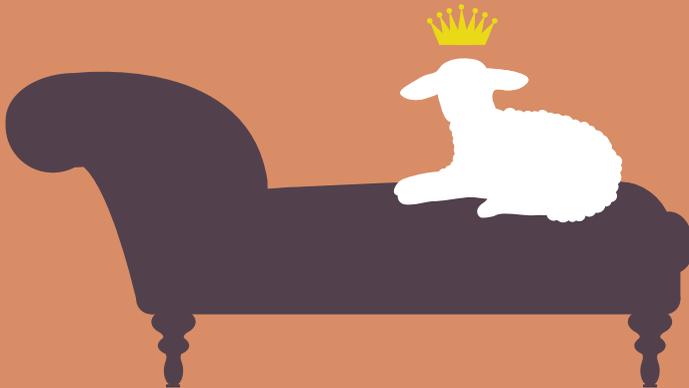


Counseling

& the Authority of Christ



by Russell D. Moore

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Counseling and the Authority of Christ:

A New Vision for Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” [Mark 1:22 ESV]

The story of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is seen most clearly not in the dusty volumes of a theological library, but in the gravestones of Cave Hill Cemetery. Here one can read names etched in marble that shaped entire epochs of Southern Baptist thought and life. James P. Boyce, E.Y. Mullins, and Dale Moody defined eras of Southern Baptist systematic theology. John Broadus did the same for preaching, A.T. Robertson and Frank Stagg for biblical studies, W.O. Carver for missiology, and Gaines Dobbins for Christian education. Among the legendary thinkers of Southern Seminary, perhaps no one has proven more influential in his discipline than Wayne E. Oates, the father of Southern Baptist pastoral care. The influence of Wayne Oates has made itself known to varying degrees in the pastoral care and counseling departments of all six Southern Baptist seminaries. More significantly, the Oates influence has transformed the language and thought patterns of generations of Southern Baptist preachers and congregations, most of whom never knew his name.

Southern Baptist churches in the twenty-first century face new and daunting challenges, challenges unrealized and unmet by previous generations. Southern Baptist churches recognize that the desperation of hurting people in our congregations is far deeper than can be answered by the facile promises of our therapeutic culture. Moreover, our churches are gradually awakening to the reality that the most basic questions of anger, anxiety, and family chaos are addressed in the ancient oracles of the Old and New Testaments. What is needed is to equip pastors with a biblically informed, theologically grounded worldview so they are able to wield the sword of the Spirit not just in their pulpits, but also in their counseling offices. Southern Seminary has the opportunity to cast a vision for biblical counseling that can offer an alternative to the therapeutic captivity of our culture. This new vision can recover the church as the focal point for human sanctification and the Spirit-illuminated Scriptures as the sufficient vehicle for human transformation.

Counseling, Psychology, and the Heritage of Southern Seminary

The genius of the Wayne Oates approach to pastoral counseling was its attempt to integrate biblical reflection with the insights of various streams of contemporary psychotherapy. In this model, Oates and his successors sought to be, in the words of one of his students, “bilingual” in both pastoral ministry and secular psychotherapy, able to “move back and forth with amazing agility.”¹ Moreover, the Oates tradition at Southern Seminary pioneered the professional field of pastoral care, through a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program that prepared counselors for state licensure and placement in private, state-sponsored, or church-based practices. Oates was aware that his approach to psychology and counseling was a new direction for Southern Baptist theological education. Indeed, his model met deep opposition from his colleagues, many of whom believed such a discipline did not belong in the School of Theology.² Oates prevailed and through his influence, combined with that of Professor D. Swan Haworth, the pastoral care model of counseling established itself as the default position of Southern Baptist thought on what previous generations would have called the care of souls.

While Oates’ approach was groundbreaking in Southern Baptist life, it was hardly novel. Oates appropriated a model of pastoral care that had been percolating among Protestant liberals in Europe and America throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, Oates himself identifies the integrationist stream in the therapeutic ministries of liberal Protestant pastors Harry Emerson Fosdick and Norman Vincent Peale.³ The pastoral care model may have sought to bifurcate, in one sense, theology from the insights of psychotherapy, but the project itself was theological from its very core. Walter Jackson, who taught in the program as an heir of the Oates tradition, locates the theological roots of the movement in the thought of Paul Tillich and his concept of correlation.⁴

The Oates model of pastoral care flourished at Southern Seminary from the 1960s to the early 1990s precisely because it was so consonant with the overall identity of the institution. Just as the counseling department sought to integrate the “findings” of Scripture with the “findings” of secular humanistic psychotherapeutic thought, the biblical studies department sought to integrate the “findings” of Scripture with the “findings” of the secular humanistic presuppositions of higher-critical biblical scholarship and archaeology. Just as the pastoral counseling department sought to train men and women for professional ministries as licensed clinical therapists, the School of Social Work sought to train men and women for professional ministries as licensed social workers.

