

*The Christian World View of
Psychology and Counseling*

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What is the Coalition on Revival?

The Coalition on Revival is a network of evangelical leaders from every major denominational and theological perspective who share a vision for and a commitment to revival, renewal, and reformation in Church and society in America.

People of Anabaptist, Arminian, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Wesleyan denominational backgrounds are all represented among COR's leaders. Pre-, a-, and post-millennialists are cooperating with each other, sharing the exciting task of getting God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven insofar as that is possible between now and whenever Christ comes back to Earth. Charismatics and non-charismatics, covenant and dispensationalist theologians, have joined arm in arm in prayer and hard work to see revival, renewal, and reformation in the Christian Church and the American culture.

COR's vision is to see Christians everywhere doing all they can in the power of the Holy Spirit to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), in every aspect of life. Toward that end, we have developed a series of worldview documents that set forth what we believe are the fundamental and essential points of the total Christian world and life view. The COR worldview documents state what we believe are the biblical principles for all spheres of human life including theology, evangelism, discipleship, law, civil governments, economics, education, family, medicine, psychology and counseling, arts and media, business and professions, and science and technology. We believe that the COR worldview documents state where the entire Church must stand and what action it must take to accomplish its task in the remaining years of the Twentieth Century and on into the next century.

COR steering committee members from all walks of life were joined by many hundreds of other interested Christian scholars, pastors, and laymen in developing the COR documents during many series of workshops and conventions. Each document therefore, reflects input from theologians, philosophers, professionals in their respective fields, pastors, and lay Christians. We have sought to avoid denominational and theological bias in the documents; our aim has been to focus on principles so fundamental that we are convinced no Bible-believing Christian who studied the major questions related to each sphere of life would come to a contradictory conclusion.

COR views itself as a "Bible obedience, holiness movement" that crosses denominational and theological lines. The next step on its agenda, now that its basic documents are complete, is to disseminate them widely and to educate hundreds of thousands of Christians on how to make Christ Lord of absolutely every aspect of life. We plan to do that through publications, and through seminars, and training workshops in the major cities of America and Canada. COR will also work in cooperation with other Christian networking groups to help unify the pastors in major population centers around the vision of mobilizing their people to "Get God's will done in their city as it is in heaven" to whatever degree that is possible before the return of Christ. We believe America can be turned around and once again function as a Christian nation as it did in its earlier years. We believe that wherever the pastors of any city in the world join together in unity to make Christ Lord of every sphere of life, and, with Spirit led strategy, mobilize their people into a unified spiritual army; that city can and will become "a city set upon a hill" and be "a place where righteousness dwells."

About the 17 World View (Sphere) Documents

COR developed the 17 World View Documents, which set forth what we believe are fundamental and essential Biblical principles governing 17 major areas or *spheres* of human life and activity: law, government, economics, business and professions, education, art and media, medicine, science and technology, psychology and counseling, Christian unity, local and world evangelism, discipleship, helping the hurting, educating Christians about social and political moral issues, revitalizing Christian colleges and seminaries, marriage and the family, and pastoral renewal. These documents offer Christian leaders concise and comprehensive Biblical principles of how to apply the Truth of the Bible to all spheres of life and ministry. Each document includes short, creed-like statements of affirmation and denial that we believe state non-negotiable Biblical truths for that sphere of reality.

The 17 World View Documents were developed within 17 different committees made up of leaders with experience and expertise in the 17 different fields over an intensive three-year period of dialogue, critique, editing, and finally, a consensus conviction. Sixty of COR's National Steering Committee members with over 300 other theologians, pastors, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and Christian workers made up the 17 committees. COR sends forth these documents to the Church at large with the prayer that they may be used by God's Spirit to get God's will done on earth, as it is in heaven—to whatever degree that is possible prior to the Return of Christ.

Preface

The modern Christian has access to more knowledge, better material blessings, more disposable time, and more professional help than his predecessors. Yet frequently he is self-indulgent in his focus, confused in his concepts of life, and racked with inner pain.

The large number of books about personal wholeness in Christian bookstores should convince the observer that attempts are being made to solve these problems. But on closer inspection, he will find a lack of consensus. If he knows some theology he will also discern a non-theistic theory and practice, designed to correct human maladjustment, spliced into Biblical concepts. The result is a mixture of conflicting and often erroneous concepts. Jehovah is wedded to a golden calf.

The language in these books is often that of secular psychology and a culture that gauges life by the degree of pleasure and fulfillment it produces. In counseling this expectation translates into the goal of helping clients or counselees feel good.

