

Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)



by David Powlison

I. The Counseling Revolution

The epoch of a great revolution is never the eligible time to write its history. Those memorable recitals to which the opinions of ages should remain attached cannot obtain confidence or present a character of impartiality if they are undertaken in the midst of animosities and during the tumult of passions; and yet, were there to exist a man so detached from the spirit of party or so master of himself as calmly to describe the storms of which he has been a witness, we should be dissatisfied with his tranquility and should apprehend that he had not a soul capable of preserving the impressions of all the sentiments we might be desirous of receiving.¹

We live in the epoch of a great revolution.

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Consider that in 1955, believing Protestants had *no* comprehensive models of counseling. Theological conservatives had *no* educational programs to train pastors or other Christian workers in the face-to-face cure of souls. Christian bookstores contained *no* books on the problems of everyday life and the processes of change. *No* evangelical, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, or reformed leaders were known for their skill in probing, changing, and reconciling troubled and troublesome people. Practical theology concerned itself with preaching, missions, education, evangelism, liturgical activity, church government, and administration. Good things all! Discipleship programs taught doctrine, morals, and devotional activity. Good things all! But what was the quality of corporate wisdom in comprehending the dynamics of the human heart? How rich was the human self-understanding? How well did the church analyze the destructive and practice the constructive in human relationships? What does change look like, think like, feel like, act like, talk like? How does change proceed? What sustains sufferers and converts sinners?

No systematic analysis of care for the soul grappled with the particulars of how souls

needed curing and might find it. In 1955, the churches that took God at His word had little to say about “counseling.” The last significant counseling work from a believing theological standpoint predated the Civil War. Without a well-developed practical theology of change and counseling—and without the institutions, books, and practitioners to embody and communicate such—churchly resources were reduced to religious forms in abstraction from systematic understanding: a prayer, a Bible verse, a worship service, a banished demon, a creed, a testimony, an exhortation, a commitment. Should these fail, there were no options but referral out to the secular experts.²

The counseling vacuum among evangelicals was inversely proportional to the counseling plenum in the surrounding culture. The twentieth century had witnessed the birth and proliferation of the modern secular psychologies, and of those mental health professions that mediated such theories into lives. Secular institutions teamed with the mainline churches, the latter being part product and part co-author of the emerging therapeutic culture. Modern forms of self-knowledge were psychological, or social, or somatic, or psycho-social, or psycho-somatic, or psycho-social-somatic, per se. In other words, intrapsychic, interpersonal, and bodily phenomena pointedly did not operate vis-à-vis God. Religious beliefs, practices, and experiences might be privately engaging and meaningful, but the God of the Bible was insignificant for objectively explaining and addressing the human condition.

We humans were not made and sustained; our diverse sufferings did not exist in a context of meaningfulness; we were not accountable, observed and evaluated; we were not condemned; we were not pursued and redeemed. “God” was an objectively weightless concept with respect to the human psyche; the weighty things in our souls had to do with other things. Evangelicals might object to the secularity of the modern and modernist world view, but they were not doing more than a rudimentary job in offering an alternate analysis and cure. Knowledge and skill to conduct patient, probing, remedial conversation became the province of secularists and liberals.³

The Revolutionaries

But a revolution has occurred in the past fifty years, a counseling revolution. Evangelicals have begun to counsel, to write about counseling, and to educate counselors. They have written bestsellers and have founded thriving graduate programs and counseling centers. Everyone agrees that a serious defect needs serious repair: confused, suffering, and wayward people need more than a verse and a prayer. But as in most revolutions, those who agree heartily about the need for change disagree profoundly about the changes needed. Countless gradations and variations exist, but in broad strokes there have been two parties within this counseling revolution.

One group has developed in the footsteps of Clyde Narramore and along the lines of Fuller Seminary’s Graduate School of Psychology. Its core intellectual agenda can be characterized this way: wise counseling requires that evangelical faith be carefully integrated with the theories, therapeutic methods, and professional roles of the modern psychologies. An ‘evangelical psychotherapy’ movement has arisen to tackle this intellectual and educational task, and has set out to address the counseling needs of the church with the specific goods of psychology.

The other group has developed in the footsteps of Jay Adams and along the lines of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation’s pastoral training at Westminster Seminary. The core intellectual agenda can be characterized this way: wise counseling recognizes that the Bible mandates development of a comprehensive pastoral theology distinctly different from prevailing cultural paradigms. A ‘biblical counseling’ movement has arisen to tackle this intellectual and educational task, and has set out to address the counseling needs of the church with the specific goods of Scripture.⁴

During the tumult of passions, serene impartiality is impossible, even suspect and undesirable. How can a thoughtful person remain indifferent when the issues at stake are so momentous? The well-being, self-understanding, and practice of real people, the people of God, both corporate and individual, are at stake. Our ability to love and address

those outside of Christ is at stake. God's glory in this therapeutic culture is at stake. How can we know and do what we need to know and do in order to cure souls?

This essay is no attempt at dispassionate history. My commitments and convictions will be obvious in what follows. I believe that the church needs above all else a comprehensive and case-wise pastoral theology, something worthy of the name *systematic biblical counseling*. But I am no triumphalist. I am as interested in the remaining agenda as in the extant accomplishments of those whom I think are fundamentally on the right track. And I am no sectarian. I am keenly sympathetic to many of the concerns and intentions that energize those with whom I must fundamentally disagree. No one in the body of Christ will "arrive" until we all arrive. And arriving is not just a matter of asserting the bare truth of a systematic model. Truth, love, skill, and institutional structure must all grow to the same stature. That is our Lord's call to His children in Ephesians 4.

Finding a Workable Taxonomy

Christ's call to walk and talk worthy of His calling creates an immediate problem of terminology for all of us. Participants in the counseling revolution sharply disagree about how things ought to be run. This is not merely bickering between ideologues over inconsequential matters. None of us should be indifferent to the existence of vastly disparate conceptions of the faith and practice of Christ's people. People have staked education, career, reputation, institutions, and ministries on significantly differing points of view about what is true and necessary for the health of the church. But how do we talk about the conflict constructively? How can we fairly characterize the different "sides" in the current "counseling wars," so that matters are clarified not muddied? How do we speak the truth in love in pursuit of a just peace, rather than exacerbating quarrels and perpetuating self-serving caricatures? At the most basic level, what terminology best describes the parties, so that the issues at stake can be seen and discussed without prejudice?

Psychology bashers versus psychoheretics? Unfortunately, when so-called psychology bashers and so-called psychoheretics square off,

it produces the edification effect of loud static in the public address system. Sneering obliterates all discussion of profound issues. God's children are rarely edified by scathing words. When we look at each group through the worst of the other's language, both groups appear shamefully disreputable. Reckless and factious words fail the test of constructive, gracious, gentle speech to which God binds us and by which He will examine us (Eph. 4:15, 29; 2 Tim. 2:24f; Matt. 7:1-5). In fact, there are some true bashers and heretics around. But provocative language and sweeping generalizations usually serve to provoke, nurture, and justify the worst tendencies in human nature, not the further outworking of our redemption. It is always good policy to interact with the best representatives of a point of view, not the worst representatives. We feel self-righteous when we pose and posture next to our caricatures. We must listen, think, and argue well when we engage a thoughtful disputant.⁵

I suspect that most of us are brothers and sisters to be dealt with gently. We ought to sympathetically appreciate the other's honest description of shaping experiences. We ought to acknowledge the valid insights and concerns, even if we end up disagreeing with the conclusions. All of us are more or less ignorant and wayward, beset with weakness (Heb. 5:2). Many well-intended believers on both sides of the debate are more clumsy than perverse. Our sin makes us clumsy thinkers, clumsy practitioners, clumsy theologians, clumsy exegetes, clumsy cultural analysts. We all get pigheaded, shortsighted, particularly stuck in those forms of error that contain partial truths. Yes, all error has a perverse logic, but we may hold to errors and semi-truths without being wholly perverted people. May God make us deft—together.

Here is the inescapable fact that we have in common: throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the Bible-believing church has been woefully weak in the cure and care of souls. And Christ would have us do some serious maturing in individual and collective wisdom. Maturing is hard, slow work, made the slower because the issues at stake are momentous. No doubt, the sower of discord and falsehood is always active in hindering the

church from growing up toward real wisdom regarding both the ailment and the redemption of our humanity. But the Sower of love and truth seems willing to work amid the tumult of passions over the long haul: over decades, lifetimes, and centuries. Biblical wisdom does not spring full-grown from the head of Zeus. It is born small, and grows through many trials and missteps, by the sustaining grace of God, towards the fullness of the mind of Christ.

So-called psychology bashers—those who believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for generating a comprehensive counseling model—do fundamentally disbelieve the modern psychologies, taking them to be systematic counterfeits and pretenders in the final analysis. They believe that the Bible fiercely resists syncretism. But they still claim that something can be learned from the psychologies: wrong does not mean stupid; error must borrow elements of truth to be plausible; God often allows observant and persuasive error to expose lacunae, crudities, and distortions in His own children's thinking and practice. That Scripture is 'sufficient' to transform us never means that the Bible is 'exhaustive'. It does not mean that the Bible's message for us is accessed and communicated only through proof-texts. All application of Scripture demands that we engage in a theological and interpretive task. Good, true, faithful theology is closely grounded in the text, but often says a somewhat different thing than the text says, because it speaks to a different set of questions.⁷ Face-to-face ministry must use the Bible in the same way; ministry is not simply a matter of inserting proof-texts into conversation. All ministry demands sensitivity and flexibility to the varying conditions of those to whom one ministers.⁸

Though one might find some exceptions, most supposed psychology bashers are not anti-counseling. Most work to develop and practice loving and effective cure of souls as the alternative to secular or quasi-secular psychotherapy. The debate is not whether or not to counsel; the debate is about what sort of counsel to believe, what sort of counseling to do, what sort of cure to offer.

So-called psychoheretics—those who believe that Scripture does not intend to be sufficient for generating a comprehensive

counseling model—do see an essential role for the secular psychologies. Psychological disciplines offer some sort of necessary truth; psychological professions offer some sort of necessary and valid practice. But the so-called psychoheretics still claim that the Bible must provide the final authority. That Scripture is not sufficient does not mean the Bible is irrelevant or that it ought to be subordinated to secular psychologies, but that the Bible itself mandates looking and learning from outside. The Bible itself resists biblicism.

Though one can find exceptions, most supposed psychoheretics are not out to swallow the camel of secularity and foist it on an unsuspecting church. Many work to critique the secularity of the modern psychologies and to screen out what seems to fail the test of Scripture. Why do they become psychologists? Glaring defects in the church's current understanding and practice are the main reason they expend time and effort to do hard study of human beings. In this culture, that often means to study psychology. Where else is one permitted and disciplined to gaze steadily into the complications and miseries of the soul? Where else do defective relationships come under scrutiny? Where else can one be taught to probe the details of life lived, and then to offer timely and patient aid? Theological and pastoral training typically does not look closely enough or get hands-on enough to engender case wisdom and a patiently probing counseling process.⁹

Theologizers versus psychologizers? Polemical language tends to subvert understanding and godliness by superheating the conversation. Perhaps we could describe the 'bashers' and 'heretics' more calmly by alluding to the practice of different intellectual disciplines, as theologizers and psychologizers respectively. These terms, too, quickly become misleading. In reality, both parties claim to be in the same business. Both claim to think theologically about psychological matters, and both claim to do Christian ministry with those who experience problems in living.

Those who pursue a systematic pastoral theology specifically discuss psychological experience through the lens of explicitly biblical categories. They seek to interpret the case-study

realities of life lived. Their view of theology is that it is about the interior and horizontal dimensions no less than the vertical. Good theology interprets psychological phenomenon and good pastoral practice addresses psychological and interpersonal problems. As a God-centered theory of human personality, biblical counseling claims to offer a psychology that systematically differs from the various secular personality theories. As a gospel-centered approach to helping people, biblical counseling claims to offer a psychotherapy qualitatively different from the various secular psychotherapies.

On the other side, those who pursue an integration of or dialogue between Christianity and psychological theory specifically claim to do theology. They seek to unfold the implications of the doctrine of God's common grace with respect to intrapersonal and interpersonal problems, and regarding the methods of skillfully addressing such problems. There is solid theological rationale for viewing secular disciplines as fit subjects for hard study. The stuff of psychology does not necessarily wholly overlap the Bible. They frequently view their counseling practice as a communication of God's grace to people whose church experiences have often fed legalism and dishonesty. Where the church has been brusque, they aim to offer an incarnation of grace, a generous and accepting attitude in which trust and honest conversation can flourish. In sum, both parties claim to be both theological and psychological.

