

# **What Is Redemptive Counseling / Clinically Informed Biblical Counseling?**

**A Paper by  
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The 2010 World Cup introduced the world to an instrument that most people had never heard of: the vuvuzela. This two-foot-long horn rapidly spawned opinions among everyone who tuned in to watch world-class soccer matches. Some insisted on banning it as a disturber of the beautiful game, others viewed it as an expression of South African culture to be embraced. The majority perhaps just tolerated it until the phenomenon faded away.

Many curious Christians, counselors, and church leaders have run across a relatively new term: redemptive counseling, more commonly referred to as clinically-informed biblical counseling.<sup>1</sup> Like the vuvuzela back in 2010, there are many opinions buzzing about how to understand and classify this Christian approach to counseling. (For the sake of brevity and clarity, we will use the shorthand RC/CIBC throughout the remainder of the article.)

We aim to provide light and not heat in this article, as our purpose is to set forth ten essential commitments that we hold as professors at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and believe RC/CIBCs from other institutions and ministries would likewise affirm. We will also attempt to show the historical and theological lineage of our position through occasional quotations from authors, theologians, and counselors who have been essential in its formation. We also write this not claiming to be the only voices involved in describing the RC/CIBC position. We do not mean to speak for others but aim to set forth our commitments as faculty members within the counseling department at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. We hope that this document will prove helpful as a starting point for further conversation and development.

In order to clarify our RC/CIBC approach, we need to make necessary comparisons to two other approaches to counseling. Selecting a label for movements or groups of people

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<sup>1</sup> There are benefits to both terms, which are to be read as synonymous. “Clinically-informed biblical counseling” is highly descriptive. CIBC sits within the biblical counseling tradition, while also acknowledging the helpfulness of methods and skills derived from clinical counseling.

The term “redemptive counseling” emphasizes how Christ is our redemption, both for salvation and for help in the midst of all the troubles that befall us. The term also captures the emphasis on “redeeming psychology” (to reference David Powlison). Redemptive counseling as a term therefore speaks to the redemption of the person and the redemption of common grace tools that may be used to aid in that redemption.

is always an exercise fraught with peril, as groups are rarely homogeneous in belief or practice. That being said, we are in need of some kind of nomenclature.<sup>2</sup>

We will use the term “integrationism” to refer to the approaches to counseling that are Christian by conviction and clinical by practice. These systems, and they are diverse, largely hold to the historic creeds and confessions of the Church and are conservative in their Christian doctrine. Many of them view the Bible as God’s Word and authoritative in all spheres of life, including counseling. These approaches tend to describe the Bible as a foundation and a filter. It provides steady bedrock to establish truth and is able to cull out of secular therapies those things that are not true. This approach is best captured in the work of Gary Collins, Stanton Jones, Mark Yarhouse, and others.<sup>3</sup> The organization that most notably identifies this lane is AACC, the American Association of Christian Counselors.

We will use the term “nouthetic counseling” to refer to the approach to counseling that derives its heritage from the work of Jay Adams, Wayne Mack, Stuart Scott, and others. This approach likewise sits within the stream of historic Christian orthodoxy. Its approach to counseling emphasizes the exposition of Scripture within the counseling setting and eschews the use of therapeutic techniques or tools derived from secular psychology.<sup>4</sup> The organization that most notably represents this lane is ACBC, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (formerly the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It's important to note that we consider neither of the terms used for different approaches to be negative. These are historical labels selected by each approach for themselves. Each term has been much discussed, but this article focuses on the distinctives of RC/CIBC and is not an adjudication of the best name for other approaches to counseling. We simply ask you to bear with our choice of names should you prefer another term for each group, assuming the best of our intentions.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of integrationist literature see John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore. *The Integration of Psychology and Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979; Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman. *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011; Mark Yarhouse and William Hathaway, *The Integration of Psychology and Christianity: A domain-based approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> Seminal texts describing the nouthetic approach are Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986 repr.); John MacArthur and The Master’s College Faculty, *Biblical Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005); Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> An intramural debate exists within what we are calling the nouthetic movement over whether contemporary leaders within that tradition actually affirm the same system of counseling as the movement’s founders. Evaluating these claims are beyond the scope of this article. Again, our aim is to set forth the distinctives of RC/CIBC. For those interested in the debate over whether second- and third-generation nouthetic counselors follow Adams, see Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011) and Donn Arms, “Book Review: The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams,” The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, Published 1.30.2012, Accessed 5.23.2024. <<https://nouthetic.org/book-review-2-2/>>