In 1993, the conservative majority in the SBC launched a Reformation at the denomination’s flagship seminary with the election of President R. Albert Mohler, Jr., who led the seminary back to the confessional moorings of the institution’s founders. Mohler’s predecessor, Roy Honeycutt, warned that the conservative resurgence would

necessarily mean a retreat from the influence of the pastoral care model of psychology in what he saw as the “golden era” of Southern Seminary’s history. This is because, Honeycutt reasoned, “differing conceptual and philosophical conceptions” would now govern the curriculum. Moreover, he wrote, the SBC seminaries would also move away from the type of professional certification endemic to the pastoral care model. “Bit by bit with the change of faculty personnel, variation of program emphases, and the shifting of institutional mission statements, pastoral care/counseling in a seminary-based program will diminish substantially,” Honeycutt lamented.⁵ Honeycutt’s diagnosis was rational and historically informed. The CPE/pastoral care model of the Southern Seminary tradition was indeed founded on a theological worldview and on a ministry paradigm inconsistent with the theological worldview and conversionist outlook of the new era.

Counseling, Psychology, and the Mission of Southern Seminary

Counseling and psychology are not incidental to the callings of a minister of Jesus Christ. The pastoral call is, by definition, a call to “shepherd” the flock of God (John 21:15-17). The biblical revelation consistently describes Christian discipleship in terms of aspects of human existence that are now classified as “psychological” and “relational”—from marriage relationships to the rearing of children to the avoidance of wrath, anxiety, and envy. Indeed, the “fruits of the Spirit” of the new order and the “works of the flesh” of the old order are inherently “psychological” in that so many of them have to do with inner dispositions and motives of the mind, heart, and conscience (Gal 5:16-24).

Moreover, the very act of evangelism is impacted by the professional guild of secular psychology and counseling. Every sinner and every sinful society seeks to suppress the claims of the gospel (John 3:19-20). Our culture has co-opted therapeutic language to evade the biblical witness on issues of sin, righteousness, and judgment—the very issues that are at the heart of the gospel itself (John 16:8-11). The psychological deconstruction of the human conscience is so well underway in contemporary culture that humanities scholar Wilfred McClay notes that his university students simply cannot understand the plot of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. It is not that the book’s content is too intellectually cumbersome, but rather, as McClay puts it: “The central premise in Hawthorne’s imaginative world—his insistence that the weight of the sinful human past, in one’s own life, in the life of one’s family, and in the life of one’s city and country, can never be denied or wished away—is completely lost on a generation raised on smug therapeutic platitudes.”⁶ In one particularly pitiful example, *Modern Drunkard*, a newsletter for unrepentant alcoholics, counsels its readers to counter an “intervention” of family and friends by using the deterministic categories of psychology and psychologized religion. As the article puts it, the alcoholic should seek to “get God and science on your side.”⁷

This is increasingly easy to do. As one secular critic has observed, the therapeutic worldview of the current cultural climate has created a “new polytheism.” Instead of individuals fearing the caprice of the “gods” of thunder, pestilence, and famine, they now fear the caprice of “genes” for anger, alcoholism, and sexual irresponsibility.⁸ With this the case, a new form of psychotherapeutic soteriology is everywhere present in the culture our ministers seek to engage—a utopian soteriology that finds in the psychological establishment a pharmacological solution to virtually every human problem. As the White House Council on Bioethics has noted, therapeutic utopianism is at the root even of such trends as human cloning and the push for a “post human future.”⁹ As we note the skyrocketing rates of psychotropic drug use, we must not delude ourselves as to the way these trends deaden our culture to the biblical message of sin and redemption.