Pastoral counselors versus psychologists? How about using occupational categories to characterize the contemporary debate? Is this simply a turf war between pastors and psychotherapists? It is clear that the pastoral counselors strongly value explicit ministry of the Word and see the crucial significance of the local church where God works through both authoritative and mutual counsel. They think that counseling theories and practices should operate under theological accountability. It is equally clear that the psychologists strongly value state licensure for professional identity, and because it makes possible insurance reimbursements as a fiscal underpinning. They resist coming under ecclesiastical jurisdiction for their ideas and their practice. But one cannot

draw lines in the sand regarding occupational title or the educational background that qualifies for an occupation.

On one side, the "biblical counseling" group includes many people with training, experience, and credentials in social science and mental health fields: psychologists of various sorts, psychiatrists, neurologists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, M.D. general practitioners, graduate students, former psychology majors.¹⁰ They know the psychologies from the inside. They usually appreciate the observational detail and credit the intention to be helpful. But they think the theories pervasively flawed and the therapies finally impotent. The Bible and theology probe the human heart far more graphically, make better sense of life lived, and bring the living power of Christ to turn lives upside down.

On the other side, the "psychologist" group includes many people with theological training, experience, and credentials: pastors, elders, deacons, seminary graduates and professors, lay counselors, graduates of pastoral counseling programs, members in good standing of local churches. They know and believe their Christian faith from the inside. But they find the operative faith and practice of their ecclesiastical training and setting all too often ignorant, peremptory, and pat. Psychology, despite obviously bumbling the closer it gets to ultimate issues, validates neglected dimensions of human experience, prompts intellectual curiosity, and encourages the patient pursuit of both self-knowledge and case wisdom. In sum, neither mental health nor ecclesiastical experience offers a predictable guide to the issues at stake.

Biblical counseling or Christian counseling? What about the names the groups have largely adopted as self-designations: biblical counseling (as in *Journal of Biblical Counseling*) and Christian counseling (as in American Association of Christian Counselors [AACCC])? Each group finds the other's self-designation objectionable. The label *biblical counseling* seems to presume that whatever advocates believe and do comes with the full authority of the Bible, further implying that anything else is unbiblical. What if what they teach and do falls short of offering wise biblical help for strugglers?

Similarly, the label *Christian counseling* seems to presume that what advocates believe and do is distinctly Christian. What if what they teach and do is at odds with their professed faith? In both cases, the reality beneath the label is a complex maybe/maybe-not. The terms *biblical* and *Christian* are precisely what is at stake and up for debate in the present tumults.

Here is further dilemma in coming up with accurate terminology. In the landscape of Christians-who-counsel, it has become harder to keep the parties straight because they seem to have moved closer together in the past twenty years. There have been significant developments on both sides.

The psychologists became more explicitly biblically-oriented in the 1990s than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Larry Crabb and the AACC are only the most visible exemplars of how the *evangelical* part of the evangelical psychotherapist's dual identity is no longer an embarrassment to professional identity. A more holistic view of human nature has emerged among many evangelical psychotherapists. Some still attempt to sector off "spiritual" problems from "psychological, emotional, relational, mental" problems, attempting to validate their professional existence and activity as something qualitatively different from cure of souls. But many at the leading edge of the profession see that the divide between "spiritual" and "psychological" problems is artificial and problematic. Advocates have been won to John Calvin's foundational insight that true self-knowledge and knowledge of the true God are interchangeable perspectives. This more holistic gaze has affected professional self-image. Increasingly, Christian counselors seek to express an explicitly Christian identity by defining their work of counseling as care for the soul, or eldering, or ministry for Christ that must be more closely linked to the church. The psychotherapists have come to sound more like the pastoral counselors and pastoral theologians who followed Jay Adams.

Meanwhile, the "biblical counselors" have also changed. Their writing now evidences a broader scope of concerns and concepts than they had in the early 1970s. They have supplemented, developed, or even altered aspects of Adams's initial model. They are

paying a great deal of attention to [1] intrapersonal dynamics such as motivation theory, self-evaluation, belief, and self-deception; [2] the impact of and response to varieties of suffering and socialization; [3] the compassionate, flexible, probing, and patient aspects of counseling methodology; [4] nuances in the interaction between Christian faith and the modern psychologies; [5] the practicalities of marital and familial communication; [6] the cause and treatment of so-called addictions.¹¹ The model of biblical counseling is now more detailed and comprehensive about any number of "psychological" matters.

So, the psychologists seem more biblical and the biblical counselors seem more psychological. What does this apparent convergence mean? Are the parties heading toward a rapprochement or towards a more profound collision? Or are they moving toward an as yet unimagined realignment?

I believe that the two visions are still fundamentally incompatible. But I also believe that our current situation is ripe for a fresh articulation of the issues. Half truths and good intentions—all too easily corrupted by posturing, tunnel vision, and parochial ignorance—can appear in a very different light when they are reframed within a more comprehensive call and truth. I hope that we, the body of Christ, can identify where ideas and practices are fundamentally incongruent. Such incongruities ought to be openly stated and debated, so that the church can evaluate positions and choose wisely. We may also find places of unexpected agreement that bid us to cross or realign current party lines. Some apparent differences may prove to be either the same thing stated in different words or complementary things that can be accounted for within a common model. After all, we serve the living God who masters history to His glory and our welfare. He will not leave His children bedraggled by ignorance, incompetence, quarrels, and confusion. In the rough-and-tumble of our gropings after Him, in our uneven hearing and partial seeing, He manages to triumph in and through us.

So what taxonomy should we use? I suggest that we use language that is minimally prejudicial and maximally descriptive of the

sticking point. The core question turns on the intent and scope of Scripture, the nature of pastoral theological work, and the degree of significance attached to what the church can appropriate from the world. In short, is the engine of counseling theory and practice external or internal to the Faith?

VITEx or COMPIN?

I will speak of two fundamentally different tendencies, two incompatible organizing centers, using the acronyms VITEx and COMPIN. Acronyms are dull? All the better! Though these sound like creatures from *Jurassic Park*, I hope the very oddity and connotative flatness of the terms will aid discussion by damping the excesses of passion.

VITEx believes that secular psychologies must make a *VITal EXternal contribution* in the construction of a Christian model of personality, change, and counseling. While biblical faith gives us certain controls to evaluate outside input, it does not give enough detail to enable us to constitute and develop a model. The operating premise of VITEx, whether explicit or implicit, is that Christian truths must be 'integrated' with the observations, personality theories, psychotherapies, and professional roles of the mental health world. Modern psychologies are the engine producing insights, theories, and practices. In an essential way, the counseling that Christians do will orient to and take its cues from outside sources. The fascinating, exciting, relevant, and important developments are taking place external to Christian faith and practice. Biblical truth is static in comparison.

In contrast, COMPIN believes that the Christian faith contains *COMPrehensive INternal resources* to enable us to construct a Christian model of personality, change, and counseling. While the modern psychologies will stimulate and inform, they do not play a constitutive role in building a robust model. The operating premise of COMPIN is that the Faith's psychology offers a take on the human condition essentially different from any of the other contemporary psychologies. The living Christ working in His people through His Word is the engine producing depth of insight, accurate theory, and effective practice. The

counseling that Christians do must orient to and take its cues from our own source. Practical theological development is the cutting edge. The modern psychologies and psychotherapies are relatively dull, shallow, and misleading in comparison.¹²

The three sections that follow pose questions whose answers over the coming years will define the intellectual, methodological, and institutional characteristics of evangelical counseling. Those characteristics will ultimately be shaped by either a VITEx or a COMPIN vision. We will examine three essential questions, around which a host of subquestions cluster. The first has to do with epistemology. What knowledge most matters for understanding and helping people? The second has to do with motivation theory. How do we fundamentally understand people? The third has to do with social structure. How should we educate, license, and oversee counselors in order to deliver the goods?

¹ William Duane, an American historian writing in 1798 about the French Revolution even as events continued to unfold, cited in Richard N. Rosenfeld, *American Aurora* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 11.

² I am not implying that the living God does not sustain and transform His chosen people through times when our ability to systematically articulate His ways is weak. The grassroots wisdom of godly people often far exceeds what is written in both secular and Christian counseling books. The Holy Spirit often works despite our ignorance in articulating His ways. Plain folks, without a whisper of counseling training, will often size up others insightfully, and communicate to them the honey and light of timely biblical wisdom. They will read a best-selling counseling book and comment, "I liked xyz, but abc didn't seem right to me." Their discernment—not analysis, but instinct—is frequently profound. God does sustain His own, but where our articulated understanding of truth is defective we become vulnerable to deviant and distracting theories, for which we pay a price in confusion and harm. A well-systematized biblical counseling model will not transcend grass-roots wisdom, but will express, encourage, and defend such wisdom.

³ For a description of how liberal-psychological pastoral theology eclipsed conservative-soteriological pastoral theology, see E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983). For a description of how secular mental health professions subordinated mainline pastoral care, see Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁴ Brief descriptions of this revolution among evangelical believers—from varying points of view—can be found in Jay Adams, *Lectures on Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, 1976, 1977); Donald Capps, “The Bible’s Role in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Four Basic Principles,” *Journal of Theology and Christianity*, 3:4 (1984), 5-15; George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987). An extended description of the issues raised in the last two paragraphs is found in my “Competent to Counsel?: The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996, 2nd Edition, 2006).

⁵ Eric L. Johnson, “A Place for the Bible in Psychological Science,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 20 (1992), 346-355. Johnson comments insightfully on the communication breakdown caused by posturing, polemics, and disparaging labels. Of course, we must generalize if we are to speak in any context wider than private conversation, and I will generalize in this essay. But I hope to do so in a constructive way.

⁶ ‘Cure of souls’ refers to the transformation of individual lives and communal life into the image of Jesus Christ. ‘Care of souls’ refers to the pastoral processes aiming to bring about such changes in others. The former is the goal, the latter is the method. As is always so in the dynamic of the gospel, those being cured learn how to care.

⁷ A good summary of the difference between biblicism and *sola scriptura* can be found on pages 272-280 of John Frame’s “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism: Reflections on *Sola Scriptura* and History in Theological Method,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 59 (1997), 269-291.

⁸ At the most rudimentary level, the Bible itself teaches us that ministry does not always lead out with a Bible verse. We read in Acts 13:14-41 that Paul cited and applied specific “chapter and verse” with a timeliness that created an uproar of interest in his hearers. In Acts 14:8-18 we see that he gained entry by a loving action, vigorously identified with his hearers, and then discussed everyday human experiences, weaving in biblical truth without specific citation. In Acts 17:16-34 we read that Paul began by talking about some observations that had given him pause. He went on to cite their own poets and philosophers—the psychologists and psychotherapists of that day—co-opting their words to proclaim Jesus, to call to a change of mind, and to awaken lively concern about the day when our lives will be weighed in the balance. How did Paul know the difference? Case-wisdom. He had come to know people through his diverse experience in applying the singular message of the Bible.

⁹ The introductory chapters of Stanton L. Jones and Richard Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991) and of David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003) capture the differences in emphasis from the insufficiency and sufficiency points of view, respectively.

¹⁰ I am among this number. I majored in psychology as an undergraduate, then worked for four years in psychiatric

hospitals, intending to go on to graduate school in clinical psychology. My conversion to Christ rerouted me to seminary.

¹¹ Articles, reviews, and bibliographies in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* provide an entry point into the literature. In my view, one regrettable aspect of the debates in print is that evangelical psychologists continue to cite only Jay Adams’s earliest works, *Competent to Counsel* (1970) and *Christian Counselor’s Manual* (1973), seemingly unaware of thirty-five years of development. One introduction to further developments is David Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 9:3 (1988), 53-78.

¹² Though a sharp social divide has existed between integrationist psychologists (approximately VITEX) and biblical counselors (approximately COMPIN), my definition muddies that divide a bit, adding some immediate twists and nuances. For example, coming out of Wheaton College, Stan Jones’s and Richard Butman’s *Modern Psychotherapies* is a classic articulation of VITEX, but Robert Roberts’s *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) comes within a millimeter of COMPIN. Intending to “mitigate the Christian captivity to psychology,” Roberts says that “A Christian psychology would not *have* to be pursued in dialogue with secular psychology” (p. 14).

Clearer categories help focus discussion, but never solve all vexed questions. For example, the adjectives *vital* and *comprehensive* contain ambiguities. The concrete implications need to be fleshed out.

Furthermore, clearer definition does not answer whether the actual products (theory and practice) live up to a person’s stated commitments. For example, most COMPIN advocates, myself included, disagree with the motivation theories and views of personhood proposed by Larry Crabb and John Eldredge. Crabb and Eldredge voice COMPIN commitments, as I do. But what any of us thinks the Bible teaches is fair game for evaluation. Part III of this extended article bears on the particular question of motivation theory.

