ever widening experiment of faith. This procedure would be honed and perfected over a period of years by Frank Buchman and his First Century Christian Fellowship. A description of this successful method can be found in H.A. Walter’s manual entitled *Soul Surgery*. We include here the relevant excerpts.

### I. CONFIDENCE

By this we mean coming so wholly into the confidence of the one we seek to help along the avenue of personal friendship that we know his verdict on his own case, see him through his own eyes. The physician of souls must know his patients intimately, or he cannot diagnose their troubles accurately.

And just as the doctor needs to know the whole subject of disease, so the soul doctor must know sin. That does not mean experiential knowledge in either case, but the knowledge which comes through vital healing contact with the real life experiences of men.

Not only must the soul-physician know the soul, in health and disease, the universal human heart, which is found to be so surprisingly alike in all lands when its passions and fears and aspirations are analyzed; he must also know the particular individuals to whom God’s Spirit has directed him to lay siege with all the powers, seen and unseen, that he can muster to his support.

This background of knowledge of men and of sin, coupled with a study of particular individuals, is indispensable, but our diagnosis of any individual case can never be complete until, to our general knowledge of human nature and our specific knowledge, such as any observant detective might acquire, of the man we seek to win, there is added the knowledge that is locked away from the detective which comes through the lips of the patient himself.

We do not think of our family physician as a detective; far less can we thus think of one whom God can use to help us spiritually, but who can only help us adequately and permanently when we are as frank with him as with the physician who nurses our bodies back to health.

*“After a spirit of discernment, the next rarest things in the world  
are diamonds and pearls”*

We must remember, however, that the peril of our becoming the mere detective is always present, and can only be avoided as we realize what almost infinite respect and love and faith, what constant consciousness of the dignity and worth of an immortal human soul, must be his who would serve as a medium to men of the healing power of Christ. Above all, the physician must keep human, sensitive, courteous, remembering his own shortcomings and respecting another man's reticence's. Says Drummond: 'Brusqueness and an impolite familiarity may do very well when dealing with his brains, but without tenderness and courtesy you can only approach his heart to shock it. The whole of etiquette is founded on respect; and by far the highest and tenderest etiquette is the etiquette of soul with soul.

Undoubtedly one reason why men do not confide in us more, even when they are longing for help and real friendship, is because of our own reserve which holds them back. We must be as ready to give as we are to receive, realizing the need of reciprocal confidence. It is generally understood that if the preacher's message is to strike home to the hearts of his hearers, it must proceed from his own heart.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. CONFESSION

This is only the last word of confidence, denoting that the life-changer has won through to the innermost recess of his friend's life, has been privileged to see into the darkened chamber whose door is usually closed and barred, so that he knows his man—far back into the motives and desires that arc the roots of all his actions. Through the avenue of confidence we win a man's friendship. Through confession we may win his soul—for Christ. Even where there is abundance of natural confidence, our work may be a comparative failure, because we have stopped short of the ultimate confession that is needed in order to complete penitence and victory. If, as Drummond says, the furniture of a man's inner life can be totally changed in an hour, it is necessary that light should be let into *all* of the rooms of his soul. The house must be refurnished throughout. Here our analogy of the physician of men's bodies will help us again, though it is only partial since it stops short of the moral issue. The physician's diagnosis cannot be complete until the patient has given him his *entire* confidence, which may involve certain revelations of his past history or present habits which he naturally shrinks from disclosing. However reluctant a man may be at this point, he is seldom resentful, for he realizes how much may be staked upon his making a clean breast.

Every physician knows the importance of getting to the root of the trouble, to avoid the danger of false diagnosis and superficial or harmful treatment, which might even result fatally. Is it any less important for the soul-surgeon with a life-destiny at stake to make certain that he has reached the ultimate seat of the trouble before he seeks to administer the cure? It is well for him to remember that men are living their lives on four levels—spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical—and that the diseased spot, the centre of infection that is spreading in

all directions, may be in any of the four. It may be that pride, dishonesty, selfishness, or impurity, corresponding roughly to the four levels enumerated, is slowly poisoning the entire personality.