Political economist Francis Fukuyama (who is no friend of Christian orthodoxy) warns that the proliferation of therapeutic drugs such as Ritalin and Prozac will prove to have massive societal implications that few seem to have considered. Many of these drugs are so popular because they seek to assuage the conscience in much the same way as the “gay gene”—the psychological characteristics that wreak havoc in the soul are a freak of genetics and thus “nobody’s fault.”¹⁰ Fukuyama sees in the therapeutic establishment’s attempt to “medicalize everything” an attempt to escape the “constraints” even of gender:

There is a disconcerting symmetry between Prozac and Ritalin. The former is prescribed heavily for depressed women lacking in self-esteem; it gives them more of the alpha-male feeling that comes with high serotonin levels. Ritalin, on the other hand, is prescribed largely for young boys who do not want to sit still in class because nature never designed them to behave that way. Together, the two sexes are gently nudged toward that androgynous median personality, self-satisfied and socially compliant, that is the current politically correct outcome in American society.¹¹

For Fukuyama, the issue to fear is not Prozac, Ritalin, or any other drug in and of themselves, but rather the ways in which they are being used by the therapeutic establishment—ways that portend a chilling future for society’s concept of something as basic as what it means to be human. He warns:

If tomorrow a pharmaceutical company invented an honest-to-God Huxleyan soma tablet that made you happy and socially bonded, without any harmful side effects, it is not clear that anyone could articulate a reason people shouldn’t be allowed to take it. There are many libertarians on both the Right and the Left who argue that we should stop worrying about other people’s souls or internal states altogether, and let people enjoy whatever drugs they choose as long as they don’t hurt anyone else. If a cranky traditionalist objected that this soma wasn’t therapeutic, the psychiatric profession could probably be depended on to declare unhappiness a pathology and to put it into the DSM next to ADHD.¹²

These concerns are precisely on-target. The question is whether our pastors and church leaders are equipped to bring the mind of Christ to such concerns. Will our ministers be able to equip parents to think through the worldview implications of a school psychologist's recommendation to put their son on Ritalin? Will our pastors know what to say when neuropharmacology advances to the point of producing a pill that can neutralize feelings of guilt or fear of death? Will our pastors be able to answer—clearly and biblically—the abusive husband who utilizes therapeutic language to cover his guilt before God? Will a Southern Seminary alumnus be able to translate the same worldview he weaves through his preaching into his premarital counseling or his crisis intervention with a couple on the brink of divorce?

The stakes are seen to be even higher when we consider how the regnant therapeutic ethos has transformed even the conservative evangelical American subculture. Pastors routinely neglect the counseling of their people, “outsourcing” a key demand of the pastoral office, to “professional” psychologists and psychiatrists because ministers do not feel themselves competent to do even the most basic of counseling tasks. Moreover, many of our pastors and church leaders are so naïve of the assumptions and presuppositions behind contemporary psychological theories that they recast biblical teaching and preaching in decidedly psychotherapeutic terms—with disastrous consequences for the “otherness” of the biblical gospel. The tragedy of the therapeutic captivity of the evangelical church is demonstrated in the testimony of anthropologist Roger Lancaster, a homosexual gender liberationist who was reared in a conservative Free Will Baptist church. Lancaster points out to his secularist readers that “new forms of Christian therapy tap post-sixties self-actualization movements.” Nonetheless, he assures them, “my experience suggests that the spiritual ideal cannot long check the worldly impulse in these hybrid forms.”¹³

After decades of a psychologized evangelicalism, still failing to connect with secular society despite cloaking the gospel in its categories, it is clear that Lancaster is right on this point. This is especially pertinent given the theological challenges posed by the therapeutic culture for evangelical identity itself. As James Davison Hunter has warned, American evangelicalism has negotiated away to modernity much ground through “the synthesis of biblicism and humanistic or Freudian psychology” in which “the language of this perspective (e.g., awareness, assessment, self-actualization) is provided a biblical basis and given a spiritual relevance.”¹⁴ One need only walk through a popular evangelical bookstore to see the ways such categories have transformed the thought and witness of conservative American Protestantism. If Southern Seminary is to continue to lead a confessional resurgence within American evangelicalism, we must provide intellectual leadership in this vacuum.

Counseling, Psychology, and the Future of Southern Seminary

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has now moved to a radical redirection of our psychology and counseling department. The faculty of the mid-twentieth century was wrong to see counseling as outside the mission of the School of Theology. And Wayne Oates was correct to argue that counseling and psychology are to be taken seriously as theological disciplines necessary to the health of our churches. For too long, Southern Baptists have failed to take seriously the theological underpinnings and implications of psychology and counseling. It is time for us to lead the way with a new vision for biblical counseling that addresses the mission of our churches and engages the confusion of our culture.

The following measures have served to reorient our department of psychology and counseling. These include a theological reorientation and a methodological reorientation.