As a similar example from the VITEX position, Jones and Butman have said that “too much of what passes for integration today is anemic theologically or biblically and tends to be little more than a spiritualized rehashing of mainstream mental health thought” (p. 415; cf. pp. 29ff). They are articulately critical of the many lightly Christianized pop psychologies.

II. Epistemological Priorities

What knowledge really matters for understanding and helping people? Evangelical counselors have apparently been deeply divided over formal epistemology. On the one hand, VITEX is interested in “integrating” Christianity and psychology because secular psychological theories, therapies, and professional roles will make a vital contribution to Christian counseling. Christians can learn constitutive things from what the world has to offer in the social and behavioral sciences. Christians can participate in psychological research and in the mental health professions. But as honest evangelicals, VITEX advocates want Scripture to exert final and functional authority.

On the other hand, COMPIN is interested in the sufficiency of Scripture for informing and defining counseling ministry because resources internal to the Christian faith are comprehensive about what counseling is about. Scripture is sufficient, not in that it is exhaustive, containing all valid knowledge, but in that it rightly aligns a coherent and comprehensive system of counseling that is radically at odds with every a-theistic model. Christians can offer a distinct alternative to what the world has to offer. Christians can revitalize their own distinctive shepherdly and mutual ministries. But as honest observers and thinkers, COMPIN advocates want to gain what knowledge they can, both theoretical and applied, from the social sciences and other fields.

But both sides tend to talk past each other. VITEX discredits itself to COMPIN ears by sounding epistemologically naïve and syncretistic. “All truth is God’s truth” is an epistemological truism, without bottom line value, exactly like “All lies are the devil’s lies.” The real question is how you tell the difference, which throws us back into the crucible: we need to define the sources and criteria of significant and reliable knowledge. Furthermore, the actual products of VITEX thinking—in the name of ‘general revelation’ and ‘common grace’—have usually been, self-admittedly, rewarmed and

baptized versions of secular theory. As much as thoughtful VITEX would like to dissociate itself from the egregious offenses of Christianized pop psychology, they tend to sound like birds of a feather.

On the other side, COMPIN discredits itself to VITEX ears by sounding biblicistic, obscurantist, and anti-intellectual. ‘Sufficiency of Scripture’ stumbles too easily into pat answer, legalism, pietism, or triumphal separatism. What anyone says the Bible says is not self-evident, and must be subjected to serious scrutiny and criticism. “The Bible says” ought to engender hard thought, close observation, and careful discussion—not freeze our minds, end the conversation, and close our eyes to life lived. Furthermore, in the name of biblical authority, the actual products of COMPIN thinking have too often been, self-admittedly, reversion to moralism, pietism, and exorcism.¹ As much as thoughtful COMPIN would like to dissociate itself from the egregious offenses of biblicistic quick fixes and ranting, they can sound like birds of a feather.

The church’s counseling has been locked in epistemological stalemate. Both sides say we can learn something from psychology; both sides say the Bible gets final say. The debates usually sputter into fruitless generalities about common grace and biblical authority. How can we break through to fresh ground? To break the stalemate, I propose that we significantly reframe the epistemological debate. We should ask ourselves about epistemological priorities, and then show how our answers concretely work out. This priority question has a double reference. First, what epistemological priorities are expressed by the Bible itself? Second, what priorities do we need in our time and place, both for the church’s welfare and to engage the therapeutic culture to which the church is called to bear witness? I believe that both the example of Scripture and the need of our times yield the same answer:

- Our first priority must be to articulate positive biblical truth, a systematic

practical theology of those things that our culture labels “counseling issues.” A systematic theology of care and cure for souls will wed conceptual, methodological, and institutional elements.

- Our second priority must be to expose, debunk, and reinterpret alternative models, whether secular or religious. Personality theories and counseling models assert different ‘gazes’, different interpretations of human life. Our point of view radically critiques other points of view, and invites them to a thoughtful conversion.
- Our third priority must be to learn what we can from defective models. We will always be stimulated, challenged, and informed by those with whom we disagree and whom we aim to convert. Articulating our own model (1st) and critiquing other models (2nd) frees us to learn from others without being counterconverted or becoming syncretistic. Such learning also enables us to enter the frame of reference of those we hope to persuade.

If we keep these priorities in their proper order, the church will thrive, both in our ministries to each other and as light to the world.

The Bible’s Priorities

Does the Bible itself model this particular ordering of priorities? Yes. This is one of those questions whose answer suffers from an embarrassing abundance of supporting material.

The first priority: articulating biblical truth and developing our systematic theology of care for the soul. Biblical confirmation of this first priority is unmistakable. God’s primary revelatory purposes are neither to criticize nor to adopt what floods the cultural surround. He is different, holy. He aims to proclaim, teach, and model something distinctive. The Bible’s positive message both *is* counseling and *is about* counseling. In content, method, and institutional locus the Bible overflows with counseling instructions and implications, not just in proof-texts, but in the whole body of Scripture.

From the outset, Scripture redefines how we tend to define ‘counseling’. Counseling is not fundamentally a professional helping activity, where an identifiably competent party intentionally offers aid to an identifiably distressed party in a formalized structure (such as weekly one-hour sessions on a fee-for-service basis). Given the culture’s professionalized definition, the Bible seems relatively insufficient—even utterly silent—on the subject of counseling. But if counseling is about the tongue, and wise or foolish companions, and master-disciple relationships, and one-anothering influences for good or bad, and the truth or lie that speaks in the heart, and ministry of the Word of life... then the Bible brims. Relatively formal, private counseling ought only to apply and extend the practical truth and knowledgeable love that ought to characterize both informal relationships and public ministry. Counseling, whatever its formal or informal status, is either foolish (reorienting us away from God and towards our own self-trust) or wise (reorienting us to God). We need, first and foremost, to learn our own paradigm for understanding and transforming human nature, and that is exactly the Bible’s major focus in revealing God on the stage of human life.

The second priority: exposing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models. The Bible conducts a running border war with multiform error. Idolatries and lies, false teachers and “the world” are like viral pathogens that endlessly mutate. Every book of the Bible has a backdrop, those formal systems or merely idiosyncratic tendencies that would lead us away. Falsehood is always new and creative, yet it always plays variations on the same old themes. Sinful human beings instinctively think about life as if there were no living God, no weighing of our lives in His eyes, and no need for a divine Savior. Human beings assiduously construct God-substitutes and truth-substitutes, other meanings of life, other ways of making life work. Theories about our lives are like our lives, embodying the instinct for evading reality.

Sin exerts a systematic distorting effect on thought and practice. The Bible teaches us how to see and expose sin and error. Most ungodliness is not unusually vile. It is so utterly commonplace that we miss it. In our day, it

includes the deep assumptions every secular psychology makes about what transpires in the human heart. Secular psychologists can't help the godlessness of their view of the psyche and relationships. A secular psychology is the cultural product of a God-less person, and will reflect and express that. Theories systematize and rationalize the unbelief of those who create and embrace those theories. Because the wisdom of the world has always been foolishness with God, the Bible always conducts a secondary polemic in order to defend and clarify the truth and to protect people from plausible falsehoods. This running argument arises from redemptive intention, not paranoid irascibility. The Redeemer is conducting an invasion, and He critiques other theories in order to convert people to His indestructible truth. The Bible's demonstrated second priority, criticizing untruths, is one logical implication of the demonstrated first priority, revealing truth.

The third priority: learning what we can from other models. We can learn from everything around us. Saying that God Himself 'learns' from ancient Near Eastern societies is inaccurate. But there is no doubt that God's prophets and apostles learn from everything around them. God adapts His message to time, place, language, culture, and people. The Bible freely co-opts surrounding cultures as one aspect of God's redemptive, transformative working. God's servants work with what is around them linguistically, politically, religiously, economically, artistically, educationally, agriculturally, militarily. Committed to knowing the truth and critiquing error, they then appropriate lots of things. Redemption works with what is at hand, the "human documents," both individual and social, and the cultural products.

From the standpoint of fundamental model building, such learning plays a distinctly tertiary role. But this third priority is not unimportant. Because we ourselves are both limited by finitude and tainted by sin, God often uses "perceptive error" to reprove His people. It's part of how He makes us work to refine our understanding and application of His truth. Others may be seeing things we aren't seeing, doing things we aren't doing, asking questions we aren't asking. God's redemptive revelation is

constitutive, but even counterbiblical theories may be provocative. And extra-biblical knowledge—of ourselves and our world—is always the grist with which biblical truth works continually to extend the range and depth of understanding. We learn, critique, reinterpret, convert, apply. We are able to traffic in the extra-biblical constructively when we know what we ought to know that reorients and controls our gaze (the first and second priorities).

This is God's world, so everything, even if it intends to efface God, bears witness to God—understood and reinterpreted through biblical eyeglasses. The Bible freely traffics in the extra-biblical, in the creation, in fallen cultural products, in the terminology of the very contemporary falsehoods that God is attacking. But God always interprets or reinterprets. He is imperial. Biblical truth is a corrective gaze. For example, the formal structure of Deuteronomy was modeled on ancient Near Eastern political treaties, but what God appropriates He radically reworks. Some proverbs are formally identical to older Egyptian sayings. But they mean something fundamentally different when embedded in the context of Yahweh-fearing proverbs from what they meant when embedded in a context of superstition, animism, idolatry, and self-trust.

The Bible never fears secular education. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22); God gave Daniel and his friends knowledge and intelligence in every branch of Chaldean literature and wisdom (Dan. 1:17); Paul was a man of great learning (Acts 22:3, 26:24). But Moses, Daniel, and Paul interpreted life through God's redemptive grid. Paul could quote with favor an "anthropologist" who studied life in Crete (Titus 1:12), and he could weave the words of Greek literati into his argument in Athens (Acts 17:28). Where the living, speaking, seeing, acting God rules, His servants move freely into the culture of their time and place. The Bible gives no warrant for Christians to be intellectual isolationists, to be biblicistic, cut off from culture, speaking a private language to our own kind.

Fallen though it is, this world is God's stage of redemption. But notice how the appropriation of culture is always subordinated,

first to clear-eyed grasp of God's truth, and, second, to keen-eyed skepticism about fallen alternatives. Paul had obviously learned a great deal from his culture. But he did not learn the living, systematic truth he proclaimed from those sterile and deviant substitutes. And the truth he proclaimed radically reworked those substitutes.²

The Needs of the Hour

The Bible itself models these primary, secondary, and tertiary priorities. What then are the needs of our time and place regarding the modern secular psychologies and psychotherapies? I believe the same priorities apply to how we engage them. First, both the confused church and the benighted culture need, more than anything else, positive biblical truth pointedly applied. We need to understand and practice our own distinctive psychology. We need to understand and practice our own distinctive care for souls. If we do not know well the peculiar wisdom of our own truth, we act not as light in the current darkness, but as second-rate disciples of that darkness. Truth is the best thing we can offer.

Second, we need a penetrating critique of contemporary sources of confusion and darkness. Secular alternatives for understanding and caring for souls need careful exposure and pointed challenge. Priorities one and two will enable us to build up and protect the people of God. They will also enable a telling and timely proclamation of Christian truth into a psychologized culture. We believe differently and do differently from the world around us. We have depth where they are shallow. We have riches where they are impoverished. We see where they are blind.

Third, we will develop our model through interacting with contemporary models. Their successes can certainly reprove us, and help us see more clearly places where we are inept and ignorant—as long as we do not counterconvert. Their observations of what makes human life go and not go can inform us—if we radically reinterpret them from within our world view. At every point, the first priority must be first, the second second, the third third.

Getting priorities sorted out generates a host of implications and applications. I will

briefly flag three: the task of psychological research, the ability of the church to evangelize psychologized people, and the appropriation of historical theology.

First, the necessity of reordering our priorities does not mean that it is wrong to closely study psychological, relational, and counseling processes. Exactly the opposite. Psychological study that submits itself to God's truth becomes part of the joyous outworking of the church's first priority. When we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, we enter into a vast practical-theological task, not a concordance search for the proof-text for every problem. Adopting a frankly biblical worldview, we should get about the business of hard, fruitful study, in subordination to the mind of Christ.