RC/CIBC occupies a space between these two approaches. As such, it shares similarities with both while also manifesting differences that demarcate it as a distinct manner of doing counseling. In our conversations with integrationist brothers and sisters, they routinely indicate that they view RC/CIBC as a different approach to counseling than their own. Likewise, nouthetic counselors have also delineated their approach as being different than ours. Both nouthetic counselors and integrationists have, at times, treated RC/CIBC as if it is one and the same with its opposite neighbor. However, it is important to note that those opposite neighbors indeed view RC/CIBC as a neighbor and not as a member of the family sharing the same roof. Both nouthetic counselors and integrationists tend to affirm that RC/CIBCs are “not one of us.” This is what we are arguing as well – we are neither integrationists nor nouthetic counselors.<sup>6</sup>

As one last caveat, please note that the following commitments are in no way comprehensive. Little will be said about the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, substitutionary atonement, the special creation of Adam and Eve, and a whole host of other theological positions. RC/CIBC exists within the framework of the Christian church’s historic creeds and confessions, and – in our case - the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Abstract of Principles.

## Ten Commitments of Redemptive Counselors / Clinically Informed Biblical Counselors

### *1. On Scripture*

The Bible is necessary, relevant, and authoritative for counseling. God describes his Word with a beautiful constellation of descriptions. The Bible is an illuminating lamp that points out hazards and helps along our path (Ps 119:105). It is able to transform fools into wise men and women (Ps 19:7). It is able to reveal to us our deepest motives and commitments which are often hidden otherwise (Heb 4:12). Memorizing its text helps us avoid staggering into ruin (Ps 119:11). It is our only source for knowing the good

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<sup>6</sup> To be clear, we believe that RC/RIBC is a member within the family of biblical counseling approaches. We are not nouthetic counselors, but our heritage is traced out of the biblical counseling movement – especially the work of second-generation biblical counselor David Powlison. In our perspective, biblical counseling is a collection of diverse approaches that affirm the doctrinal statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition, a document written by over a dozen leaders within the biblical counseling movement - most notably David Powlison, Sam Williams (one of the authors of this paper), and Bob Kellemen. See “The Confessional Statement of the Biblical Counseling Coalition,” n.d., accessed 5.23.2024, <<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Confessional-Statement-of-the-BCC.pdf>>

We should note that some who identify with the RC/CIBC position identify themselves as counselors standing within the nouthetic tradition. Our use of “we” in this footnote is meant to be a statement of belief by the authors, not speaking for all those who affirm the commitments set forth in this document.

news of the gospel that we might be reconciled to God and given new hearts (Rom 10:14-15).

RC/CIBCers affirm that one of the purposes of the Bible is to address problems-in-living faced by human beings. In particular, God's Word equips us to be conformed to the moral image of Christ (Rom 8:28-29; 1 John 3:1-3). Secular psychology can never serve as a replacement for biblical truth as God reveals in his Word: instruction, a divine perspective, and power essential for change that cannot be discovered elsewhere.

### *2. On Sufficiency*

The Bible is sufficient for counseling. This sufficiency is seen in two ways. First, the Bible gives us all the divine inerrant verbal information we need to understand our spiritual and moral condition, know our God, and be reconciled to him. Nothing needs to be added to the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as if the Bible was lacking.

Second, the Bible is sufficient to give us the wisdom necessary to live godly lives that represent God's character and lead to human flourishing. To use language adopted from John Calvin, the Bible is a pair of spectacles that allow us to see the world through the eyes of God's evaluation.<sup>7</sup> RC/CIBCers therefore have everything necessary to evaluate common grace tools from every arena of life and establish their congruity or incongruity with God's truth as the Holy Spirit leads God's children in wisdom.

RC/CIBCers do not believe that the Bible's sufficiency means that material outside of what is presented in the Scriptures is irrelevant or unimportant for counseling. To quote David Powlison, a "commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture does not hermetically seal the mind to all further input or interaction. Such commitment is a standpoint on the world, not a blindfold to the world."<sup>8</sup> RC/CIBCers are committed to receiving God's manifold grace given through his Word, through natural revelation, and through common grace. All of these channels are ways that God is equipping humanity to follow him. They are complementary and not competitive, and as counselors called to holistically care for human beings, ignoring any of them will lead to less helpful, and possibly harmful, counseling.