Not only is this entire self-disclosure needed in order that the spiritual surgeon may possess all the data for an accurate diagnosis. It is required by an imperious inner law, that will not leave to the sinner a vestige of the old prideful pose behind which he had shielded iniquity. The secret thing must be exposed before it can be dealt with effectually, permitting the repentant sinner to go forward on a new basis of utter honesty, looking the whole world in the face. The clinic of the soul surgeon is, therefore, a very different thing from the confessional of the Roman Catholic priest.

Only God can show a man when and where he must confess; and only He can show the personal worker when he ought to press for a confession. When he is certain that the need for confession exists, the soul surgeon must be lovingly relentless in insisting that the confession be made, when and where it is needed. It is often the kind of drastic, spiritual operation which alone can prevent a superficial repentance and unreal conversion.

To go with a confession of unworthiness is not only consistent, but it tends to disarm criticism....Hence, when approaching him, it is always safest and generally helpful to begin by confessing one's own sense of unworthiness, and then add a confession of faith and hope in Christ as one who is most precious and helpful to you, and therefore, to all who will accept him.

We may be sure, then, that if we are honest and humble and truthful, God will keep us human and sympathetic, and may be able to use our very weaknesses and temptations, over-ruled by His grace, to His everlasting honour and glory.

Finally, *keep every confidence absolutely sacred*. This counsel may seem superfluous because the need of observing it is so obvious; and yet we often do not realize how easily we may let slip a remark about some person into whose confidence we have come, which may reveal to another more than we think. The professional honour of the physician is of the utmost importance here, as every priest is compelled to learn. Unless people come to feel an entire reliance on our discretionary silence they assuredly will not trust us. Many a potential life-changer is severely handicapped because he (or she) has never acquired this great and costly gift of silence. They may need to pray not now for a new heart, but for a new tongue. Weymouth translates a phrase in the seventh verse of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, referring to true love: *'She knows how to be silent*. The moral surgeon must be one who is the complete master of his tongue, a man of studied silences and large reserves of knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

*"A man can have no saving sense of the power of the Living Christ if that power has not saved him from the sin that, in his heart of hearts, he knows lives on, and that is festering and poisoning his spiritual life."*

### 3. CONVICTION

This stage is as closely related to Confession as Confession is to Confidence. It may come simultaneously with, or it may precede, confession, but that confession of sin is not conviction of sin...and no one who knows himself dare tell all he knows.

To the Christian, conviction of sin means more than this: it means a vision...of his own personal guilt..." "It is the recognition that sin...is *striking God in the face*"

"This work of bringing conviction of sin to a human heart no man can accomplish. It is the work of the Spirit of God..."

Is our part, then, to be that of mere passive waiting, when we arrive at the baffling point where there is confession of sin with no deep sense of conviction, leading to a new birth? By no means; there is much that we can do. In the first place, we can try to help the man to see himself as God sees him, to view his own life, as we would have him view sin, *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the standpoint of eternity, as the old divines used to put it.

Then, having known it so far as possible to man, there remains the greatest difficulty of all—to introduce him to himself. You have created a new man for him, and he will not recognize him at first. He can see no resemblance to his ideal self; the new creature is not such a lovely picture as he would like to own: the lines are harshly drawn, and there is little grace and no poetry in it. But he must be told that none of us are what we seem; and if he would deal faithfully with himself, he must try to see himself differently from what he seems. Then he must be led with much delicacy to make a little introspection of himself; and with the mirror lifted to his own soul you read off together some of the indications which are defining themselves vaguely upon its surface.

Often if a man can be led to see the chain he is forging, link by link, in habits he is forming, he may be arrested temporarily and may then be permanently helped.

#### 1. *Sin's Binding Power.*

At the beginning sin always comes disguised as liberty. Its lure is the seductive freedom which it promises from the trammels of conscience and the authority of law. But every man who ever yet accepted sin's offer of a free, unfettered life, discovered the cheat. Free to do the evil thing, to indulge the baser moods—so men begin, but they end *not free to stop*, bound as slaves to the thing that they were free to do.