The Demands of the Christian Counselor

Psychology and counseling, at their core, deal with the nature of man. What a practitioner does is inextricably bound to his system of assumptions. Counseling theory and practice are by nature deeply theological. It is impossible to help people without implementing theological beliefs.

Thus, the Christian counselor faces two demands. First, he *must begin* with the Word of God and a consistent grammatical, historical, and theological interpretation of it. He must not move from the study of man and his social context back to the Bible. A systematic understanding of the Word of God is his standard, not man and his social context.

Second, his methodology must be consistent with a theological interpretation of man and man's social context. He cannot choose, or allow his counselee to choose, goals—or methods to achieve those goals—that violate Biblical principles.

Introductory Definitions

Psychology is the study of man's thinking, behavior, and emotions, and of how they interrelate. The presuppositions of the person who develops and practices counseling directly determine his theory and methods. More accurately, the person's philosophy *is* his theory of psychology. Thus, the Christian should use either *theology* or *anthropology* rather than psychology as his term to denote theory.

Further, *counseling* is the best term for the Christian to use in denoting the application of psychology/theology because it is a Biblical concept and does not have a secular connotation, as do psychology and psychotherapy.

In the following affirmations and denials, however, we will retain *psychology* in some places instead of theology or anthropology, to communicate to a predominately secular mindset. We will always use *counseling* to refer to application and what many refer to as psychotherapy. *Counselor* will always refer to the person who makes the application. *Counselee* is the person to whom the application is given, rather than “client” or “patient.” *Mental illness* will be defined in a restrictive sense. What a *psychiatrist* does is considered as identical with the practice of a counselor except that in some countries, the former is licensed to give medications along with his “psychotherapy.” Although it is best to avoid psychological terms altogether, we will use some, especially in labeling, to communicate clearly the issues we address.

Statements of Affirmation and Denial

Epistemology

1. Authority

We affirm that the Bible is the authoritative source of knowledge for psychology and counseling as in all other areas of life.

We deny that any other source of knowledge is equally authoritative with the Bible for psychology and counseling.

2. Applicability

We affirm that the subject matter of counseling is precisely the same as that of the Bible and, therefore, the Bible completely equips us with the theory and principles of counseling.

We deny that the Bible is inadequate for the theory and practice of counseling.

3. All Truth

We affirm that all truth is God’s truth; that all truth is thoroughly consistently with Biblical revelation in its presuppositions, categories, methodology, conclusions, and application, all of which are related as a unified system; that all error derives from Satan; and that attempts to establish truth at the level of methodology, application, and conclusions without a direct correlation with underlying Biblical presuppositions are doomed to error.

We deny that truth can be established only at the level of methodology, application, and conclusions, without a direct correlation with the underlying presuppositions, which must be Biblical.

4. Psychology

We affirm that psychology is the study of man's thought, behavior, and emotions, and of how they interrelate; that counseling is the direct application of Biblical direction (as the norm) to man's thoughts, behavior, and emotions; and that psychology cannot be separated from spirituality.

We deny that man's thoughts, behavior, and emotions can be understood or directed righteously without Biblical knowledge.

5. Eclecticism

We affirm that counseling is unavoidably dependent on the theory of man (anthropology) believed by the psychologist or counselor, and that the light of Biblical revelation is incompatible with the darkness of human knowledge without revelation.

We deny, therefore, that psychology and counseling should be eclectic.

6. Scientific Method

We affirm that the scientific method is useful in carrying out the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 to subdue and have dominion over creation when the investigators have Biblical presuppositions and when the Bible does not directly give us the answers we seek; that the use of the scientific method is entirely controlled by the presuppositions of the investigators and therefore the results are a pronouncement of faith rather than of scientific fact; and that the faith nature of the results of scientific investigation is evidenced by the investigators' proselytizing intent, that is, their attempt to transform man into their idea of what man should be.

We deny that the scientific method can ever be applied in psychology without its being thoroughly determined by the presuppositions of the investigators.

7. Language

We affirm that human problems can be adequately understood, described, and corrected by Biblical language, categories, or concepts, and that the use of terms and language common to psychology is an inaccuracy that is dangerous to Biblical faith and the personal health of counselees.

We deny that psychological or medical diagnoses are sufficient to understand, describe, and correct the problems of counselees.

8. Integration of Psychology and Theology

We affirm that the integration (as it denotes the merging and agreement of equals) of secular psychology with Biblical revelation violates the doctrines of the inerrancy, infallibility, and sufficiency of the Bible.

We deny that attempting such an integration is consistent with the authority of God's revelation.