For example, Jonathan Edwards's *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is a model of empirical study constrained by biblical presuppositions. His was not positivist science pretending to neutrality; it was not narrow biblicism closing its eyes to the very phenomena that need study and interpretation; it was not a borrowing of secular thinking, thinly glossed with Christian words. Rather, it was a theological labor to develop systematic biblical understanding. But Edwards looked at only one (significant) slice of human life. Who will do the equivalent work regarding the multitude of significant counseling issues we face today? A hundred Edwards could write a hundred equally masterful books, and a systematic practical theology of counseling would not yet be finished. There is no reason that study and a treatise on the 'affections' in general—desires, emotions, attitudes, motives—cannot be done from frank Christian convictions about the nature of the human heart. It will not be a need theory, instinct theory, drive theory, or self-esteem theory. It will understand human experience with God in view.³

The Bible itself invites systematic inquiry, by the very generality and universality of God's revelation. The writers of the Bible intend to provide eyeglasses that enable all seeing, not an encyclopedia that contains all facts. For example, Galatians 5:19-21 says that the manifest lifestyle of sin is "obvious." Paul then gives fifteen representative examples, closing with "and the like." That provides an

inexhaustible research agenda. Of course, Paul does not pretend to be methodologically and theoretically neutral. Those “works of the flesh” are sinful; they arise causally from various “lusts of the flesh”; both desire and doing will be morally evaluated by God, with inescapable consequences. We know *à priori* that loveless behaviors are not fundamentally products of enculturation, psychosocial trauma, unmet needs, a DSM-IV syndrome, or a somatic disease process. Each of the items on the Galatians 5 list—“interpersonal conflict,” “substance abuse,” “dysphoric emotions,” and “sexual disorders”—invites extensive research to flesh out biblical understanding.

What about problems, like those labeled “eating disorders” or “obsessive-compulsive disorders,” that do not appear on the representative list in Galatians 5? “Obvious” (and close study will unpack the details to show the how and why of those works of the flesh).⁴ Fear and anxiety are not on the list? “Obvious.” The countless faces and voices of self- and other-deception? The many forms of self-righteousness, self-pity, self-serving bias, self-exoneration? The psychological and interpersonal complexities of people-pleasing? “And the like.” There is work to be done in cultivating a biblical gaze; a biblical gaze then cultivates wide-ranging knowledge.

Our doctrine must control our study; and our study must flesh out our doctrine. Careful “psychological” study is one direct implication of the sufficiency of Scripture and of getting our first priority straight. We best study human psychology not by submitting ourselves to the world’s deviant psychologies, but by looking at the world through the gaze of our own systematic biblical understanding. If we want to understand people so that we can truly help them, we undertake a task in practical theology.

Second, powerful, relevant evangelism to psychologized people is another direct implication of getting priorities straight. Contemporary secular psychological models are observationally rich, but they fundamentally misconstrue what people are like. If we are their beggars, they will never see their need. But if we have the true riches of accurate interpretation, and a corresponding critique of their poverty, we have something they will want.

I believe that several aspects of the contemporary psychological culture make the time ripe for the church to display its goods. In this post-Kuhnian, post-modern climate, confidence in positivistic scientific methodology for the social sciences has waned. The underpinnings of “psychology” as neutral truth have been kicked out. The age of confident model building, of the Grand Unified Theory (G.U.T.), has faded. Microtheories and eclecticism are the order of the day. Despite the brave face psychologists attempt to put on it, these tendencies in fact register epistemological skepticism and despair. All this creates an opportunity for the church to get about business and stand up with our own counseling model.

We have the G.U.T.—the work-in-progress of a systematic practical theology of counseling. As the mental health professions increasingly rationalize themselves by their licensed control over turf, rather than by defensible truth or efficacy, the church will doubtless suffer intimidation, lawsuits, legal restrictions, and so forth. But the fundamentally non-professional character of biblical wisdom shines with particular poignancy in such a world of brazen self-interest. We need not care much about licensure, accreditation, and third-party reimbursement schemes. The state does not license the church to believe and do what we need to believe and do, and it cannot stop us. Counseling is not primarily a profession according to our G.U.T. Instead, it is a lifestyle. It is a matter of character, wisdom, every word out of our mouths, walking worthy of our calling. It is serving up the message of life to the ignorant and wayward, to the afflicted and dying, to the redeemable, to ourselves.

As Christians get our priorities straight, wonderful things happen. We become distinctively wise, able to help our own with our own resources. We begin to shine into a world in which people realize, when they are honest, that the mental health professions are groping in the dark. We have something positive to offer our world: truth, love, and power, in the exact areas in which people are most concerned and most confused. Our critique becomes more than sectarian intransigence. Our message becomes more than religious mumbo-jumbo for and from religious people. It’s about life as it is *actually*

lived, experienced, motivated, and evaluated—for every human being.

Third, our labors will result in something the world has not yet seen. We can appreciate the achievements of theologians, philosophers, and pastors who have alerted us to the historic resources of the Christian faith: e.g., Thomas Oden's series *Classical Pastoral Care*, Robert Roberts' *Taking the Word to Heart*, Tim Keller's "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," Paul Griffiths' "Metaphysics and Personality Theory," Dennis Okholm's "To Vent or Not to Vent?"⁵ The intellectual revival of long departed practical theologians offers a healthy corrective to the subjection of evangelical faith to various contemporary psychologies, and it reasserts positive Christian wisdom about the nature of persons, relationships, and the activities we call counseling.

But we must not forget the call to do fresh theological work. It is not enough to recover what has been long forgotten or obscured regarding human nature and counseling; it is not enough to appropriate the fruits of historical theology for present edification. Yes, Augustine's *Confessions* is a marvel of insight into the myriad ways that sin disorders our loves, and grace reorders us. Yes, Edwards's *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* is a masterpiece of empirical study conducted under the authority of Scripture. Yes, Gregory the Great and William Baxter collated vast practical wisdom. But the questions those books address are only partly universal; they are also significantly dated. Our generation must—and will—break new ground. The positive formulations of fresh theological work will enable us to criticize our Christian past discerningly. Not all earlier practical theologies were created equal. Not all are equally worth resurrecting. We must appropriate the best and forsake the worst, and that demands fresh criteria for judgment. Our task is always fresh: "A theology that does not build on the past ignores our debt to history and naively overlooks the fact that the present is conditioned by history. A theology that relies on the past evades the demands of the present."⁶

None of our forebears hammered out fidelity to Christ in a culture with a knowledge explosion in the social sciences, and with an omnipresent mental health establishment that

attempts to define and meliorate human nature. The church's cure of souls has never before faced such stiff, organized, and persuasive competition. This has arisen in the sovereignty of God, that we might expect and pursue fresh wisdom.

Robert Roberts was hesitant to suggest that we expect a radically Christian counseling model to emerge internally, from within the Christian faith:

A Christian psychology would not *have* to be pursued in dialogue with secular psychology—at least not if the psychologist in question were Augustine, or Kierkegaard, or Saint John of the Cross. But I can think of two reasons why we more ordinary Christian thinkers are well advised to do our psychology in dialogue with important secular psychologists."⁷

Perhaps Roberts rightly fears presumption and incompetence, our lack of intellectual and practical stature. I grant that our own psychology *will* emerge in interaction with the environing psychologies—and with everything else we experience culturally. But such dialogue should not be seen as a matter of constitutive necessity. That dialogue with secularity has so far been largely unprofitable in the VITEX tradition. It has resulted in counseling models that are recapitulations of and capitulations to secular forms of thinking and practice. A biblically guided dialogue will certainly contribute in a tertiary way, but our primary call is to the dialogue between the Bible and lives lived, as COMPIN asserts. Let us work explicitly from our own foundation.

Roberts may be right that no solitary and extraordinary genius will arise among us. Perhaps since care and counseling are fundamentally tasks of corporate wisdom, our Lord will be pleased to raise up something better, a corporate Augustine, a hundred Augustines, a hundred thousand Augustines, for the task that faces us. Perhaps many Christians will tackle the same massive intellectual and practical project: to construct "systematic biblical counseling" for the beginning of the third millennium *anno Domini*. After all, the Bible offers unique and superior wisdom, not only for extraordinary people, but also for

ordinary people (see Ps. 119:98-100; 1 Cor. 1-2). Our problem is not so much a matter of talent, but a matter of corporate vision and will.

If our counseling model arises from Scripture, it will explicitly cohere with long-formulated Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. It has often been said regarding the relationship of Old Covenant to New Covenant that “The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.” The same is true of theological progress. A systematic pastoral theology for the twenty-first century will cohere with historic orthodoxy, yet will break open new light and new power. Our concepts will probe the depths of the human heart and map the diversity of individual and cultural differences. Our methods will deliver the goods that comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable, converting all into the image of Jesus. Our institutional structures will be ecclesiastically rooted, vehicles of the ministry of the Word, combining wise pastoral authority and mutual encouragement.

Systematic biblical counseling—the Faith’s psychology—will break fresh ground theologically, practically, and institutionally. For example, our understanding of the Christian life will be radically transformed as we deliver progressive sanctification out of its religious closet—a sector of religiously-colored experiences, doctrines, morals, and activities—and work out the renovation of our humanity in daily life and in our social existence. We might barely recognize the radical new forms that church, ministry, and piety will take when Ephesians 4 and Hebrews 3:12-14, 4:12-16, and 10:19-25 come into their own—and yet they will be utterly familiar.

Disordered Priorities

We have looked at three implications of getting our priorities straight. But what happens when our priorities get tangled? “The dialogue of Christians with psychology has been less than full because we have been held captive by the alien spirits.... As a result, we have not had much of our own to contribute to the conversation with non-Christian psychologists.”⁸ Those who elevate the tertiary priority—learning from defective models—to the first priority, find themselves subtly or

overtly psychologized. Those who overweigh the significance of secular psychology “learn” more than they bargained for. They tend to undergo a wrong-way conversion, becoming anesthetized to the God-centered realities actually playing out in the human psyche. They begin to reason God-lessly about behavior, mood, relationships, motives, cognition, and so on. They promulgate faulty reasoning and practice through the body of Christ

Consider the popularity of “psychological need theories” (needs for self-esteem, achievement, love) since the 1980s. Consider the uncritical acceptance of DSM-IV categories as normative and explanatory, rather than as merely descriptive and as both biased and blinkered by faulty assumptions about human nature. Consider the fascination with psychotropic medication. Such distortions of human life occur when the scope of Christian faith is constricted, its significance restricted to a “spiritual” sector. However unwittingly, Christians allow conceptual categories from personality theory or self-help or medicine, the authority of the latest research study, the well-socialized and tacit assumptions of the mental health professional, and the necessities of licensure and accreditation permeate thought and practice. All of this works in concert to unnerve faith. The Bible becomes an ancillary and supportive text, a source of proof-texts in the worst sense. Christian faith and biblical citation are pressed to rationalize ideas intrinsically alien to the mind of God. Only when our first priority is first will we truly think and act in ways that transform our culture, those we counsel, and ourselves.

Those who major in the secondary priority—exposing and debunking alternative models—create a different problem for the body of Christ. Criticism without the rich, growing edge of the first priority is unpalatable and unedifying. If we major in criticism, we become polemicists, rather than agents of redemption. Often polemicists excuse their loveless rough edges by the demands of truth. But they lose more than they realize. In fact, when love and the growth of positive truth are lost, truth is also lost. Biblical truth loses its scope, balance, depth, applicability, savor, and growing edge when the second priority seizes center stage.

The positive theological task that is the need of our age gets obscured. Caricatures of truth and discernment replace the realities. Words that are not constructive, timely, and grace-giving are rotten and non-nutritive, whatever their formal likeness to Christian content (Eph. 4:29). To lose charity, tenderheartedness, sympathy, and generosity is always to simultaneously pervert the redemptive nature of biblical revelation. Narrowed “truth” may bristle enough to defend one city wall, but it is not good enough to conquer the world.⁹ Only when our first priority is first do we Christians have a robust, radiant, and sensible alternative in our hearts and in our mouths, something good to offer those we critique, those we counsel, and ourselves.

The church must transcend the misplaced priorities and fruitless posturing of much current debate between VITEX and COMPIN. The tertiary priority must be submitted to the call to pursue the primary and secondary priorities. The secondary must be submitted to the primary, and then the implications of the tertiary spelled out. We must get our priorities straight. Such shifts will invigorate both the secondary and the tertiary to function as they ought, and will produce a buoyant intellectual and practical confidence for both counseling ministry and evangelism. Our ability to understand ourselves, to counsel our own, and to reach the world with our own distinctive truth is at stake.

¹ In fact, Jay Adams opened *Competent to Counsel* not by criticizing psychology, but by criticizing the Bible-believing church’s impoverishment in what it thought was biblical counseling. He did not consider “read the Bible, pray, yield, or cast out a demon” to be adequate either as a reflection of Scripture or as a way to meet human need. His *Insight and Creativity in Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982) was an extended critique of the tendency of biblical counselors to fall into a cookbook mentality. I critiqued the demon-deliverance movement as a reversion to superstition and animism in the name of biblical counseling in David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995).