### *3. On the Use of Scripture in Counseling Practice*

The Bible is not just the foundation for counseling but is to be woven throughout the DNA of the counseling process. This commitment distinguishes us from integrationism,

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<sup>7</sup> See John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis. Battles. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 70.

<sup>8</sup> David Powlison, "Does Biblical Counseling Really Work?" in Edward E. Hindson and Howard Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 55.

which tends to describe the Bible as the foundation for counseling yet may only infrequently use biblical truths explicitly in counseling. One study of self-described integrationists uncovered that only 13% used the Bible explicitly in counseling and only 3% used it in “critical moments” in counseling.<sup>9</sup>

RC/CIBCers view such practice as withholding the very thing that was given to make humanity wise and give life (John 10:10; see commitment #1). The best counseling available to human beings will always involve the message of the Scriptures woven throughout. RC/CIBCers will use the biblical text by reading it from the page, by paraphrase, and by implicit ideas. RC/CIBCers affirm David Powlison’s words regarding his training at Westminster Theological Seminary: “The theology and Bible courses were strikingly relevant to a young man who came with counseling questions and aspirations... Though most of the courses didn’t make ‘counseling applications’ in any detail, they were unmistakably about the ‘stuff’ counseling deals with.”<sup>10</sup>

When we say that the Bible is part of the DNA of counseling, we mean that Scriptural truths and principles govern and guide all truly Christian counseling. Counseling given by RC/CIBCers must conform to the moral imperatives of Scripture, which are given to humanity for its flourishing. At the same time, the manner in which Biblical truths are applied will vary, based upon the counselee’s spiritual maturity and the role of the counselor (i.e., friend, small group leader, pastor, lay counselor, or licensed professional). While nouthetic counseling tends to place the exposition of Scripture at the center of counseling and integrationism tends to explicitly use the text of Scripture infrequently in counseling, RC/CIBCers seek to ascertain what method of engagement is most helpful for the client at the moment, following wisdom and discernment given by the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

#### *4. On Engagement with Secular Psychology*

Tools and methods for counseling may be derived from secular approaches to psychology and can be helpful (which is different from being essential). These tools and methods enhance our ability to minister the truth of God’s Word into our clients’ life. These tools and methods are not a replacement for the truth of Scripture or used to inculcate worldliness into the hearts of our counsees. Rather, these tools and methods

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<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Ball and Rodney K. Goodyear “Self-Reported Professional Practices of Christian Psychotherapists,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 10, no. 2 (1991): 148. This study is quite dated; however, it is the most recent study of its kind available.

<sup>10</sup> David Powlison, “Answers for the Human Condition: Why I Chose Seminary for Training in Counseling” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20:1 (2001): 46-54.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus affirmed the necessity of wisely considering which truths to speak at which time as he told his disciples, “I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t bear them now” (John 16:12).

provide additional ways of engaging the human person that are not explicitly spoken of in the text of Scripture.

RC/CIBC diverges from nouthetic counseling on this point. Nouthetic counseling has historically affirmed that using extrabiblical knowledge in counseling is congruent with the sufficiency of Scripture due to the doctrine of common grace.<sup>12</sup> However, nouthetic counseling has also drawn a border around the interventions emerging from secular psychology as being outside the bounds of what may be faithfully employed. This is due to the worldview-laden nature of therapeutic techniques.<sup>13</sup>

RC/CIBC affirms alongside nouthetic counselors that common grace allows for extrabiblical knowledge to be of significant value in counseling. However, we disagree that all methods emerging from secular psychotherapy are by necessity tainted by their worldview.<sup>14</sup> RC/CIBCers draw a distinction between an approach's worldview and its methods.

An illustration is helpful at this point. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) emerged from the work of Aaron T. Beck, Albert Ellis, and Donald Meichenbaum. The core tenet of CBT is that problems in emotions and behaviors exist downstream from thoughts. Therapy is therefore focused on changing thoughts.<sup>15</sup>

RC/CIBCers reject the view of humanity proposed by CBT, as its claims contradict Scripture. Adam and Eve partook of the fruit because it was “desirable.” James says our conflicts come from our desires (Jas 4:1-3). That same author later affirms “For the one who knows to do good and does not do it, he sins” (Jas 4:17). Biblical anthropology rules out the idea that human psychology is exclusively, or even primarily, thinking-

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<sup>12</sup> Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 65-102.