Theological Reorientation. Too often the typical evangelical approach to psychology and counseling had been a naïve acceptance of psychological theory as a theologically neutral discipline—thus baptizing the “findings” of the therapeutic establishment as the “insights of general revelation.” The theological problem here emerges from a defective understanding of general revelation—a defect that renders this model of “Christian” counseling similar at least in one aspect to theistic evolution, a “mediating” theory that meets the intellectual demands neither of orthodox Christian theology nor of the scientific authorities it seeks to engage.

The Southern Seminary confessional tradition indeed does hold to a robust doctrine of general revelation and a robust doctrine of common grace. The Old and New Testament Scriptures testify to a universal revelation of the Creator to all persons in the structures of the cosmos (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:19-20) and in human beings (Rom 2:14-16). The Bible does affirm, for instance, that one need not be a regenerate believer to be able to understand how to plow a field—agricultural knowledge can be gained by simply observing the way the world operates (Isa 28:24-27). The theology of general revelation at the heart of the integrationist experiment, however, claims far more for general revelation, and does so often at a strikingly simplistic level.

First of all, even many secularist intellectuals now find dubious many of the claims to objective “science” at the foundation of much of twentieth- and twenty-first century therapeutic thought. Neil Postman, for instance, notes that “scarcely anyone believes today that Freud was doing science, any more than educated people believe that Marx was doing science, or Max Weber or Lewis Mumford or Bruno Bettelheim or Carl Jung or Margaret Mead or Arnold Toynbee.”¹⁵ This is nowhere more easily seen than the current debates between health insurance companies and the psychological establishment as to whether psychotherapeutic practices are actually “science” at all. Such discussions have also divided the American Psychological Association (APA) itself, splitting the

organization into rival camps. As the New York Times reports: “At bottom, the dispute is over the nature of psychotherapy: Is it an intuitive process, more art than science? Or is it more a matter of a therapist following specific procedures that reliably help people get better?”¹⁶ If the psychotherapeutic guild itself cannot decide whether its discipline is science or something else, then why should evangelical Christians simply accept its claims as “general revelation”?

Moreover, the most popular “Christian counseling” models have not taken seriously the effects of the Adamic Fall on the human race and its intellectual projects. While the Scripture is indeed insistent on a universal revelation of God to humanity, it is equally insistent that this revelation is universally suppressed (Rom 1:18), jettisoned in favor of idolatry (Rom 1:21-25). This suppression is seen in the inherently religious foundation of contemporary psychotherapeutic ideologies. It is no accident, after all, that Sigmund Freud devoted significant research to “debunking” the Mosaic claims to monotheism.¹⁷ It is no mere coincidence that Carl Jung centered so much of his research on a transcendent alternative to orthodox Christianity.¹⁸ It is no mere coincidence that contemporary “sociobiology” seeks to “explain” the human quest for God in terms of evolutionary naturalism.¹⁹ Indeed, as New York University psychology professor Paul Vitz has noted, much of the history of contemporary psychotherapeutic theory amounts to an attempt to construct an alternative secularist theology of the self.²⁰

Our churches need pastors and leaders who understand depravity and the Fall to the degree that they are able to see the ways in which fallen human self-interest often masquerades as objective “science”—especially when this “science” seeks to explain and prescribe a cure for the fallen condition of humanity. This means that Southern Seminary must maintain a commitment to sola Scriptura in our counseling department no less than in our biblical studies, systematic theology, and evangelism departments. After all, Scripture claims its own authority and sufficiency in “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3 ESV). It claims that through the power of the oracles of God the man of God is “competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16b-17 ESV).

In recent years, a growing movement called “biblical counseling” has sought to educate the church on how best to return the biblical mandate for counseling to the churches. The biblical counseling movement suffers from many caricatures, and from the fact that there is considerable diversity within the movement itself. Nonetheless, the Westminster Seminary stream of biblical counseling, articulated by the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) and the *Journal for Biblical Counseling*, has provided a theologically hearty and biblically sound body of research on these matters. This model of biblical counseling has conserved the Reformation commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture and the centrality of the church, while clarifying helpfully the relationship between general and special revelation as it relates to psychology and counseling.

Methodological Reorientation. The ideological and theological incoherence of Southern Seminary’s counseling department led to another pressing issue—the ways in

which we were providing practical training in the field.

Because of the demands of licensure, the model under which many schools train students for ministry includes conditions that often prohibit them from evangelizing, sometimes that even prohibit them from praying in the name of Jesus or to God as Father. Moreover, the demands of licensure have driven our curriculum, since “professional” counselors must be steeped in humanistic psychological theories if they are to be taken seriously by the psychotherapeutic guild.