9. Perception of Reality

We affirm that there is reality apart from God's reality, and that reality is immediately interpreted in the area of psychology most accurately by a qualified Biblical counselor who is Biblically and theologically astute (Hebrews 4:12,13; 5:11-14).

We deny that the counselee's perception of reality or his situation, unless that perception is Biblically accurate, has any bearing on the direction of counseling except to be identified, explored, understood, and corrected by his counselor.

Anthropology

10. Man's Composition

We affirm that God created man as a unity of non-material (non-physical) and material (physical) substance and that the mind (man's thinking substance) originates in the former and expresses itself through the latter (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7).

We deny that man is composed only of material substance that limits his thoughts to an "epiphenomenon" (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7).

11. Personality

We affirm that personality is both constant and changeable, and that individuals can change some aspects of their personalities.

We deny that man is locked into personality traits and expressions that are destructive, that personality is indelibly determined by environment, and that man can change his sinful nature apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.

12. Covenant

We affirm that every man's relationship to his Creator and to his fellow-man is that of a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker.

We deny that man can be counseled adequately as an individual apart from these relationships.

13. Personal Health

We affirm that perfect personal health has been experienced only by Adam and Eve prior to their sin and by the incarnate Jesus Christ.

We deny that perfect personal health is possible for fallen people except for believers in Heaven.

14. Root Causes of Personal Problems

We affirm that all personal problems have their roots in the sin of Adam and Eve; that non-organic (and even many organic) problems are immediately affected by personal selfishness and rebellion

against God and His Law; and that man's restraint against worse sin is due primarily to God's common grace and secondarily to the governing structures of conscience, family, state, and society.

We deny that these problems may be explained entirely on any other basis; that men are basically "good" (moral); and that any man has within his own knowledge and energy all that he needs to solve his problems.

15. Guilt

We affirm that every person incurs true guilt whenever he violates a law of God (whether or not the act was intentional or the person was aware of the law that he violated), and even whenever he violates a standard that he wrongly believes to be required by God (Romans 14:23).

We deny that true guilt is incurred only when a person consciously violates a law of God.

16. Primary Concerns

We affirm that man's greatest concerns, not only for this life but also for eternity, should be to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and to be forgiven through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.

We deny that any other concern is measurable in comparison, and that counselors may avoid evangelizing their unsaved counselees.

17. Secondary Concern

We affirm that man's most important secondary concern is Biblical obedience in every area of his life; that it is possible for him to change, becoming increasingly obedient to God's will as revealed in the Bible; and that this change is wrought by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:12,13).

We deny that any other direction for a believer's life is as important as Biblical obedience.

18. Purpose

We affirm that the purpose of man's existence is to glorify God and to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and—on this basis—that the unbeliever cannot realize any true, eternal purpose for his existence (Ephesians 2:12b; Romans 8:28,29).

We deny that any other purpose will give the meaning to life that every man must have to think, act, and emote properly.

19. Relationships

We affirm that personal problems increase when Biblical demands are not met in the areas of self control, the family, the Church, the state, and voluntary associations.

We deny that counselors should ever neglect particular and comprehensive attention to these areas.

20. Individuality and Dependence

We affirm that God created every person to be related to others on both physical and spiritual levels, especially within marriages, families, churches, and fellowship groups.

We deny that any person can find within himself all that he needs to achieve his full covenantal responsibilities.

21. Ultimate Goal of Counseling

We affirm that Jesus Christ is the ultimate model for the Christian life, and, therefore, that the ultimate goal for all counselees is to be conformed to Christ's image (except for those attributes that are clearly an aspect of His purpose as Messiah and His divine nature).

We deny that any other model or goal may be considered Biblical or acceptable by the Christian counselor.

Psychological Concepts

22. Mental Illness

We affirm that the term "mental illness" should be restricted to those problems that manifest a clear physical or physiologic origin or cause and that affect the thinking of man.

We deny that the term "mental illness" should be applied to problems that clearly originate in the non-physical mind and have been clearly designated by the Bible as sins— *e.g.*, homosexuality and "alcoholism," the latter Biblically defined as drunkenness.

23. Angels and Demons

We affirm that creatures who have only a spiritual dimension exist, that some serve God faithfully (angels) and others are in active rebellion against God (demons), and that the latter may possess unregenerate persons and oppress or influence regenerate persons.

We deny that the Christian counselor may neglect the reality of demons, and that personal problems, organic or non-organic, are never the result of the influence of or possession by demons.

24. Love and Situational Ethics

We affirm that love is the self-sacrifice of one person for another, best exemplified by the love of God through Jesus Christ, and that while love goes beyond the Law, it must always be consistent with and directed by Biblical Law and principle.