² All that I have said about appropriating, working with, and learning from what is around us is no less true of what is within us. We make our own experience normative to our peril. Experience is not autonomous, self-interpreting, or self-interpreted (except in sin’s delusion). The truth of the mind of Christ (priority one) critiques us (priority two) and remakes us, folding and reinterpreting all of life’s particular learning and experience (priority three) into God’s pattern and story (priority one).

³ The next section of this essay offers a sketch of how God explains and interprets human motivation—and He gets both first say and final say on how people tick! The second half of my *Seeing with New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003) is a collection of essays on these topics.

⁴ See, for example, Mike Emlet, “Obsessions and Compulsions: Breaking Free of the Tyranny,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 22:2 (2004), 15-26 and David Powlison, “Is the ‘Adonis Complex’ in Your Bible?,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 22:4 (2004), 42-58.

⁵ Paul J. Griffiths, “Metaphysics and Personality Theory” in *Limning the Psyche: Explorations in Christian Psychology*, Robert C. Roberts and Mark R. Talbot, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 41-57; Timothy J. Keller, “Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice*, 9:3 (1988), 11-44; Thomas C. Odem, *Pastoral Counsel, Classical Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987); Robert C. Roberts, *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Others in an Age of Therapies*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); Dennis Kohl’s “To Vent or Not to Vent?”; Mark McMinn and Timothy Phillips, eds., *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁶ John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 9.

⁷ Robert Roberts, *Taking the Word to Heart*, 14. His two reasons are consistent with COMPIN: (1) the fact that psychology is part of our cultural surround, and (2) the fact that we can learn some things, while maintaining our distinctive point of view.

⁸ Robert Roberts, “Psychology and the Life of the Spirit,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 15:1 (1996), 26-31.

⁹ See John Frame, “Scripture and the Apologetic Task,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 13:2 (1995), 9-12 for a stimulating discussion of matter and manner in defending the faith.

III. Our Theory of Motivation

The first crucial question dealt with epistemology. This second question deals with human motivation, with personality theory. Why do people do what they do? What is wrong with people and how can we make it right?

At the center of every view of human nature is a theory of motivation, and the logical end of every theory of motivation is a cure. The various answers to the question, "Why do we do what we do?," provide synopses of the various schools of thought. Each definition of the core problem is then a signpost to the cure of soul that the respective theory proposes. Everyone agrees that something is wrong with us. The big questions are always *Why?* and *What can be done about it?*

- If your brain chemistry is unhinged, then you need chemical re-engineering.
- If you are fixated somewhere on the hierarchy of needs, then you need particular needs met.
- If your drives have been conditioned in unacceptable directions, then you need to be redirected and reconditioned.
- If your spirit is dead while your souliness is too lively, then you need God's Spirit to release your spirit to master your soul.
- If you are wounded, then you need healing.
- If you search for meaning while believing and doing meaningless things, then you need the courage to embrace something meaningful.
- If this is a bad-star day for those born under your zodiac sign, then stay home today.
- If you feel bad about yourself, then you need reasons for more self-confidence.
- If you were born in a miserable existence because of previous karma, then you need to work it off in hopes of something better next time around.
- If your self-talk is self-defeating, then you need a motivational speech and a dose of stoic philosophy.

- If you are mentally ill, then find the right medicine to make you well.
- If you are lazy, then you need more self-discipline.
- If it's just a guy-thing or a girl-thing, then affirm the quirks that make you hard to live with.
- If you've been oppressed by society, then you need to stand up for your rights.
- If you are in flight from acknowledging unacceptable impulses, then you need to stop and look in the mirror.
- If a demon of anger has staked out turf in your soul, then someone must eject it.
- If you have psychic voids created by disappointing object relations, then you need to find ways to understand your personal history and redirect your longings.
- If you are compensating for your inferiority complex, then learn to accept yourself realistically and do something worthwhile.

And so forth.

Everyone in the supermarket of ideas knows that something is wrong with people. What is it? Everyone in the supermarket of cures wants to do something to make it better. What gives the life that is life indeed? Different views of the soul's ailments will logically propose different cures for the soul. Wrong views of any disease always bring with them wrong views of the remedy. The right view brings the right remedy.

So what is the problem? The three word description that Christians have harvested from the Bible is "sin and misery." The remedy for our disorientation and suffering? The two word solution that Scripture sows into our lives is "Jesus Christ." The seven word version of the solution, encompassing our response, is "Christ's grace enabling repentance, faith, and obedience." God is in the business of turning folly and misery into wisdom and felicity. How is such theological shorthand relevant to the problems that counselors of all stripes address

daily? How do basic Christian diagnostic categories map onto the details of such things as interpersonal conflicts, unpleasant emotions, misdirected lives, twisted cognitions, chaotic cravings, compulsively escapist behaviors, sufferings at the hands of others, somatic afflictions, devilish temptations, sociocultural lies? That last sentence simply offers a twenty-five word elaboration of “sin and misery.” One could further elaborate any topic or subtopic into book length without ever needing to slip into another set of categories. Similarly, the wise felicity of grace—God’s solution—can, must, and will be elaborated, tailored, and nuanced as it is worked into our lives.

The holy grail after which counseling theories finally aspire is redemption from what ails us, a cure for the diagnosed problem. In the Bible’s comprehensive view, this must engage both inward and outward aspects of the person, and it must engage both the individual and the community. The renewing of our hearts

What did He want? How did He understand Himself? We learn how the human soul is intended to work, hence we learn the standard from which to make diagnoses of defection and distortion.

We witness the psychology of Jesus not only in the Gospels, but also in psalms, proverbs, history, and prophets. Every revelation of the ways of God and the ways of godliness give expression to how Jesus worked both intrapsychically and interpersonally. What emerges as the central drama and pivot of human existence? What threads through every emotion, cognition, action, relationship, suffering?

Our souls play out a drama of evil and good. Sin and righteousness, fall and redemption, false and true, misery and felicity, folly and wisdom, deafness and hearing, stupor and wakefulness, death and life—these are playing in the theatre of life-lived. Every life. We play out this drama vis-à-vis God, at every

The holy grail after which counseling theories finally aspire is redemption from what ails us, a cure for the diagnosed problem.

(fructifying cognitive, emotional, and volitional processes), the renewing of our manner of life (transforming individual behavior), the renewing of our community (transforming corporate relationships), and the renewing of our bodies (resurrection from the dead) go together. In biblical language, such comprehensive renewal is “wisdom and felicity.” It is the goal of God’s counseling.

The writers of the Bible portray and intend to create such wisdom at every turn. For example, we are taught and shown a tremendous amount about the psychology of Jesus. This is the centerpiece for understanding. We know how He thought, felt, chose, acted, and spoke. We know not only how He related interpersonally, but also how He related individual identity to community. We know how He interpreted and responded to sufferings, and how He located individual life in the larger flow of history. In what terms did His psychic life transpire? How did He interpret what He saw?

moment, in every choice, in every nuance of cognition, emotion, and volition, in every detail of lifestyle. Every aspect of our existence plays out on the stage of God’s history, with a day of reckoning coming.

We also learn about psychopathology, the madness in our hearts. From the biblical point of view, one of the leading characteristics of sin’s psychopathology is that we repress awareness of these moral, theological, social, and historical terms in which the drama of our psyches is cast. Psalms 10, 14, and 36 are but a few examples of how the thought processes of the sinful psyche are analyzed as attempts to elude reality. The repression of God and of our historical embeddedness and accountability are prominent themes. Only a biblical psychology reveals how significant this is; fallen psychologies manifest the repression. This is a stunning psychology. Other psychologies repress awareness, participating in the universal psychopathology of fallen human nature. People

with problems in living, and people who seem to function in healthy ways, and psychological models that attempt to make sense of human behavior are only differently sick (Eccl. 9:3). They all repress the truth.

The psychology that Jesus teaches us is multifaceted. The psalmist is simultaneously sinner and sufferer, *par excellence*. The proverbist is simultaneously wise and keenly aware of remnant folly, *par excellence*. The prophet lives simultaneously in his moment and in the larger flow of history, *par excellence*. And in each case, individual identity and community identity interweave. What cure is there for what ails us? The steadfast love of Yahweh is the only hope for deliverance from both sin and suffering. We all know this. These things lie on the surface of Scripture; they constitute the depths of Scripture. They deconstruct and reconstruct the human soul. They are so familiar and so “religious” that we barely hear them. We barely hear their shocking implications for our conceptual and applied psychology.

What does this mean for our model of counseling? Jesus owned the psalms, proverbs, and prophets as the voice of His experience and emotion, the content of His cognitive process, and the framework of His action.¹ They articulate what human life is really about. The fully honest, fully human person thinks, feels, and reacts in these ways. These things record the categories of consciousness and action for the only fully conscious and seeing man who ever lived. They record the categories through which the gaze of the Searcher of hearts ransacks our lives. One sees in the Bible the normatively wise human psychology; it is so radically God-centered that we can barely see it as a psychology and as the true psychology. It sounds like theology, not psychology. But the Bible portrays the nitty-gritty of human psychology as pervasively theological.

One also sees in the Bible many portrayals of the normally foolish human psychology. This is utterly familiar stuff—dysfunctions and eufunctions of relationship, emotion, cognition; the Lego pieces with which every false psychological theory plays; the descriptive case study data. It all looks shockingly different seen through biblical gaze, seen against the diagnostic backdrop of the normative

psychology of God-fearing. Jesus experienced life as He counseled others to experience life: the issues of life lived are specifically about sin and misery, specifically about gracious deliverance, and specifically about the felicitous wisdom of repentance, faith, love, and obedience. There is no “religious” sector of life. Such sectoring is one of the commonplace machinations of sin’s logic that flies in the face of reality.

Why belabor this? I wish I could belabor it better, less impressionistically, more radically! What the Bible communicates to us about God’s gaze on the psyche and relationships is so “odd” that even to glimpse it turns our whole notion of psychology and counseling inside out, upside down, and backwards. God gives a radically “other” explanation and agenda. Contemporary counseling models—including “Christianized” models—do an extremely poor job of reflecting and communicating what life is really about. They are weakest where they claim to be strongest. We are immersed in decidedly bad psychologies, in gross misinterpretations of human existence.

The Christian subjects modern psychological models to thorough critique, not because they are some bogeyman called ‘Psychology’, but because they are specifically faulty psychologies. By definition, a personality theory ought to help counselor and counselee alike accurately understand what’s going on within and between persons. By definition, a counseling model claims to help us reorient to reality, to know what to do to fix things. But what should we make of models that essentially and consistently evade reality? That misdefine the basic problem? That suppress the major Player in human psychological, relational, and somatic existence? That suppress the historical conditions—past, present, future—that qualify human existence? That redefine the dynamics of our God-dealing hearts by expunging God? That redefine the basic solution, so it is no longer a Person? That redefine the desired human response that is so radically interpersonal? A model that does not move within the categories of human experience that Jesus Himself moved in, and by which God Himself looks at life, will fundamentally disorient and misguide those who embrace it.

Every counseling model offers a map of reality, an interpretive framework. The Bible's reality map sets the goal of all valid counseling lived in the consciousness and lifestyle of Jesus. We witness and listen in on the normative subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

This has huge implications for our theory of motivation. First of all, the dynamics of human intention and desire cannot be defined in purely psychological terms (or psycho-social terms, or psycho-social-somatic terms). Motivational dynamics do not simply operate within or between persons. The human heart has to do with God. So when the Bible describes the desires that obviously play within our souls and rule our lives, it does not portray them as hard-wired psychological or physiological givens: as needs, instincts, drives, longings, wishes. It speaks of them as morally freighted vis-à-vis God, as moral-covenantal choices: we are ruled either by cravings of the flesh or by repentance-faith-obedience to God's desires. Our desires are tilted one way or the other, either toward the true God or toward the host of idols we fabricate both collectively and idiosyncratically. Our mastering desires are relationally and morally qualified.

Similarly, when the Bible describes the beliefs, assumptions, and inward conversations that so obviously play within our souls and shape our lives, it does not portray them in neutral fashion, as mere cognitive functions: as self-talk, schemata, conscious or unconscious contents, memory, attitude, imagination, worldview, and the like. Our functional beliefs not only occur *coram Deo*, they actually have to do directly with God. Our actual mental life transpires either for or against God. Lies and unbelief contend with truth and faith. In the Bible, people whose self-talk talks as if there were no God—and hence no ongoing and eventual moral evaluation by God—are described in vividly moral terms: they are foolish, wicked, proud. People who talk in their hearts in the light of God are also described in vividly moral terms: wise, righteous, after God's own heart. Our mastering beliefs are relationally and morally qualified.