#### 2. *Sin's Blinding Power.*

Blindness, that is partial and uneven, lands a man in peril whenever he tries to come downstairs or to cross the streets—he steps on the doorstep that is not there and misses the real one. He is involved in false appearances at every turn. And so it is in the moral world—there is one real, however many unrels there are, and to trust to the unreal is to come to grief on the real.

### 3. *Sin's Deadening Power.*

Not only does sin bring confusion to a man's standards of right and wrong, but it brings callousness of heart in the presence of the sin and suffering of others.

### 4. *Sin's Propagating Power.*

Perhaps the most terrible consequence of sin is its deadly power of passing on its taint to others in the family, the community, and even in the next generation. Because of my sin others must suffer and others will be led to sin.

'Sin is essentially selfishness. The definition is more in harmony with the social gospel than with any individualistic type of religion. The sinful mind, then, is the un-social and anti-social mind.

In the next place, besides trying to help a man to see himself and his sins as they are ...we shall be able to help him toward a decision by *the contagious power of our own example*. Indeed, this should be our first contribution.

'Character is caught, not taught'...'Before you can get religion into any one else you must have a contagious case of it yourself.' Health is contagious as well as disease.

To get his confidence, I have been taught that the only way is to take my place as a fellow-sinner. He has to realize that I am seeking his truest well-being, and will not be satisfied till I get to the facts. The interview, of course, must be private, and often the wrestle comes after we get down on our knees together. I have done what I have never done in my life before, and what is foreign to my instincts—put my arm round a man's' shoulder as we prayed together on our knees until the guilt was confessed and the burden lifted. The actual touch sometimes makes all the difference.<sup>40</sup>

## 4. CONVERSION

We need not linger long over this crucial step because it is a transaction that takes place altogether between the soul and God, usually following conviction and a new sense of the need of a Saviour when Christ's salvation is recognized and appropriated. Here we can do little except help to centre on Christ and His redeeming love and power the attention which has been directed toward the sinful self and its needs. If the patient stopped at the last stage he would be like a sick man who mourned the magnitude (real or fancied) of his disease, but saw no hope of healing. He would become a morbid, religious hypochondriac. The burden of his sin must fall from his shoulders..."

Viewed from man's side it is an act of faith in which the sinner deliberately and finally turns from all known sin and identifies himself with Christ, for the future, in a saving, victorious moral unity and fellowship. Viewed from God's side, it is an act of God's free grace by which He is able, through bearing human sin—in suffering redemptive love—to forgive the sinner and so to effect in Christ a reconciliation, a new relationship, in which the barrier of sin no longer remains.

The result of this twofold act is a fundamental change so important that Jesus called it a new birth of the spirit. The modern religious psychologist uses strikingly similar language, calling the change that occurs at conversion 'the formation of a new ego'.

Writes Starbuck: 'It seems that the heightened worth of self and the altruistic impulses in conversion are closely bound up together, and the differences between them lie simply in the different content of consciousness, determined by the direction in which it is turned. The central fact underlying both is the formation of a new ego, a fresh point of reference for mental states.'

In different terms, but with a no less clear recognition of the profound significance of this crisis and transformation, William James begins his chapter on 'Conversion', in the book to which we have already alluded. 'To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified, and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.' Later on he writes concerning the new centring (*sic*) of a man's life interests after conversion. 'It makes a great difference to a man, whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him.

To say that a man is "converted" means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.'

Professor James's colleague at Harvard, the late Professor Royce, referred to this new focal point of a man's interests and activities as a new centre of loyalty to a great cause around which all his energies thenceforth revolve, and which calls forth his highest powers. He writes: 'If you want to find a way of living which surmounts doubt and centralizes your powers, it must be some such way as all the loyal in conversion have trodden since first loyalty was known among men.'