We deny that love is the same as mercy and kindness, and that love is determined by situations without specific direction by Biblical Law and principle.

25. Self-Love

We affirm that Jesus used self-love as a standard of intensity by which we are to love others, not as a command to love ourselves, and that the Bible teaches that a preoccupation with love for others is the means to self-fulfillment.

We deny that self-love is a Biblical goal other than in those duties that promote sanctification, such as Bible study, prayer, church attendance, and activities that promote physical health.

26. Self-Image

We affirm that the only proper application of self-image in counseling is to make an accurate assessment of the counselee's thinking and behavior and to provide further understanding of what needs to be changed.

We deny that any positive characteristic or achievement that is credited to the self and not directly and consciously to God's grace or mercy will give true or sustained growth to anyone.

27. Emotional Problems

We affirm that emotional disturbances arise from one's thoughts, behavior, physical state, or a combination of these.

We deny that emotional disturbances can be affected directly without a Biblical or medical correction of their primary cause(s).

Family

28. Family and Personal Health

We affirm that the marriage of a man and a woman and their procreation of children (where physically possible) is essential to the personal health of individuals except for those Christians called to singleness (Matthew 19; 1 Corinthians 7; Genesis 2:18).

We deny that individuals not called by God to singleness are otherwise complete within themselves and that homosexual, multiple, or temporary marriages are ever approved by God.

29. Family Counseling

We affirm that problems within family relationships often require that all affected members be counseled together.

We deny that those with family problems normally should be counseled individually unless the other members refuse to come or supplementary counseling could help.

The Supernatural

30. Prayer

We affirm that prayer by the counselor both within counseling sessions and at other times is essential to the counseling process, and that the counselee must pray as one application of Biblical counseling.

We deny that Christian counselors should ever omit prayer as a part of, and external to, Biblical counseling.

31. New Age Practices: Psychic Modalities

We affirm that the use of any psychic or supernatural means in counseling, other than prayer to God according to Biblical instructions, is a dangerous exposure to occult and Satanic powers (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19; Matthew 24:24; Revelation 9:21; 21:8).

We deny that psychic abilities, spiritism, divination, life energies, and other paranormal processes have any place in counseling (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19; Matthew 24:24; Revelation 9:21; 21:8).

32. New Age Practice: Meditation

We affirm that conscious, rational meditation on God's attributes and Biblical content is a necessary practice for all Christians (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 19:7; 119:50).

We deny that transcendental or any other type of meditation, drugs that alter normal thought patterns or states of consciousness, and hypnosis have any place in psychology or counseling (Galatians 5:23; Ephesians 5:18; 2 Timothy 1:7).

The Practice of Counseling

33. Practicality

We affirm that the Bible gives specific practical directions for one's relationship with God, others, and oneself, and that anything not specifically mentioned can be dealt with by Biblical principles correctly applied to the issues by deduction.

We deny that any knowledge derived outside the Bible is necessary for the counselor to complete his task of dealing with non-organically based problems, although it may be of supplementary value.

34. Superficiality

We affirm that the counseling process must be thorough in its investigation of the thoughts, behavior, situation, emotions, and physical state of the counselee, and that the results must lead to practical direction in dealing with these areas and their inter-relationships.

We deny that a superficial, mechanical approach, in contrast with a thorough approach, is effective or Biblical.

35. Qualifications of a Christian Counselor

We affirm that the Christian who functions formally as a counselor must have a thorough knowledge of, and be able to apply practically, the Bible; that he must be ordained or otherwise recognized by the Church as having those spiritual gifts that are necessary for counseling; that he must be directly accountable to the governing body of a church; and that such counseling is a ministry of the Word.

We also affirm that Christians who fulfill the above standards may function in situations that are primarily secular in order to present the true answer (the gospel of Jesus Christ) to people's problems.

We deny that the Christian counselor who fails in any of these standards is fully obedient to God's Word.

36. Church Discipline

We affirm that the several steps of church discipline are necessary for Christian counselees who fail to repent; that discipline begins definite Biblical correction for their lives; and that membership in a church that practices church discipline is necessary for all Christians.

We deny that any counselor has all the resources for Biblical change if church discipline is not available for unrepentant counselees.

37. Suffering

We affirm that Christians commonly experience trials and temptations (sometimes severe or resulting from Satan's action), which God uses to promote His glory and increase the holiness of the one involved (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:2-4).

We deny that Christians may expect a life free of trials and temptations; that Satan is ever outside of God's control; and that counseling that ignores this truth is Biblical at its core.