In the same way, when the Bible describes the self-evaluating capacities that play within our souls and so powerfully determine us, it does

not portray them as merely intra-psychic entities: self-esteem, self-image, self-worth, self-love, self-confidence, inferiority complex, and identity. Our evaluative and self-knowing capacity registers human-before-God realities. The conscience or "eyes" by which we weigh ourselves either expresses our self-will ("in my own eyes," pride) and my subjection to the opinions of others ("in others' eyes," fear of man), or it expresses and is informed by God's evaluative criteria ("in God's eyes," *coram Deo*, the fear of the Lord). Self-evaluation is not intrinsically an autonomous, intra-psychic function. It only acts that way when sin operates to suppress God-awareness. Our mastering conscience is relationally and morally qualified.

In sum, the human heart—the answer to why we do what we do—must be understood as an active-verb-with-respect-to-God. Climb inside any emotional reaction, any behavioral choice or habit, any cognitive content, any reaction pattern to suffering, and you are meant to hear and see active verbs working out. Love God or anything else. Fear God or anything else. Want God or anything else. Need God or anything else. Hope in God or anything else. Take refuge in God or anything else. Obey God or anything else. Trust God or anything else. Seek God or anything else. Serve God or anything else. The Bible's motivation theory shouts from every page—but it does not look like a motivation theory to those whose gaze has been bent and blinded by sin's intellectual logic. How can we learn to think and see psyche and behavior in the moral-covenantal terms in which life actually transpires?

Consider this analogy. The Bible's psychology is like a hyper-psychosocial theory. Psychosocial theories embed psychic functions in social realities. The Bible's motivation theory is a psychosocial theory in three dimensions. A covenantal-relational analysis of the human heart adds a pervasive and determinative dimension to which both encapsulated psyche theories and interhumanly-psychosocial theories are utterly oblivious. No secular theory can say this, because no secular theory can see this, because no secular theory wants to see this. But this is what explains human behavior. No one else in the modern world is able or willing to say what the church can and must say: human

beings are radically sin-sick. The cure of souls must cure this ailment, or else it is prescribing painkillers for cancer. Other cures whistle in the dark while a deadly, unseen corruption festers and an imminent, unrecognized destruction approaches.

Christ cures sin-sickness. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds. One small, but significant, part of the cure is that He reveals His own psychology to us, and demonstrates exactly how these are in fact the realities transpiring in our souls. When we get straight how the active heart works vis-à-vis God, then the grace of Jesus maps straight onto human need. The good news of Jesus refuses to be relegated to a religious sector of life. It is the explicit need of the psychologically honest and the clear seeing. All other psychologies—whether formulated into personality theories or merely lived out in the workings of individual

Difficulties in Understanding the Heart from God's Point of View

Sin is the problem, but people find it difficult to make the core of Jesus' gaze useful in developing a counseling model. Several common distortions in the working definition of sin make us unable to trace the psychological logic of sin.²

First, people tend to think of sins in the plural as consciously willed acts where one was aware of and chose not to do the righteous alternative. Sin, in this popular understanding, refers to matters of conscious volitional awareness of wrongdoing and the ability to do otherwise. This instinctive view of sin infects many Christians and almost all non-Christians. It has a long legacy in the church under the label Pelagianism, one of the oldest and most instinctive heresies. The Bible's view of sin

When we get straight how the active heart works vis-à-vis God, then the grace of Jesus maps straight onto human need.

idiosyncrasy—traffic in myth, lie, false consciousness, and perverse speculation.

The Bible locates the core motivational dynamic as existing in covenantal space, not merely in psychological, physiological, or psychosocial space. What God sees in us mocks the paradigm and contents of the encapsulated psyche that most of the older psychologies posited. It mocks the social psyche of many of the newer psychologies. It mocks the epiphenomenal psyche of the empty organism posited by behaviorists, medicalists, and sociobiologists. The intricacies of behavior, emotion, forgetting and remembering, attitude, and cognitive processes specifically come out of the God-relational heart. This is not simply a vague, religiously-toned generalization. What people do with the living God plays out into the details. In other words, our core psychological problem is sin, and the core resolution is awakening faith. Sin operates specifically here-and-now, not somewhere in the background in general.

certainly includes the high-handed sins where evil approaches full volitional awareness. But sin also includes what we simply are, and the perverse ways we think, want, remember, and react.

Most sin is invisible to the sinner because it is simply how the sinner works, how the sinner perceives, wants, and interprets things. Once we see sin for what it really is—madness and evil intentions in our hearts, absence of any fear of God, slavery to various passions (Eccl. 9:3; Gen. 6:5; Ps. 36:1; Titus 3:3)—then it becomes easier to see how sin is the immediate and specific problem all counseling deals with at every moment, not a general and remote problem. The core insanity of the human heart is that we violate the first great commandment. We will love anything, except God, unless our madness is checked by grace.

People do not tend to see sin as applying to relatively unconscious problems, to the deep, interesting, and bedeviling stuff in our hearts. But God's descriptions of sin often highlight the unconscious aspect. Sin—the desires we pursue,

the beliefs we hold, the habits we obey as second nature—is intrinsically deceitful. If we knew we were deceived, we would not be deceived. But we are deceived, unless awakened through God's truth and Spirit. Sin is a darkened mind, drunkenness, animal-like instinct and compulsion, madness, slavery, ignorance, stupor. People often think that to define sin as unconscious removes human responsibility. How can we be culpable for what we did not sit down and choose to do? But the Bible takes the opposite tack. The unconscious and semiconscious nature of much sin simply testifies to the fact that we are steeped in it. Sinners think, want, and act sinlike by nature, nurture, and practice. We instinctively return evil for evil. All psychological processes are sin-kinked. That is the most interesting and significant thing about them diagnostically.

The tendency to only see sin as behavioral and fully volitional carries enormous implications for counseling. When people see sin only as willed actions, then they must invent

presumably something else, and only remotely sin. When the deacon gets drunk and sleeps with his secretary, he sins. But when the drunkard and pornography habitué succumbs, he suffers alcoholism and sexual addiction. When a normal mother feels some anxiety about her children and pressures them, she ought to repent of her worry and domineering and learn to trust God. But when someone is a walking nervous breakdown, feels wracking anxiety about everything and manipulates everyone, then she suffers neurosis, or codependency, or borderline personality, or an adjustment reaction. Such thinking swings a wrecking ball into the church's ability to think about counseling the way Jesus thinks about it. A psychologically astute gaze will discern how sin plays out in people's problems—and in the things they do not think are problems. False psychologies obscure what the true psychology sees.

The modern psychologies are primarily wrong about psychology itself. Of course, their

Sin blinds, while preserving the illusion of seeing.

other categories to cover the blind chaos, insanity, confusion, compulsion, impulsivity, bondage, and fog that beset the struggling human soul. A few people, the consciously bad people, can then be usefully described as sinners. Everybody else might commit a few sins: "Of course, we're all sinners." But that is a weightless comment. The weighty action typically occurs elsewhere in the person, going on beneath or beside those occasional, undefined, generic sins. If sin is only conscious badness, then the person grappling with the chaos of the human condition must suffer something else: emotional or psychological problems, demons, mental illness, addiction, inner wounding, unmet needs and longings, adjustment reactions, or some other DSM-IV syndrome.

If a certain problem happens on occasion, and presumably under conscious control, then it might be sin. But if the problem happens a lot, and is driven by blind compulsion, then it is

descriptive acuity about certain features of human existence is challenging and informative. We should listen and learn. But the theoretical gaze always blinkers out the most significant data. It necessarily distorts the very things seen most acutely and cared about most intensely. It always fabricates significant data, because what is seen is an artefact of the way of seeing. Sin blinds, while preserving the illusion of seeing.

As far as secular psychologists know themselves, they want to understand and help people. But they are committed to defining the core, causal problem as *anything* except sin. Imagine a group of detectives examining a murder scene. The criminal has left countless clues. An hour before the crime he had been heard in a restaurant making loud threats. He dropped his business card at the scene of the crime. He stood in front of a surveillance camera that took pictures every three seconds. He left fingerprints everywhere, including on

the gun, which lay beside the body, and which he had purchased three days earlier. He made a credit card call on the victim's telephone moments after the crime. He was collared running away from the scene wearing blood-spattered clothes. Under questioning he is extremely agitated, alternating between contradictory excuses and sharp cries of remorse. But imagine further that the detectives are committed to find some other culprit, any other culprit, because they themselves are accomplices. All the evidence will be processed through a grid of intentions that forbids the truth. Secularity cannot help noticing the clues screaming out "sin," even as it cannot help rationalizing away the true interpretation.

A further problem almost invariably accompanies this defective view of sin. When people think of naming problems as "sin," they tend to react in one of two ways. One reaction is to punish sin. They become moralistic and condemning, morbidly curious about others' failings, morbidly depressed about their own failings. So when someone assumes a punitive stance towards sin, and assumes that others do the same, then calling something "sin" necessarily involves attitudes of condemnation of self or others. We all know, however, both by Scripture and instinct, that those who would help others need to love them, and those who would find help need to know love. In the interest, then, of bringing sweet necessities—grace, kindness, gentleness, patience, acceptance, tender solicitude, and sympathetic understanding—it seems that we must come up with other categories besides sin. The unexamined and ultimately bizarre logic assumes that we can be Christ-like towards people and ourselves only if a problem is defined as something other than sin—as a psychological problem, mental illness, or addiction.

People who would understand a problem as "sin" must presumably be punitive. But how curious it is that Jesus, whose gaze was, and is, utterly conditioned by the sin analytic, brought grace and kindness! In fact, to be conscious of how sin is the problem is the only way to experience grace for oneself and then to really love as Jesus loved. When we know ourselves accurately, we become recipients of spectacular

grace, which we are able to give away freely and patiently. Because they knew their own sins and God's grace, the high priests were able to "deal gently even with the ignorant and wayward" (Heb. 5:2; cf. 4:12-5:8). May we learn to know and do likewise.

The second reaction is to excuse sin. People euphemize, whitewash, relabel, evade, rationalize, and blame other things. They get defensive about themselves, and so try to excuse others. As we have said above, this strategy is at work throughout the modern psychologies. It is part of their allure that they pretend to present deep and determinative knowledge about the human soul, yet they evade the essential problem of the human soul. But when we know grace, we have no reason not to look frankly in the mirror at ourselves, and no reason not to help others look in the mirror. Indeed, we look in the mirror so that our hearts might be remade with shouts of exultation.

The Bible is crystal clear about all these things. This is Theology 101 applied remedially to contemporary bad psychologies in the interests of forming a sound psychology. These are the ABCs of a biblical theory of why we do what we do and what we should do about it. These concepts appear nowhere in any secular model, and rarely with any profundity in Christian counseling models. Instead, one finds counterfeits, abstractions of human existence ripped out of their true theistic context.

Let me pose a series of questions to the VITEX community, the community of people who believe that secular psychological models must make a vital external contribution to the construction of a Christian model of personality, change process, and counseling method.

- Why do the models of Christian counseling that have been proposed over the past fifty years not teach the biblical view?
- Why does one or another secular theory of human motivation almost inevitably control the theory at the punch line, where counseling engages the details of life lived?
- In particular, why have "need" theories that define significance, love, and self-esteem as the standard needs been so

prominent, when this is so alien to the gaze of God and to the psychological experience of Jesus?

- Why has the most typical, and apparently the most vital external contribution of psychology been secular motivation theory, the very thing that wrenches human life out of its true context and drains psychological experience of its essential characteristics?
- Why do integrationist theories not take seriously the specific, omnipresent nature of sin as the chief and immediate problem in the hearts and lives of those we counsel?

VITEX paid lip-service to sin as a general concept inhabiting the remote background. But where is the hard work and clear thinking that shows exactly how sin in specific, here-and-now, underlies those dysfunctions and dysphorias that plague those we counsel? Why do current Christian counseling models have such a hard time portraying the gospel of a sin-bearing and wisdom-giving Savior as intrinsic to all cure, as vivid, logical, and immediately relevant? Why do Christian counselors so often override the biblical view of the active heart by considering suffering (socialization, trauma, unmet needs, biochemistry, and genetics) to be determinative and finally causative? Why do Christian counseling models fail to recognize, mention, and make clear God's immediate and sovereign purposes in such sufferings? Why do they treat sin so vaguely, while other factors are considered deeper, more significant, and more interesting for both theory development and therapeutic attention? Why aren't counselors who would call sin "sin" credited with bearing such mercy and grace, both personally and from Christ?