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Mack writes, “Extrabiblical statements that seem to reflect biblical truth must be regarded as false because, as Richard Pratt states, “they are not the result of voluntary obedience to God’s revelation. Beyond this...the statements are falsified by the non-Christian framework of meaning and therefore lead away from the worship of God. If nothing else, the mere commitment to human independence falsifies the non-Christian’s statements.” Mack, “What Is Biblical Counseling,” 26-27. This essay was republished by ACBC in 2017 in a self-released anthology of essays titled “Sufficiency: Historic Essays on the Sufficiency of Scripture.”

<sup>14</sup> We have demonstrated elsewhere similarities between those methods employed by nouthetic counselors in their practice of counseling and those methods used by secular psychologists. See Nate Brooks, “Everybody Integrates” *Southeastern Theological Review* 15.1 (2024): 7-20.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the history and therapeutic commitments of CBT see Michelle Craske, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* 2nd ed., Theories of Psychotherapies Series (Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, 2017).

centered.<sup>16</sup> If anything, the Bible highlights the idea that our affections largely direct our thoughts. RC/CIBC therefore denies the truthfulness of CBT as a comprehensive explainer of humanity.

RC/CIBC affirms, however, that the strategies for thought change employed within CBT can provide assistance for counselors as they seek to help their counselees change their thinking. The Bible affirms that what we think about is important, both for righteousness and for our well-being. Scripture gives us some strategies for changing our thoughts (Phil 4:8): memorization of God's Word (Ps 119:11), the use of mnemonic devices such as acrostics (Ps 25, 34, etc.), and biblical meditation (Ps 119:15). However, because the Bible was not written to be a comprehensive manual on every manner by which thoughts may be changed, observation and research may uncover for us additional strategies to effect lasting thought change, particularly when they do not contradict Scripture. Some empirically validated strategies have emerged out of CBT, which counselors may then employ to effect godly thought change by the power of the Holy Spirit who provided those tools through his common grace. We draw a distinction between the system as a whole (human beings are cognition-centric) and the tool (strategies for thought change).

In many ways, RC/CIBCers are merely following the pattern set forth by preaching pastors. Pastors typically preach with a clearly stated main idea and several numbered points designed to aid the congregation in retention. People remember outlines better than whole sermons, and so the preacher employs a rhetorical strategy derived from observation and secular speech theory to better assist his congregation's hearing the Word and growth in sanctification despite there being no examples of enumerated sermon points within the Bible.<sup>17</sup> RC/CIBCers likewise affirm that specific tools that emerge from secular psychological theories may be filled with biblical content and employed to advance sanctification in the life of their counselees.

##### *5. On the Legitimacy of Working towards Civic Righteousness*

RC/CIBCers work in the realms of both moral righteousness and civic righteousness. Christians often collapse these two forms of righteousness together in our daily talk, but they are different. Moral righteousness is more familiar to our ears – the righteousness that counts before God. This righteousness is both ultimate righteousness – that imparted to us by Christ, and the moral righteousness that comes out of our hearts in

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<sup>16</sup> See Michael R. Emler, "Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20:2 (2002): 47-52; A. Craig Troxel, *With All Your Heart* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Expository preachers certainly allow the structure of the text to determine the message's structure, yet an extrabiblical manner of framing that message is used to enhance the listener's understanding of the Word. For another example, see the use of Aristotelian rhetorical distinctions in Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 12ff.

good works. Biblical counselors (both RC/CIBCers and nouthetic counselors) are in the business of growing moral righteousness.

Civic righteousness has received far less formal attention in many theological circles. John Frame describes civic righteousness as the possibility

to perform an act that is good for society, at least at the surface level, without being good... Some people contribute much to the well-being of society - by helping the poor, by becoming great artists, musicians, authors, and public servants, and in other ways – without a heart to serve God....Such people are ‘good for’ their communities. But it is also possible to speak of their actions as a partial moral goodness. Such social benefactors are depraved, according to Scripture, but since we don’t know the hearts of others it is difficult to know, or to show, in what ways they fail to measure up to God’s standards. In any case, partial moral goodness is not enough to please God.<sup>18</sup>

This righteousness is the righteousness that benefits a society and people in the society, without being of moral acceptance before God. A simple example is that all of us would rather have as our neighbor a kindly, unbelieving grandmother who showers the neighborhood with scratch baked apple pies rather than a war crime-committing dictator in exile. Neither are converted, yet one is more civically righteous than the other.