If licensure and clinical credentials require our students to be sub-evangelical in any arena of ministry, then licensure is asking too much. We would not ask our students to train for missions by interning with the global missions agency of the United Church of Christ, through which students would participate in social ministries and yet not be allowed to witness explicitly to the gospel. Not only would such a practice violate our convictions, it would not prepare adequately our students for the Great Commission endeavors we and our churches expect from them.

Just as it was impossible to train licensed social workers and remain a confessional institution, it is impossible to train licensed therapists and remain a confessional institution. Moreover, even apart from these more basic concerns, we do not currently have a base of church- and clinic-based sites that share our confessional stance in order to maintain an acceptable practicum-based education.

But the issues here are more complex than simply the lack of evangelical conviction at our practicum sites. The basic problem is the power structure of the institutionalized arrangements of psychotherapy. David Powlison is correct when he argues that power is wielded by the institutionalization—even in “Christian” counseling—of secular theories and therapies through clinics, hospitals, accrediting boards, licensing laws, professional societies, and lines of referral. Powlison asserts that the institutional structures of autonomous mental health professionalism “tacitly shape many assumptions that work against faith.”²¹

The stakes are especially high in light of the long-term future of Southern Seminary. The shift toward training therapists has had profoundly negative implications on once-great evangelical institutions such as Denver Seminary, Fuller Seminary, and even now Western Seminary. No such shift would ever happen under the current leadership of Southern Seminary, but what about thirty to fifty years from now? How can we train a new generation of Southern Baptist pastors and scholars who will know how to respond to the therapeutic culture—and pass on that heritage—long after the current leadership is in Cave Hill cemetery?

Some would appeal to the broadness of the Kingdom of God to explain the need for a parachurch-focused therapeutic model of counseling. And yet, such an appeal to the Kingdom ignores the fact that the New Testament identifies the local congregation as the nexus of Kingdom activity in the present age (Eph 1:21-23). Thus, against the competing voices of the powers of this age, the church is what the apostle Paul calls the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15 NASB). And, Scripture further affirms, the congregation is

the vehicle for transforming individual believers toward maturity in Christ (Eph 4:1-5:20). This is why our primary mission at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is to train ministers for the churches—not therapists for counseling centers. The central thrust of our counseling department then should focus, not on licensure, but on equipping pastors and other ministers to counsel the people of God from the Word of God.

From Integration to Transformation: Proposals for Reform.

1.) The Department of Christian Counseling and Marriage and Family Studies has been renamed the Department of Biblical Counseling and Family Studies.

This is much more than a cosmetic change. It sends a profound signal that Southern Seminary is distancing itself from the current atmosphere in “Christian counseling” toward an approach that sees Scripture as foundational to the task. The terms “pastoral care” and “pastoral counseling” should be considered terminology of Southern Seminary’s past, not its future, at least until these terms can be reclaimed from the therapeutic and syncretistic connotations of the Oates/integrationist streams.

2.) Southern Seminary no longer trains professional therapists for licensure, but is initiating a new direction of training pastors and church leaders for the task of counseling.

Southern Seminary publicly sets forth that our counseling program is oriented toward training pastors, missionaries, and church leaders to counsel. We are no longer in the business of training professional therapists and licensed clinical psychologists. This does not mean that professional counselors will not come to Southern Seminary for training. What it means is that they will piggyback on training geared for pastors, and not the other way around. I would compare the situation to that of an M.D. who wishes to serve as a medical missionary. Southern Seminary is equipped and eager to train him theologically—including in ways to integrate his medical training with a biblically informed worldview. We are not—and should not be—equipped, however, to run a medical school.

3.) Southern Seminary has adopted a manifesto of institutional conviction on the direction of our counseling department. This consists of two documents, providing determinative boundaries for classroom instruction, curricular development, and faculty recruitment.

The first of these documents is the Southern Baptist Convention’s 2001 resolution, “On the Sufficiency of Scripture in a Therapeutic Culture” [Appendix A]. The second is “Affirmations and Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling” by David Powlison [Appendix B].

4.) Southern Seminary has implemented new degree programs that reflect the directional changes toward biblical counseling at Southern Seminary.

Working in consultation with biblical counselors across the country, the following new degree programs have been developed: the Master of Divinity with Emphasis in Biblical Counseling (M.Div./BC) and the Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling (MABC). The M.Div./

BC and the MABC are completely new degree programs with radically different courses and degree requirements. These two degrees will be the most academically rigorous and practically focused in the evangelical world.