But the question which...psychologists seem unable to answer satisfactorily, namely, what *motive* is adequate to explain the phenomena which they have so painstakingly investigated, bringing to pass this unification of the divided self, this supreme loyalty, is answered by Kenneth Saunders, who has added to a thorough training in psychology a wide experience in dealing with individual souls, illumined by true devotion to Christ. Conversion, in his eyes, is a 'falling in love'. He writes:

'The basis of conversion is the awakening of a new self, and the vital element in this new birth is the dawning of a new affection which henceforth dominates, the heart. Conversion is, in fact, as we have said, a "falling in love" a saying "Yes" to the "Divine Lover" And again he writes: 'It is this

passion for the Unseen and the Eternal which above all else can change the heart, and strengthen the will, and illuminate the mind. Conversion is the birth of Love.”

With the birth of this new affection religion has parted company with philosophy, as Fosdick makes clear in his *Meaning of Faith*: ‘*Religion begins when the God outwardly argued is inwardly experienced.* Religion begins when we cease using the tricky and unstable aeroplane of speculation to seek Him among the clouds, and retreat into the fertile places of our own spirits, where the living water rises, as Jesus said. God outside of us is a theory; God inside of us becomes a fact. God outside of us is an hypothesis; God inside of us is an experience. God the Father is the possibility of salvation; God the Spirit is actuality of life, joy, peace and saving power. God the transcendent may do for philosophy, but he is not enough for religion.’

Similarly, Professor Coe, of Union Seminary, writes of the new sense of reality affected by conversion, in the most recent contribution to the subject of the psychology of religion.

‘Granted that his training has prepared him for the crisis, and that conversion puts him under the control of existing social standards and ideas of God, the fact remains that conversion makes these things real to the convert. Heretofore he has “knowledge about” them; now he has “acquaintance with” them. The world or God has meaning *for him*, and makes response *now*. Here is no mere repetition of the past, for the individual is a new and unique one, and this experience as *his* is as fresh as the creation morn itself.’

All these facts relating to the *rationale* of conversion it is well for the personal worker to know, but all that the sinner needs is to know how hateful is his sin in the eyes of his Heavenly Father, and that if he turns his face resolutely toward God in Christ, He is able to cleanse him from sin and to empower him for a new life of righteousness and victory. Books of religious psychology, like those above referred to, and books narrating cases of actual transformations, like C. G. Finney’s *Memoirs* and S. H. Hadley’s *Down in Water Street*, in the United States, and the writings of Harold Begbie and General Booth in England, abound in illustrations of conversions where there was little or nothing of the theological belief, but only a loathing of sin, the confession of utter helplessness unless through the aid of some higher Helper, then a hand stretched upward and the consciousness that Another had grasped the hand, and that thereafter freedom and strength and peace had come.

Only those who have been convicted of sin and have seen themselves as God sees them, under similar circumstances, can understand what one feels, when a great and unbearable burden is rolled away from one’s heart.

“*That which comes from the heart reaches the heart*”

“...Dr. Buchman puts the matter in the simplest terms, only three essential factors are involved in conversion – *Sin, Jesus Christ, and (the result) a Miracle.* Conviction of sin is a matter of the sinner’s heart. Conversion is a matter both of the heart and the will, and if there is anything we can do to assist him to make the great venture of faith, once he has realized his sins at the foot of the Cross and expressed the desire to be cleansed, it is, first of all, to give him autobiographical writings like those of St. Augustine, Brother Lawrence, and Tolstoy, and illustrations of others who have so ventured with momentous results; and, secondly, to help him toward greater decision of character through the reading of such pamphlets as Foster’s *Decision of Character*; King’s *Fight for Character*; Mott and Eddy’s *Constructive Suggestions for Character Building*; and the chapter on ‘Decision’ in Speer’s *Things that Make a Man*.\*<sup>41</sup>

## 5. CONSERVATION

Here is where, perhaps, the greatest service can and should be done by the personal worker, and where he most frequently and lamentably falls down. The new convert should receive the most sedulous attention in the days following his conversion, if he is not to prove one more of the sad examples of backsliders (far less numerous than many believe and usually the result of superficial evangelism or imperfect conservation) who are pointed out in deprecation of evangelistic efforts. It is the testimony of many that just after we have taken some forward step, involving the attempt to live our lives thenceforth on a higher moral level, the Tempter is most powerful and insidious in his efforts to drag us down.