RC/CIBC affirms the validity of helping clients who are not interested in divine redemption and reconciliation grow in civic righteousness. While we continue to hope for their redemption and look for moments of openness to explicit, gospel-focused conversations, helping a husband and wife stabilize and retreat from the cliff of divorce is a good thing, even if they remain unconverted. The closer human beings live to God’s standard, the better off their lives and the lives of all around them will be. Greater civic righteousness in that marriage means that children will be raised by parents who model a stable marriage with mutual honor for one another rather than suffer the trouble caused by being shuttled back and forth between parents who view their ex-spouse as an enemy.<sup>19</sup> One of the Holy Spirit’s operations in this world is the promotion of good and

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<sup>18</sup> John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013), 862. For the believer, civic righteousness is also moral righteousness; however, for the unbeliever civic righteousness is constrained to being civic righteousness.

<sup>19</sup> For a longitudinal study of the impact of divorce on children see Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2001).



the restraint of sinfulness; therefore, counselors who work towards the promotion of civic righteousness may rightly be described as doing the Lord's work.<sup>20</sup>

### 6. *On the Context of Counseling*

RC/CIBCers work as a matter of calling in church-based counseling settings, private practice biblical counseling settings, and clinical counseling settings. These settings inform how a RC/CIBCer will live out their calling as an ambassador of Christ. Church and Christian settings allow for greater opportunities to be explicitly evangelistic. Clinical settings may curtail explicit evangelism, and yet civic righteousness being a product of the Spirit's work validates care even when explicit evangelism is dependent upon the client's receptivity.<sup>21</sup>

Christian teachers working in public education provide a helpful comparison to RC/CIBCers working in a clinical setting. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7), and every Christian teacher desires their students to be wise in the fullest sense of the term. However, education that provides students with knowledge, skills, and abilities that will serve them in their vocations and relationships is a function of God's common grace and part of the Spirit's work throughout all creation.<sup>22</sup>

RC/CIBCers are evangelistic in their counseling should clients be open to hearing of the good news of Jesus Christ. However, if someone is not interested, we are willing to use the more limited techniques afforded by clinical counseling, praying that their hearts will become open to further evangelistic opportunities. These techniques are always guided by the truth found in Scripture and employed to affect the greatest amount of good possible for the sake of the individual and society, especially in secular clinical settings.

### 7. *On Terminology*

RC/CIBCers use both biblical and clinical terminology to describe human trouble and recovery. This bilingual approach is neither out of a desire to curry favor with the world nor to blend into environments that do not share our commitments. Rather, RC/CIBCers understand that different spaces call for different language, the same as

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<sup>20</sup> Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 246-248.

<sup>21</sup> See Sam Williams, "Counselors as Missionaries" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 26.3 (2012): 28-40; Brad Hambrick, "Speaking of Christ and the Gospel as a Licensed Counselor" Published 06.19.2019. <<https://bradhambrick.com/licensed/>>

<sup>22</sup> For a helpful discussion of common grace as being a product of the Spirit's work see Lydia Kim-van Daalen, "The Holy Spirit, Common Grace, and Secular Psychotherapy" *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 40 (3): 229-239.

one would communicate differently with a medical doctor and a friend. Neither form of speech is “wrong,” but the appropriateness of the language is dictated by contexts.

David Powlison’s masterful article, “Is the Adonis Complex in Your Bible?” provides a helpful example of how biblical language is used to more deeply describe a phenomenon that is more often referred to in clinical terms.<sup>23</sup> The term “Adonis Complex” accurately captures the presentation problem, yet it does not delve into the whys and wherefores of the heart. For this, biblical terminology provides a more robust understanding of what is occurring within this individual’s heart.

Psychological labels have a degree of utility, as they provide a common language to understand a person’s lived experience and provide a shared language for cooperation among helpers across different disciplines (e.g. medical personnel). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) itself declares that it does not step into the realm of etiology, but only clinical descriptions.<sup>24</sup> Many diagnoses such as generalized anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder are mere descriptions of symptoms. RC/CIBCers strongly discourage their counselees from adopting these labels as part of their personal identity, while also acknowledging they can correctly demarcate their lived experience.

RC/CIBCers differentiate between labels that are primarily moral in nature, such as narcissistic personality disorder, and those that the best scientific research indicates are likely a result of biological aberrations, such as autism spectrum disorder, bipolar disorder, dyslexia, and schizophrenia. These labels indicate troubles that tend to be fixed aspects of a person’s physical being.

### *8. On Care for the Body and Soul*

RC/CIBC affirms that all people are both body and soul, with both our material and immaterial substances broken by sin and troubled by the effects of the fall. We share these commitments with both integrationists and nouthetic counselors. We affirm that the soul is the primary locus of human personality, and that the body cannot compel the soul to sin.