The conservative church has often been

touched by Pelagian and semi-Pelagian tendencies. In some circles, that has fed moralism and tendencies towards punitive harshness. In other circles, that has fed a flight to other explanations for what is deep in the human heart. But the comprehensive Bible, and a faithful, systematic practical theology for curing souls, surely corrects all such defects by bringing amazing grace to sin-sick souls.

¹ Of course, the sinless Lamb of God was not Himself a sinner. But He entered the experience of temptation, immediately experiencing the dynamics of choice between light and darkness. And He entered the plight of sinners by identification, fully bearing the due wrath.

² Sin's very logic produces these distortions in the view of sin, for sin is elusive and evasive. As an aside, if I were to add another section to this article, I would discuss the interplay of situational variables with our sins in a cursed, redeemable world. The Bible is clear how God's sovereign and immediate purposes play out in our reactions to being sinned against, diverse somatic problems, sociocultural conditioning, the devil, suffering, misery, temptation, and so forth. There are many fine Christian books on suffering and on God's purposes within suffering (things about which the psychologies are ignorant); I will leave the reader to those sources.

IV. Educating, Licensing, and Overseeing Counselors

How should help be organized? As we have just seen, when we get our epistemological priorities straight, then our understanding of diagnosis and cure radically changes. Those same reordered priorities also bring radical implications for institutional structure. So far in this essay I have concentrated on epistemological and conceptual concerns. But some readers will have noticed that a concern about social structure has been simmering on the back burner. For example, in describing the VITEX position, I described not only a vital external contribution of theory and knowledge from secular disciplines, but also incorporation of the mental health professions into overall Christian ministry. This easy segue from epistemology to the sociology of professional practice needs to be analyzed, rather than assumed to be self-evident. Institutional structure is not the same thing as epistemology.

Evangelicals' earliest rationalization for psychotherapeutic professionalism utilized trichotomist anthropology. If human nature can be divided into body, spirit, and soul, then we need the doctor to treat the body, the pastor to treat the spirit, and the psychologist to treat the soul. Though highly dubious both theologically and logically, some Christians still buy the argument. Subsequent rationalizations for professional practice have more often tended to use theoretical epistemology. If we can learn something about people from secular intellectual disciplines, then mental health professions can provide leadership in cure of souls. That is equally dubious both theologically and logically—an intellectual sleight of hand—but it has been frequently assumed without examination.

We need to ponder and discuss two sets of questions. The first set of questions asks: What ought to be the social structure of counseling if we are to please the Shepherd of sheep? How should the cure of souls be organized? What institutional structures ought to be in place to

equip and oversee those who do face-to-face ministry? How should grass-roots counseling be delivered? What credentials and characteristics define leadership or professionalism, in the cure of souls? How should the faith and practice, the concepts and methods, of our counseling be both enriched and regulated so that we grow and stay faithful to God?

The second set of questions asks: What is the viability and validity of our current institutional arrangements? What are the implications for the church of Christ when its designated or presumed experts in the cure of souls are state-licensed, fee-for-service, mental health professionals without any organic linkage to ecclesiastical oversight? What are the implications for the church of Christ of its current lack of many crucial institutional structures that are necessary for caring for souls?

These questions are structural. They are matters of the sociology of pastoral care, of biblical ecclesiology, of the role and function of professions and social institutions. Our epistemological foundation, the Bible, addresses not only ideas and practices, but also social structure. Does the Holy Spirit intend that we develop a normative social institution for curing souls? The answer is yes. The church—as the Bible defines it—contains an exquisite blending of leadership roles and mutuality, of specialized roles and the general calling. It is the ideal and desirable institution to fix what ails us.

During the past fifty years, a new ministry role has emerged in the body of Christ, claiming legitimacy: the professional psychotherapist. In the 1950s, there were perhaps six main categories of full-time Christian workers: pastors, missionaries, chaplains, school teachers, parachurch evangelism and discipleship workers, and medical personnel. *Christian psychotherapist* would have been an oxymoron, rather like *Christian Mormon*, for reasons that had to do both with conceptual framework and social structure. But in recent decades, the

vocation of state-licensed psychotherapist has become viable and popular for Christians who want to help people. Christian psychotherapists have rapidly become a seventh category of full-time Christian work—sort of. The relationship between church and this autonomous, state-accredited, fee-for-service profession remains uneasy; it will always be uneasy. That uneasiness arises from structural contradictions that cannot be effaced.

I am not saying, by the way, that there is no place for various sorts of Christian workers besides pastors, missionaries, and the rest. I am not saying that there is no place for institutional innovation in church and parachurch structures, and for development of specialized ministries, including counseling ministries. I am not saying that there is no place for people with particular gifts, training, and experience in caring for and curing souls. What I am saying is that state-licensed professionalization of care for souls is not a desirable direction. A care-for-souls profession operating autonomously from the church is an anomaly.

they skirted the fact that Adams was most often exercised about sociology of professions, not epistemology.²

In fact, Adams's formal epistemology is a rather typically reformed transformationist position toward the observations and ideas of secular disciplines. He denied their necessity for constructing a systematic pastoral theology, but affirmed their potential usefulness when appropriated through Christian eyes. Epistemologically, Adams is a radical Christianizer of secularity, not a biblicistic xenophobe. He is no triumphalist, believing that Christian faith has already arrived at the sum of all wisdom, but believes that secular disciplines can both challenge and inform us.³ But Adams was sharply against psychology when it came to dubious theoretical models and when it came to giving state-licensed, secularly-trained mental health professions the reins to the face-to-face care of souls.⁴

The evangelical counseling community has only apparently been locked in an epistemological stalemate between VITEX and

The church is in trouble when its designated experts in the cure of souls are mental health professionals who owe their legitimacy to the state.

When VITEX advocates offer an explicit intellectual rationale for integrating secular psychology with Christian faith, they most often make epistemological arguments: secular science can make a constitutive contribution to Christian thinking about human nature and change.¹ But the social effect of importing psychotherapeutic professions has been at least as significant as the intellectual effect of importing secular personality theory. The VITEX community has historically ignored efforts to bring this question up for discussion. For example, Jay Adams repeatedly challenged the evangelical psychotherapy community on ecclesiological and professional grounds, but he was repeatedly rebutted by psychologists on epistemological grounds. When psychologists ritually charged Adams with adopting an against-psychology position epistemologically, denying common grace and general revelation,

COMPIN positions. The underlying reality is more complicated—and social. I suggest that “common grace” has often served as a symbolic resource by VITEX to evade discussion of the implications of professionalization. I also suggest that rhetoric about “the church” has often served as a symbolic resource by COMPIN to evade discussion of the actual state of the church regarding cure of souls. We must look at and address both what ought to be and what is, bringing the two together to design solutions.

What *ought* to be? The church is in trouble when its designated experts in the cure of souls are mental health professionals who owe their legitimacy to the state. Cure of souls is a decidedly *pastoral* function, in the broadest and deepest sense of the word. It is deeply problematic to operate as if the Word of God is useful, necessary, and sufficient for public ministry—preaching, teaching, worship,

sacraments—but that training and credentialing in secular psychology are necessary for private ministry. In the Bible, the same truths that address crowds address individuals. A preacher no more needs a Ph.D. in public speaking than a counselor needs a Ph.D. or Psy.D. in clinical psychology. Graduates of psychology programs should not have rights and honors to teach the church about the human condition. Fee-for-service psychotherapeutic professions should not have the rights and honors to practice the cure of souls. They have the wrong knowledge base, the wrong credentials, the wrong financial and professional structure.

According to the Bible, caring for souls—sustaining sufferers and transforming sinners—is a component of the total ministry of the church, however poorly the contemporary church may be doing the job. There is no legitimate place for a semi-Christian counseling profession to operate in autonomy from ecclesiastical jurisdiction and in subordination to state jurisdiction.⁵ The Lord whose gaze and will the Bible reveals lays claim to the cure of souls. If counseling is indeed about understanding and resolving the human condition, if it deals with the real problems of real people, if it ever mentions the name Jesus Christ, then it traffics in theology and cure of souls; it ought to express and come under the church's authority and orthodoxy.⁶

Psychotherapists are “ordained” by the state, not by the church. From the church's standpoint, they are lay persons, not professionals. They attempt exceedingly significant and delicate work in people's lives in a dangerously autonomous way, without guidance or checks from the church that has responsibility for those people's lives. If the books and articles are any guide to what is actually done in counseling, then they often mediate falsehoods. But however sincere the beliefs and intentions of individual practitioners and however close particular individuals may be to biblical thinking, the problem is structural. A hugely influential profession is operating by claiming title to the most personally intimate and weighty aspects of the cure of souls: addressing identity confusion, disordered motivation, distortions of functional beliefs,

broken relationships, responses to suffering, compulsive sins, and the like. In effect, functional authority over the souls of Christ's sheep is being granted to a semi-secular, unaccountable parapastorate. This invites trouble.

Christian counseling is currently out of control doctrinally. It lacks regulative ideas and regulative structures, though the Bible clearly gives both. The integration of psychology has provided a *carte blanche* for “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). One can arise as a leader in the Christian counseling world with little more than an apparently sincere profession of faith, an advanced secular degree, and authorship of a popular book.

We must face the question of professionalism, of the social structure for delivering counseling care. Creedal standards must also be formulated to guide and constrain the content, the theory, of private counseling. For example, a counselor's motivation theory will align the entire interpretive endeavor towards truth or error. The spectrum of Christian counselors currently mediates any and every motivation theory, however contradictory to Scripture. Nothing besides the good faith and reputation of individuals currently protects the evangelical psychotherapy professions (and pastoral counselors, too) from importing serious error into the church regarding cure of souls. Sadly, the flimsiness of current protections shows. The mind of the church about counseling is being shaped, and largely misshaped, by Christians of presumably good intentions who have their primary education and their professional identity outside of the church they claim to serve.

Psychotherapeutic professionalism is a defective institutional structure for cure of souls. Some leaders have expressed hope that they might eventually form a Christian version of state licensing boards, in order that Christians might qualify and accredit fellow Christian psychotherapists. But that would only bump the problem back a step. Those who claim expertise to teach and counsel others will still not be significantly accountable to the church and to orthodoxy for their faith and practice. To replicate an inherently defective social structure

within the body of Christ is no solution.

We have looked at what ought to be and the failure of mental health professions to match up to the structures enjoined by the Bible. What is the state of the church itself regarding cure of souls? It is not enough for those who believe in COMPIN to proclaim “the church, the church, the church!” That sounds good in theory. The Bible does locate care and cure in the body of Christ. But the church in reality does not currently have institutional structures in place to deliver the goods. Functional autonomy and potential for confusion and error are not only problems of mental health professionalism. Within the church herself, cure of souls operates in almost identical autonomy, with almost identical potential for theological and practical trouble.

Let me give a concrete example of the problem. I am part of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). One of the leaders in our congregation, AJ, is pursuing ordination. In order to be ordained in the PCA, to be recognized as competent to lead the people of God pastorally, AJ will be tested in many significant areas. His personal character must match the requirements for Christian maturity and seasoned fidelity to Christ. He must sustain examinations in Bible knowledge, in theology proper (view of God), in soteriology (view of salvation), in exegesis (his ability to get at what the Bible says), in church history (how we got where we are), in church government (how the machinery works), and in preaching (his ability to talk to a crowd).

But what about the cure of souls and counseling? AJ will not be examined on what he believes and how he practices ministry to individuals. He will present no case study of a disintegrating marriage or of a woman who binges and purges. There is no tradition of wisdom for the cure of souls into which AJ has himself been systematically disciplined. There is no institutional system—creedal, educational, qualifying, and supervisory—to help him think as biblically about counseling as he does about preaching and evangelism. His views on counseling will be matters of opinion and conscience. He can believe what he wants about counseling, as long as he is able to profess the right answer to the technical theological

question about sanctification.

Imagine, then, that AJ must deal with Roger, a troubled church member. Roger is emotionally volatile, given to fits of rage, bouts of depression, and restlessly pervasive anxiety. His relationships with others are estranged, and his work history is spotty. As a pastor in the PCA, AJ could take any of many fundamentally different approaches towards Roger. Perhaps Roger could be sent to a Meier New Life Clinic, put on a course of Prozac, and taught the principles of *Love is a Choice*. Perhaps AJ could counsel Roger according to Larry Crabb's *Inside Out* model, teaching him to explore his pain and disappointment at primary care-givers, in order to refocus his deep longings for relationship onto the Lord. Roger could be sent to a secular psychiatrist to get Prozac to level his moods.