38. Confidentiality

We affirm that Biblical authority within the family, the church, and the state may supersede the confidentiality of counselors, but that strict confidentiality should be maintained when it does not conflict with Biblical mandates.

We deny that absolute confidentiality is a requirement for counseling.

A Call to Action in Psychology and Counseling

General Actions

Because of the preceding convictions, we call upon all men and women who name Christ as their personal Savior and Lord to join us in:

1. examining earnestly these affirmations and denials in the light of God's Word to see if they are true, and informing us directly of those points in which they believe we have departed from Scripture or logic;
2. re-examining our own psychology and counseling theories and practices and asking God to show us where we are falling short;
3. repenting of all known sins, confessing and forsaking them, asking forgiveness both of God Himself and of all those who have been offended, and then making all possible restitution;
4. praying for God to fill all of His people with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in order that we may bring our personal lives and our psychology and counseling theories and practice into closer conformity to His revealed will on a permanent and consistent basis;
5. seeking guidance from our brethren and local church authorities as to how we can mutually support and influence one another to make our psychology and counseling practices glorifying to God.

Having dealt with our own personal sins and failures, and placing ourselves accountable to the Bible and to the brethren, we now commit ourselves to:

1. influencing any known Christians or Christian associations with whom we work to consider seriously our affirmations and denials with the goal of enlisting their responses;
2. influencing those in the field of psychology and counseling who agree with our affirmations and denials to implement these proposals in their work;
3. mobilizing and networking our Christian resources and working in concert with the other professional spheres both inside and outside COR, to see the behavior of the Body of Christ and our nation changed to approximate more closely the view of reality and morality presented to us in the Holy Scriptures.

Specific Actions

To these ends, we commit ourselves to taking or helping others to take the following specific actions:

1. Those with institutional and financial power within organizational structures of colleges and seminaries must immediately do what they can to bring their school's psychology and counseling departments into line with the Bible's view of man, of moral absolutes, and of reality in general.
2. A massive and close scrutiny of Christian psychology departments must take place to see if those departments allow the teaching of Freudianism, Rogerianism, Skinnerianism, and other antibiblical theories to overpower the view of man, morality, and reality taught by the Bible. Where this is the case, steps to replace unbiblical professors with professors committed to the Bible's view of man, morality, and reality should be taken with dispatch for the sake of the Biblical integrity of those Christian institutions and of the next generation of Christians. Though this action may be painful, embarrassing, and untidy, it is the only honest option open to schools that claim to educate based on the view of man, morality, and reality founded on an inerrant Bible.
3. A list of questions must be created for trustees, administrators, alumni, donors, pastoral search committees, and prospective students to use in conducting their own personal or written interviews incoming staff or with professors of psychology and counseling and potential pastoral staff members to see if they hold and teach a Biblical world view. We suggest that this psychological survey be given in conjunction with the Coalition on Revival's 20-question survey on Biblical inerrancy. Often a rejection of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy precedes a rejection of a Biblically sound psychology of man. Those professors who are committed to the Bible and its view of man, morality, and reality will welcome such a survey of their world view and be grateful that their Christian constituents care enough to find out what they are really teaching. But those professors who teach what is opposed to their constituents' view of reality will tend to evade or oppose such investigation.¹
4. An independent and interdenominational employment agency and testing service for Biblical psychologists and counselors needs to be established. This agency could test the Biblical integrity of psychology professors and church counselors and offer a computerized print-out of those psychologists who are committed to a truly Biblical psychology and are seeking employment.
5. It is our firm conviction that people related to any Christian college or seminary have the right—indeed, the *responsibility* before God—to keep a watchful eye, lovingly but unhesitatingly, on the Biblical integrity of their own Christian institutions and to take firm, deliberate steps to correct antibiblical teaching wherever it occurs.
6. A new national magazine needs to be created to serve as a Biblically orthodox version of *Psychology Today* for Christian psychologists and counselors. The Coalition on Revival stands ready to assist those who wish to establish such a needed organ for dialogue and sharing of research.
7. A bibliography of psychology and counseling text books and training materials based on an inerrant Bible must be created as a resource and guide for those students and teachers who wish to counteract the antibiblical assumptions that have permeated much of today's "Christian" psychology.

1. The Coalition on Revival does not see itself as the group to conduct such inquiry into the Biblical integrity of Christian college and seminary psychology professors. Rather, C.O.R. sees itself as a service organization to the whole Church that has been called up by God to state where Biblical lines must be drawn, and offers the Church tools by which the appropriate people may conduct their own institutional examinations.