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<sup>23</sup> David Powlison, “Is the Adonis Complex in Your Bible?” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 22:2 (2004): 42-58. The Adonis Complex refers to excessive obsession with the size and definition of muscles, seen most commonly in males between 16 and 35 years of age. See Harrison G. Pope, Katharine A. Phillips, and Roberto Olivardia, *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> For a larger discussion on the DSM, see Nate Brooks, “Understanding the DSM” Biblical Counseling Coalition. Published 2.21.2022.  
<<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/02/21/understanding-the-dsm/>>

Our evaluation of nouthetic counseling is that its emphasis on biblical exposition and skepticism towards employing secular psychological research and interventions leads nouthetic counselors to minimize or ignore care for the body while caring for the soul.<sup>25</sup> RC/CIBC does not elevate the body over the soul, but rather holds to a holistic approach to counseling that sees the body and soul as inextricably linked and the workings of the body as widely observable.

These differing commitments lead RC/CIBCs and nouthetic counselors to largely take different approaches to trauma care and healing. Nouthetic counselors reject the language of being “trauma-informed” arguing instead that the doctrine of biblical sufficiency makes biologically targeted interventions unnecessary or unhelpful.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, RC/CIBCs understand the interplay of soul and body to require counseling that holistically addresses the human person.<sup>27</sup> This two-way relationship between body and soul means that physiological trauma responses are not merely derivative of soul-centric troubles. Put another way, both the body and the soul keep the score. Thus, interventions that address bodily responses to traumatic triggers can be faithful expressions of genuinely Christian counseling.

### 9. On Learning

RC/CIBCs desire to learn from counselors to our north and to our south. (We use these terms because “left and right” tend to carry political and theological baggage.) We believe that integrationists can offer good counsel, and we believe that nouthetic counselors can offer good counsel. We believe that integrationists stop short of offering the best counseling available by relying too heavily on psychological tools and too lightly on the application of the biblical text into counseling. We believe that nouthetic counselors rely too exclusively on biblical exposition, leading them to focus predominantly on the moral elements of their clients’ struggles, often to the neglect of addressing the suffering dimension of a counselee’s hardship. However, we believe that

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<sup>25</sup> See Greg Gifford, “Does the Body Keep the Score? Biblical Counseling and the Body” *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* 8 (1) 2024: 41-63.

<sup>26</sup> See Francine Tan, “A Critical Evaluation of Bessel van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score*” *Journal of Biblical Soul Care* 7.2 (2023): 26-61; Dale Johnson and Ernie Baker, “Discerning Trauma Informed Therapy” Truth in Love Podcast Episode 412, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. 5.1.2023 <<https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/discerning-trauma-informed-therapy/>>; Dale Johnson and John Babler, “Biblically Informed Trauma Care” Truth in Love Podcast Episode 357, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors 4.22.2022 <<https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/biblically-informed-trauma-care/>>

<sup>27</sup> For a helpful resource written by a systematic theologian on the interconnectedness of body and soul with counseling applications see Gregg Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

God can and does use imperfect counseling – including imperfect counseling offered by RC/CIBCers – to affect heart change in his people, just as God uses theologically imperfect denominations and traditions to care well for his children.

#### *10. On Ethos*

RC/CIBCers view both integrationists and nouthetic counselors as brothers and sisters in the Lord who do much good. We celebrate one another's successes and rejoice in the many truths that we hold in common. We aim to have our relationship to these two neighbors be like that of a friendly bond between like-minded Baptist and Presbyterian churches in the same city. We respect each other's convictions, engage in healthy conversation, and seek to minister in our lane without making others' lanes more difficult.

#### Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to bring clarity to the convictions we hold and believe are held in common by RC/CIBCers. There certainly are other distinguishing convictions that could be discussed; however, these issues tend to be a downstream product of these ten core upstream commitments. Our goal has been to write ten convictions that speak directly to recent questions that have been raised about the beliefs and practices of RC/CIBCers.

Should you as a reader walk away disagreeing with these commitments, our article has not failed. We are not pretending to be nouthetic counselors, and we are not pretending to be integrationists. Individuals in both camps will likely find that some of our commitments resonate well with their own approaches, while other points highlight disagreements. We earnestly hope that we are able to have helpful and wholesome conversations together as we seek to offer care for hurting people in need of God's great grace and faithful love.