AJ could attempt to identify and cast out demons of anger. Roger could be referred to a secular psychologist for cognitive-behavioral retooling that would inculcate stoic rationalism rather than a relationship with the living Savior. AJ could give Roger a course of study in basic Christian doctrines, or a concentrated dose of a particular doctrine, or a Navigators 2:7 study. AJ need not believe in counseling at all, but might assert that sitting under the preaching of the word, participating in corporate worship, and cultivating a more consistent devotional life will be sufficient to cure what ails Roger. Or AJ might seek to understand and counsel Roger according to the thought forms and practices of biblical counseling, as best he understood things (which might include components from the various options mentioned above). In any case it is his choice what Roger will receive. AJ will not be taught, questioned, supervised, or disciplined about that choice.

How can this problem be remedied? Let me identify five needs. First, the church needs to *become wise in the face-to-face care of souls*. We cannot practice, teach, or regulate what we do not know how to do or think. Much of the plausibility of the VITEX position does not arise from its intellectual plausibility, but from the practical reality that the church has been poor in understanding and enabling the processes of change. We must articulate wisdom conceptually, we must become wise methodologically, and we must incarnate

wisdom institutionally. Let us highlight the institutional. When people are troubled or troublesome, who will help them? Where is the social location of that aid? How long will it last? What forms of help are offered? Because all ministry costs money, how will help be funded? I believe that the COMPIN position will sound increasingly plausible as mature biblical counseling characterizes the grass-roots practice and structures of the church of Jesus Christ.

Second, we need *creedal standards* for the care and cure of souls, or at least a widely recognized corpus of practical theological writing. A system of practical theology is something to which we can subscribe, toward which we can aim educationally, on the basis of which we can be supervised and challenged regarding our faith and practice. Currently, the requisite “faith and practice” does not include views of counseling (except by extension and application from historical formulations that generalize about the nature of ministry, human

graduate education in mental health professions, or make students “ordainable” with those state-licensed professions. Few teach how to understand and counsel people in ways harmonious with the Bible’s vision for the cure of souls.

Fourth, we need cure of souls to become part of the church’s *qualifying procedures* that recognize fit candidates for ministry. Licensure, ordination, and accreditation usually occur on two levels. One level qualifies the pastoral leadership, ordination, *per se*. Skill in counseling individuals, couples, and families must become as important as doctrinal fidelity and as skill in speaking to crowds. The second level qualifies members of local churches to function in grass-roots ministry under the authority of pastor and elders. Here is where most skilled counseling, whether formal or informal, will occur. Most psychotherapists are laypersons—not professionals—ecclesiastically, whatever their secular credentials. Are they willing to submit

We need cure of souls to become part of the church’s *qualifying procedures* that recognize fit candidates for ministry.

nature, and progressive sanctification). Our faith and practice need to be extended to include personality theory, counseling methodology, dynamics of change, and delivery systems for the care of souls.

Third, we need *educational institutions* committed to the Bible’s distinctive model of understanding persons and change. For many years seminaries taught virtually nothing substantive about progressive sanctification and the particulars of hands-on, case-wise, heart-searching, life-rearranging care for souls. Since the mid-1960s, there has been a massive effort to create counseling programs and departments, but the results are very spotty in terms of consistent biblical thinking. Christian colleges typically contain a psychology department. But, typically, neither seminary nor college teaches things that significantly differ from what a secular institution would teach. Most institutions give a junior version of secular theory and methods, or prepare students for

their theories, methods, and structures to the church’s professional oversight, to subscribe to a distinctly Christian model of persons and change?⁷

Fifth, we need ecclesiastically grounded supervisory structures for cure of souls. The secular mental health professions usually offer continuing education, case supervision, and discipline for morals offenses (breach of trust in sexual, financial, or confidentiality matters). The church has often offered continuing education in the form of books, seminars, and doctor of ministry programs. The church has often disciplined for morals or doctrinal offenses. But cure of souls tends to drop through the cracks; it is an optional activity with optional beliefs and practices. Case supervision and case discussion are clear needs within local churches. Ecclesiastical supervision ought to be extensive over the faith and practice of cure of souls, both in local churches and at higher ecclesiastical levels. It matters what theories

and ideas are being mediated to counselees. A secular psychotherapist can freely adopt any of many theoretical orientations—behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, existential, somatic, and so on—or can hold theory loosely and function multimodally. The church does not believe in such theoretical diversity, but aims to refine its doctrine to cohere with the gaze of God revealed in the Bible.

Current ecclesiastical structures, functions, standards, and competencies are far removed from what I am proposing. Perhaps it sounds ludicrous even to propose that the church get a grip on cure of souls. Counseling is renegade from God and truth within the culture; counseling is largely a runaway from the church even within the church. But without such wisdoms of truth, practice, and social structure, we as the people of God court trouble. In the previous section we considered the prevalence of secular motivation theories in the cure of souls. Such ideas would not last five minutes if they were examined in a decent systematic theology class on human nature. But the shoe fits on the other foot, too. The current state of most ecclesiastical structures, theoretical development, and definitions of ministry for the cure of souls would not last five minutes in a secular counseling class on how to go deep and hang in for the long haul with a troubled person. In the pages of the Bible we have a social model the secular world can only dream about. The Bible's vision seamlessly joins specialized competency with community and peer resources. It animates both nurturing and remedial functions. It comforts those who suffer; it transforms those whose lives are misformed; and it does both at the same time. But in the practice of the extant church, both the defined specialists in curing soul and the community of care often fall woefully short of biblical understanding and competency.

Those who rightly tout the centrality of the church face a dilemma because the church has few structures that facilitate and regulate the hands-on cure of souls. What if the conceptual and structural defects of secularity among psychotherapists are mirrored by the intellectual and structural defects of religiosity among pastors and other Christian workers? It is fine to call Christians to practice and seek cure

of souls in submission to the local church. But the church needs to become a far better place to come under.

The intellectual leading edge of VITEX—What things can we adopt from the disciplines of psychology?—has masked a serious defect in the social structure for delivering counsel. To orient face-to-face cure of souls towards the mental health professions is fundamentally, even disastrously, wrong-headed. At the same time, the commitments of COMPIN—my own commitments—towards church-oriented counseling ministry are years and decades from significant institutional realization.

What must we do now? Jesus calls us to row our boat in the right direction, however far away the destination seems. He is committed to complete us together in the maturity of his wisdom. Ephesians 4 both gives our *modus operandi* and our goal. I hope this very article serves as one small “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) in the direction of perfecting the collective wisdom, love, and power of the people of God. We must each labor to disassemble autonomous professionalism rather than to further assembling it. We must each labor to make our professed loyalty to the church a significant reality rather than a hollow profession of good intentions.

Conclusion

I am firmly committed to that point of view I have labeled COMPIN. I do not think that the VITEX epistemological priorities can equip us to understand and help people. We need our own robust, comprehensive theory—our own paradigm—to guide our interaction with the “human documents” entrusted to our care. We need our own paradigm to guide interaction with the secular models that “read” and attempt to “edit” those documents in ways significantly different from God's reading and editing. We need our own paradigm to become incarnate institutionally. We need a fresh practical theology of the cure of souls. This is a corporate work-in-progress, an agenda, a presuppositional gaze that seeks to be faithful to the Word of our Redeemer. It coheres with orthodox theology about God, about persons, and about the inworking and outworking of grace. It is distinctly different conceptually and

structurally from the world's counseling models. It recognizes historical and current defects in the Bible-believing church's understanding of human nature and proposed remedies, but does not let that recognition rationalize a flight from biblical resources.

I propose no return to pietism, moralism, or exorcism, let alone sacerdotalism, doctrinalism, or any other reassertion of a "spiritual" sector of life. I am not inviting counselors to inhabit some windowless, sectarian hovel. I have sought to describe a large house with wide open doors and with picture windows gazing on all life, a habitation in which all God's people can thrive. I hold no bias against Christians who happen to have mental health education and credentials, but they must grasp that there is no inherent bias in their favor, either. They must recognize that their education and credentials have not prepared them to cure and care for souls, but for offering a different cure and care, a different wisdom.⁸ When it comes to cure of souls, the question for Christian mental health professionals, just as for Christians who have ecclesiastical credentials and education, is: Do you think and practice in fidelity to the mind of God? Whether in a local church or at higher ecclesiastical levels, whether in a parachurch or even "secular settings," only biblically wise people should qualify to counsel other people.

Counseling, when it comes into its own, will cohere intellectually and structurally with every other form of the church's ministry:

worship, preaching, teaching, discipleship, child rearing, friendship, evangelism, mercy works, missions, and pastoral leadership. Counseling ought to operate within the same worldview and with the same agenda that all ministry for Christ must have. I hope that what I have proposed, general as it is, merits the adjectives *biblical* and *Christian*. My recommendations are a creation forged from the Word of God for our time and place, for our questions, for our tumults. I have attempted to sketch faithful answers to burning contemporary questions. The church stands at a crossroads regarding these questions. We cannot go just any way, or both ways, or every which way, except to our harm. We could go bad ways, lurching either into sectarianism or into syncretism. But I hope that I have mapped the good way forward. I hope that I have described for our times one essential part of "the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:12f).

This essay began with a comment about the difficulty of finding and keeping one's bearings amid the tumults and animosities that gust through times of great revolution. It is worth closing on the note of clear confidence with which Paul closes 1 Thessalonians. One day we who love Christ will be collectively conformed to final wisdom: "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly.... He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23f).

¹ COMPIN only drops the word "constitutive" from that last sentence, and adds that because science is not neutral and objective, its findings must always be evaluated and reinterpreted by Christian presuppositions.

² Roger Hurdling's *The Tree of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985) is an exception to the ritual charge that Adams is against 'psychology'. He recognized Adams's principal willingness to learn from and interact with secular psychological knowledge and theory, but accurately observed that this was not a "developed argument" in Adams's overall writing and practice (285).

³ See Adams, *Christian Counselor's Manual*, 71-93; and *Lectures on Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 31f. See extended discussion of Adams's views of psychology in chapter 7 of David Powlison, "Competent to Counsel?: The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement." Adams's transformationist attitude towards culture is most apparent in his attitudes towards medicine. He is less interested in and more suspicious of the social sciences, but never denies that things can be learned

from anyone and everywhere. In *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (p. 80), he even cited a swami favorably! Adams's willingness to appropriate and rework insights from secular theorists is most evident in his discussions of moralistic therapies (e.g., Mowrer and Glasser) and existentialists (e.g., Frankl). No doubt, if Aaron Beck's cognitive-behavioral therapy had been prominent in the early 1970s when Adams wrote in this vein, Beck would have come in for treatment similar to what was extended to the moralists and existentialists. Adams rarely demonstrated the same sort of carefully critical appreciation when discussing psychodynamic and humanistic psychologists, which in my view is a weakness in how he applied what he believed. The playing field is level, and none of the secular psychologies are either uniquely privileged or uniquely hobbled in comparison to each other.

⁴ Jay E. Adams, *More than Redemption: A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1979), ix-15; Jay E. Adams, "Counseling and the Sovereignty of God," *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 11:2 (1993), 4-9.

⁵ It is not necessarily wrong for Christians to work within the secular mental health system, if they can do so without being forced to communicate false ideas, diagnostically and prescriptively, to those they counsel. Sometimes in God's common grace, Christians are given great freedom within an ostensibly secular setting. But Christians in such settings must realize that when they are barred from mentioning sin and Christ, then they can only describe problems, but they cannot accurately diagnose them; they can only suggest the outward shell of solutions, but they cannot get to the deep issues that plague the heart. Christians in such settings are still free to love people, to know them, and to provide various outward mercies, but they are limited to being relatively superficial and moralistic in the content of their counsel. Unfortunately, in my observation, well-meaning Christians in mental health settings typically are far more profoundly socialized and enculturated than they realize. They fail to recognize that they are working in a radioactive zone, and they absorb faulty diagnostic, explanatory, and treatment models without knowing that they have done so.

⁶ I do not mean that there is not a carefully circumscribed place for parachurch, specialized ministries. They can often serve useful auxiliary roles with a scope beyond what

a particular local church might be able to do. But they need to remember they are valuable but barely legitimate, and only ought to exist when they genuinely and consciously serve the interests of the community whose mature functioning will put them out of business. Autonomous psychotherapeutic professionalism competes with, rather than serves those interests.

⁷ The typical professional self-image of Christian mental health personnel is that they are at the top of the pyramid of wisdom, competency, and legitimacy; that pastors are at the mid-level; and that laypersons are at the bottom. The biblical image has true pastors at the top of the pyramid, with laypersons of all sorts functioning under their oversight. This biblical image must define our corporate task. Psychotherapeutic professionalism works at odds to that task, and each increment of progress in that task will mean a further repudiating and abandoning of professionalistic social structures as defective, redundant, and counterproductive.

⁸ Robert Roberts's *Taking the Word to Heart* is provocative in this regard.