The M.Div/BC is designed for pastors and other church leaders who seek to do a significant amount of counseling from the framework of a biblical counseling model. The degree will be rich with biblical and theological studies—including a required course in biblical hermeneutics. This is essential for the biblical counseling emphasis on the normative authority of divine revelation for the counseling task. Moreover, the degree offers a firm foundation of theoretical and practical preparation for counseling itself, with a strategic array of classes in the most pressing issues of biblical church-based counseling.

The MABC serves those students called to the counseling task of the church, though not necessarily to the office of pastor. The degree blends academic/classroom experience with practical training in the task of biblical counseling.

Conclusion

This new vision for biblical counseling is historic and groundbreaking in Southern Baptist life. It means moving beyond the clinical professionalism of what historically has been dubbed “pastoral care” in the therapeutic guild, but it also means recovering true “pastoral care” as defined by the Scriptures. The ramifications of this course correction will be felt in congregations throughout the SBC and the evangelical world. It ultimately is not about curricular changes or faculty additions, but about the love of Christ for hurting people in the church and in the world.

These changes better equip our pastors and church leaders to counsel the couple contemplating divorce after years of marital strife. This new vision better equips pastors and church leaders to talk with the anorexic teenager who sits tearfully in the church office. It better equips pastors and church leaders to aid parents at the point of desperation over a “strong-willed child.” Above all, this new vision for biblical counseling equips our pastors and church leaders to trust the Word of truth, to shepherd the flock of God, and to lead congregations toward maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11-16).

The gospels repeatedly assert the authority with which Jesus taught from the Scriptures in synagogues. Indeed, the gospels tell us that this “authority” is what caused the crowds to marvel at the distinctiveness of Jesus’ message, as compared to that of the scribes (Mark 1:22). This was not simply the tone of Jesus’ voice, or the gravity with which he proclaimed the dawning of the Kingdom. Rather, the Bible asserts that his word carried the kind of authority that transformed reality (Luke 4:36)—including the reality of hurting people groaning beneath the cosmic curse of sin and death (Rom 8:20-23).

This authority has been given to the Body of Christ (Matt 28:16), not through the display of miracles, but through the transformative and authoritative proclamation of the

gospel of the Kingdom (Matt 28:19-20). As evangelical Christians, we are defined by our belief in the supernatural transformative act of the new birth. As Baptist Christians, we are defined by our belief in a regenerate body of radically transformed individuals, knit together by a common Spirit. As confessional Christians, we are defined by our belief in the transformative, sanctifying power of the Word of God.

A new vision for biblical counseling at Southern Seminary reiterates that the gospel carries that kind of counter-cultural authority. If God gives us grace, the next generation of pastors and church leaders will be equipped to shepherd hurting people and rescue splintering families. And, as in the synagogues of Galilee, perhaps a watching culture will be astonished by their teaching, for they will teach as those who have authority, and not as the therapists.

Appendix A

“On The Sufficiency of Scripture in a Therapeutic Culture”

A Resolution Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention

St. Louis, Missouri

June 2002

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists are committed to the authority, sufficiency, and relevance of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15-17); and

WHEREAS, The Bible teaches that human beings are created in the image of God—made by Him, like Him, and for Him (Genesis 1:27-28)—and that because of sinful rebellion against the Creator, our entire being suffers from sin’s corruption (Genesis 3:6-19; Ecclesiastes 9:3; Romans 1-3); and

WHEREAS, All aspects of our lives—including our spiritual, moral, and psychological conditions—are to be informed and governed by the application of and obedience to Holy Scripture (1 Corinthians 10:31); and

WHEREAS, In this therapeutic culture, physicians and counselors often ignore human sin and its effects, neglect our most fundamental human and spiritual needs, and therefore, misunderstand our condition, mistreat our problems, and sometimes unintentionally do more harm than good; and

WHEREAS, An uncritical acceptance of the therapeutic culture too often has infected our pulpits, ministries, and counseling (Colossians 2:8); and

WHEREAS, Our churches often have neglected our God-ordained responsibility for the care and cure of souls, becoming practically ineffective, both marginalizing ourselves from the culture and being marginalized by the mental health establishment; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, June 11-12, 2002, affirm Christian counseling that relies upon the Word of God rather than theories that are rooted in a defective understanding of human nature (John 17:17); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm that any method worthy of the name “Christian counseling” must address the root of our problems and reveal the crux of God’s solution—the redemptive work of Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, by which the depths of sin and the fullness of grace are made known (Hebrews 4:12-16); and be it further

RESOLVED, That, while we affirm that there are real conditions that warrant legitimate medical treatment, we reject the assumptions of the therapeutic culture that offer a pharmacological solution for every human problem; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we call on all Southern Baptists and our churches to reclaim practical biblical wisdom, Christ-centered counseling, and the restorative ministry of the care and cure of souls.