To quote Mr. Saunders: ‘The convert knows, perhaps, deeper and more intense joy than the man who has always been religious, but he knows also more profound grief, and a spiritual “dryness” which is the peculiar trial of those who have come through great religious experiences. God seems for a time to withdraw His Presence. And there are very often desperate struggles in store for the convert; “those haunting reminiscences of a polluted heart—those frailties, those inconsistencies, to which the habits of the past have made him liable.”

Dr. Fosdick, in his study of ‘Faith and Moods’, in *The Meaning of Faith*, makes the point that the acceptance of the Christian faith means the determination to believe the testimony, and live in the spirit of our best hours instead of allowing lower and weaker moods to dominate our spirits. It is for us to help the new convert to see how he can keep habitually in the higher attitudes of faith, resisting the tendency to give way to unworthy moods— and how, when dark times of trouble descend upon him, it is true that

*“The task in hours of insight willed  
Must be through hours of gloom fulfilled”*

\* Upon hearing of Bill’s “white light” experience, Ebby left Bill and returned soon after with two books, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James and *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. The method of assistance outlined here in *Soul Surgery* was followed by Ebby as directed by the New York Oxford Group.<sup>42</sup>



This will only be possible as he learns the need, for his spiritual as well as for his physical sustenance and development, of receiving continuously air, food, and exercise.

We shall keep at our best, as President King, of Oberlin, says, only as we persistently 'stay in the presence of the best'—that is, supremely, of Christ. Hence the importance of prayer as a daily exercise and a life-long study. In prayer we breathe the tonic air of faith that defies every temptation to doubt and fear. In prayer our souls become assured that while we may fail God, He never fails us, that though we may at times feel no solacing sense of His nearness, it does not indicate that He has drawn away from us, but rather, perhaps, that we have begun to live by feeling rather than by faith. He will be your leader, He will be your guide, He will be your highest ideal. He has asked you for your life, and He will make you, just as you are, at this moment His—entirely His."

First of all, then, we must guide the convert into a real and continuous and developing prayer life.

In the second place, the new convert must learn to feed his soul, day by day, on God's living Word revealed in the Scriptures; and here, too, he cannot be left to himself, but needs, and will usually welcome, friendly guidance...We must be ready with practical suggestions for progressive Bible study, adapted to the mind and temper of the one for whose building up in the faith we are responsible in God's eyes.

In the third place—and here most of all we are prone to fail in this work of individual conservation—following conversion the new convert must be set to work to win others. This will be both the test of the reality of his new experience and one of the surest safeguards against its soon becoming unreal. He should understand from the first that his prayer and Bible study will ultimately become burdensome, if not actually distasteful, if he regards them only as a means to his own spiritual development, and not also as fundamentally and inevitably the means to his successfully serving and winning others. The central pivot around which his life revolves must now be not self but others, not serving his own interests or development but serving and winning others, so that the major emphasis should be placed on the third requirement, *exercise*, thought of, however, not as 'setting up exercises' but as 'wearing out shoe leather' in the interests of God's Kingdom. Let the new convert understand at the outset, what many of us have had to learn after many years, at painful cost, that the only way to live a normal, buoyant, developing Christian life is to be constantly a missionary of Christ to others.

This brings us face to face with the fact that if we would teach *persistence* to the convert we must ourselves have learned its value and attained to its practice. It is one of the first principles of personal evangelism, not only in the period of conservation but at every other stage of our work.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>38</sup> *Soul Surgery*, H. A. Walter – 1919 pp. 15 – 19

<sup>39</sup> *Soul Surgery*, pp. 21 – 30

<sup>40</sup> *Soul Surgery*, pp. 32 – 39

<sup>41</sup> *Soul Surgery*, pp. 39 – 43

<sup>42</sup> “Tom (Powers) said that after Bill had his famous spiritual experience in Towns that Ebby went back to the Oxford Group telling them about what happened to Bill and asked what he should do to help him. They said bring him 2 books. Many people in AA know that this is when the book *The Varieties of a Religious Experience* hit the scene, but many people don't know that Ebby also brought Bill another book: *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.” See AAHL Message # 5955

<sup>43</sup> *Soul Surgery*, pp. 44 – 46