Appendix B

“Affirmations and Denials: A Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling”

By David Powlison

Journal of Biblical Counseling 19 (2000): 18-25.

I. True knowledge about people and counseling practice

We *affirm* that the Bible is God's self-revelation in relation to His creatures, and, as such, truly explains people and situations.

We *deny* that any other source of knowledge is authoritative for explaining people and situations.

We *affirm* that the Bible, as the revelation of Jesus Christ's redemptive activity, intends to specifically guide and inform counseling ministry.

We *deny* that any other source of knowledge is authoritative to equip us for the task of counseling people.

We *affirm* that wise counseling requires ongoing practical theological labor in order to understand Scripture, people, and situations. We must continually develop our personal character, case-wise understanding of persons, pastoral skills, and institutional structures.

We *deny* that the Bible intends to serve as an encyclopedia of proof texts containing all facts about people and the diversity of problems in living.

We *affirm* that the ideas, goals, and practices of counseling must cohere explicitly with the historic creeds, confessions, hymns, and other wise writings that express the faith and practice of the church of Jesus Christ.

We *deny* that the wisdom of the past sufficiently defines the issues of counseling ministry for today, as if the requisite wisdom were simply a matter of recovering past achievements.

We *affirm* that the Scripture defines and speaks to the gamut of problems in living for all people in all situations.

II. The givens of the human condition and the scope of biblical truth

We *affirm* that human beings are created fundamentally dependent on and responsible to God. People can only be understood when these realities control the counselor's gaze.

We *deny* that any form of autonomy severs people from dependency on God.

We *deny* that any form of determinism neuters moral accountability to God.

We *affirm* that the ideal for human functioning is faith working through love. Such love for God and neighbor is the standard against which to specifically understand what is wrong with people. It is the goal to which counseling must specifically aspire.

We *deny* that any other standard or goal is true.

We *affirm* that evil, done by us and happening to us, is the fundamental and pervasive problem in living. Our own sin, in all its facets and dimensions, is primary and self-generating. The circumstances that happen to us provide both provocative context (“trials and temptations”) and just consequences (“reap what you sow”) for our moral response, but do not determine the quality of our moral response.

We *deny* that any other diagnostic system is valid, universal, or penetrating.

We *deny* that nature and/or nurture determine the quality of our moral response.

We *affirm* that the Scripture defines and speaks to the gamut of problems in living for all people in all situations.

We *deny* that biblical truth is limited to a narrow sphere of “religious” or “spiritual” beliefs, activities, persons, emotions, and institutions, separated from the other spheres of daily life.

We *deny* that any particular realm of human life can be sectored off as the unique province of the theories, practices, and professions of the modern psychologies.

III. The solution to the sin and misery of the human condition

We *affirm* that the Bible teaches, invites, warns, commands, sings, and tells the solution for what troubles humankind. In the good news of Jesus Christ, God acts personally. In word and deed, He redeems us from sin and misery through the various operations of His past, present, and future grace. God uses many means of grace, including the face-to-face conversations of wise counseling.

We *deny* that any other solution or therapy actually cures souls, and can change us from unholy to holy, from sinners to righteous, from insanity to sanity, from blindness to sightedness, from self-absorption to faith-working-through-love.

We *affirm* that God’s providential common grace brings many goods to people, both as individual kindnesses and as social blessings: e.g., medical treatment, economic help, political justice, protection for the weak, educational opportunity. Wise counseling will participate in and encourage mercy ministries as part of the call to love.

We *deny* that such goods can cure the soul’s evils. When they claim to cure the human condition, they are false and misleading, competing with Christ.

We *deny* that Christless counseling—whether psychotherapeutic, philosophical, quasi-religious, or overtly religious—is either true or good. Their messages are essentially false and misleading, competing with Christ.

IV. The nature and means of change

We *affirm* that the growth process for which counseling must aim is conversion followed by lifelong progressive sanctification within every circumstance of life. Our motives, thought processes, actions, words, emotions, attitudes, values—heart, soul, mind, and might—increasingly resemble Jesus Christ in conscious and evident love for God and other people.

We *deny* that there is any method for instantaneous or complete perfection into the image of Jesus Christ. The change process continues until we see Him face-to-face.

We *deny* that the processes and goals labeled self-actualization, self-fulfillment, healing of memories, meeting of psychological needs, social adaptation, building self-esteem, recovery, individuation, etc., describe valid aims of counseling, though they may evidence analogies to elements of biblical wisdom.

We *affirm* that the Bible explicitly teaches the fundamentals of counseling method by precept and example. Through speaking the truth in love, we act as tangible instruments of God's grace in the lives of others.

We *deny* that the modern psychotherapies rightly understand or practice wise counseling methodology, though they may evidence analogies to elements of biblical wisdom.

V. The social context and scope of counseling ministry

We *affirm* that the Spirit and the Word create the church of Jesus Christ, and that the people of God should provide the personal, social, and institutional loci for speaking the truth in love.

We *deny* that the mental health professions and their institutions have the right to claim any sector of problems in living as their particular prerogative. Even those who suffer mentally disabling medical problems need godly counseling.

We *affirm* that the aims, content, and means of counseling ministry are of a piece with public ministry, the spiritual disciplines, and mercy ministry. These are different aspects of the one redemptive ministry of Christ.

We *deny* that the persons and problems addressed by the activity termed “psychotherapy” fall outside the intended scope of the ministry of Christ in word and deed.

We *affirm* that the primary and fullest expression of counseling ministry occurs in local church communities where pastors effectively shepherd souls while equipping and overseeing diverse forms of every-member ministry.

We *deny* that the institutional forms and professional roles of the mental health system provide a normative and desirable framework for counseling ministry.

We *deny* that current forms of church life and conceptions of the pastoral role are necessarily adequate and normative as vehicles to train, deliver, and oversee effective counseling ministry. The body of Christ needs institutional reformation, development, and innovation.

We *deny* that parachurch and other cooperative forms of counseling ministry in the body of Christ are inherently wrong.

VI. God's providence and the interplay between His common grace and the intellectual-practical effects of sin

We *affirm* that numerous disciplines and professions can contribute to an increase in our knowledge of people and how to help them. Scripture teaches a standpoint and gaze by which believers can learn many things from those who do not believe.

We *deny* that any of these disciplines and professions can align and constitute a system of faith and practice for wise counseling.

We *affirm* that a commitment to secularity distorts disciplines and professions fundamentally and pervasively. People who do not think and practice in submission to the mind of Christ will misconstrue the things they see most clearly, and will miscarry in the matters about which they care most deeply and skillfully.

We *deny* that secular disciplines and professions are entirely benighted by the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic effects of sin. The operations of God's common grace can cause unbelievers to be relatively observant, caring, stimulating, and informative.

We *affirm* that the personality theories are essentially false theologies, and the psychotherapies are essentially false forms of the cure of souls. Even the more descriptive and empirical psychologies are significantly skewed by secular presuppositions, and their findings need to be reinterpreted by the biblical worldview.

We *deny* that psychological research, personality theories, and psychotherapies should be viewed as "objective science," as that term is usually understood. Neither should they be seen as extensions of medicine and medical practice.

VII. Good news for psychologized people in a psychologized society

We *affirm* that mature, presuppositionally consistent, loving, and efficacious biblical counseling will be a powerful evangelistic and apologetic force in the modern world.

We *deny* that the most important part of the church's interaction with the modern psychologies is to discover what can be learned from them.

ENDNOTES

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- ³*Ibid.*, 132.
- ⁴Walter C. Jackson, "A Brief History of Theological Education Including a Description of the Contribution of Wayne E. Oates," *Review and Expositor* 94 (1997): 514.
- ⁵Roy L. Honeycutt, "Pastoral Counseling in Theological Education," *Review and Expositor* 94 (1997): 547.
- ⁶Wilfred M. McClay, "Land of Hope and Fear," *Weekly Standard*, 16 August/23 August 2004, 32.
- ⁷"Works Every Time," *Harper's*, March 2004, 21. The article is an excerpt from "How to Ace an Intervention," in the Spring 2003 issue of *Modern Drunkard* magazine.
- ⁸Cullen Murphy, "The Path of Brighteousness," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2003, 174.
- ⁹Leon Kass, ed., *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- ¹⁰Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 49.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, 51-52.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, 56.
- ¹³Roger N. Lancaster, *The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Science and Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 350, n. 8.
- ¹⁴James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 95.
- ¹⁵Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Random House, 1992), 153.
- ¹⁶Benedict Carey, "For Psychotherapy's Claims, Skeptics Demand Proof," *New York Times*, 10 August 2004, D1.
- ¹⁷Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Random House, 1939).
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- ¹⁹See, for instance, Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic, 2001).
- ²⁰Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).
- ²¹David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 216.

