

## PRE-TRIB STUDY GROUP CONFERENCE 12/5/12

### Psychology and the Church

by T. A. McMahon

The theme of this year's Pre-Trib conference, if you missed it, is "Contending for the Faith in the Last Days." Hopefully, we can indeed contend for the faith...without becoming "contentious" regarding my topic.

I say that because there are few subjects that provoke such extreme differences of opinion among conservative evangelical Christians as does than what I am about to address.

So...get ready for a bit of controversy. Obviously, you will be getting my perspective—I'm not thrilled about the controversy aspect, but it comes with the territory, and it is very critical for all of us who are concerned about adhering to sound biblical doctrine.

Let's start with my quote unquote "credentials," which may or may not, in the minds of some, qualify me to address the subject.

When Dave Hunt and I were speaking at conferences together, he would sometimes introduce me this way: "Tom's going to speak next, and you have to be a Berean when you listen to what he has to say because...well, he grew up in an insane asylum."

And then I would say, "Once again Mr. Hunt is correct on both accounts. Yes, you need to be Bereans...and yes I did grow up at a mental institution."

To explain, my father was a psychiatrist, and we lived on the grounds of a large mental institution in northeastern Ohio.

How might that be considered a qualification? Well, just as Mike Gendron and I have a good deal of understanding about Roman Catholicism because we grew up in it, I spent

a major part of my young life growing up in the mental health community. A number of my relatives worked in psychiatric hospitals.

My point is this: I know experientially—that is, “up close and personal”—the effect that psychological counseling has on the lives of its practitioners as well as some of those who were institutionalized because of their mental issues.

In college, although psychology was not my major, I participated in some of the leading experimental psych programs at The Ohio State University, which I fondly think of as a mental institution of another kind.

A Buckeye, by the way, is literally...a nut.

In my mind the only value of sharing my so-called credentials is so that you know that my personal experiences among the practitioners and those they treated have instilled in me a compassion for both.

You may be aware of the suffering of those who experience mental disorders, but you may not know that the practitioners themselves suffer some of the highest occupational hazard rates of any career field: high divorce numbers, suicides, drug abuse, alcoholism, and so forth.

To give you a personal example, which is hardly unique, my father was the chief psychiatrist in a community in Southern Ohio. He was the one to whom the leaders in the community came in order to have their mental, emotional, and behavioral problems solved.

He was also the town drunk. If you understand the mental and spiritual destructiveness involved in the process of psychotherapy for both practitioner and patient, that shouldn't surprise you.

I began this talk by noting the controversy surrounding psychological counseling.

When Dave Hunt and I wrote *The Seduction of Christianity* more than 25 years ago, the conservative evangelical church was more than pleased that we were addressing some of the erroneous teachings and practices of the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, particularly those that promoted the unbiblical prosperity and healing doctrines. Yet that enthusiasm was short-lived when many such readers got to chapters 12 and 13.

Why? Those chapters addressed the biblical problems with *psychological counseling* in the church, a phenomenon that had installed itself within evangelical Christianity in a major way.

That was more than a quarter of a century ago, and one might guess (or hope) that the body of Christ would have become aware of the preponderance of studies from some research psychologists who demonstrate that psychotherapy is not only practically worthless but is even harmful in many situations.

Few, however, have taken notice. As a consequence, psychotherapy has become so accepted among evangelicals today that rarely is anyone aware of the serious problems.

How did the evangelical church slide into such an astounding lack of discernment?

The fundamental reason is shockingly simple: most Christians, including many who claim to look to the Bible as their *authority* in all matters of living their lives in submission to the Lord, give only lip service to the *sufficiency of God's Word*.

In other words, they contradict their professing belief in biblical authority by looking elsewhere for solutions to solving life's problems, primarily by turning to so-called authorities or "experts"—and particularly to psychologists.

This is a tragic mistake because God's Word is sufficient:

*“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).*

The Word of God is the Manufacturer’s Handbook, with instructions for humanity regarding *“all things* that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him.”

What exactly are the “all things”? Certainly everything that pertains to or involves moral issues and anything that is sin related—either how to avoid it or how to repent of it.

Clinical psychology cannot deal with sin—even though most if not all of the issues for which people turn to psychotherapists are *due* to sin.

The outcome of seeking psychotherapeutic help is always destructive for the faith of the believer for what should be obvious reasons.

Psychological counseling is an anti-biblical replacement program for the Manufacturer’s Handbook. Its essential doctrine is that *self*, which is declared to be *innately good*, is the key to solving all of life’s problems.

Therefore, foundationally, it stands in direct opposition to the Scriptures, which declare that *self*, i.e., man, is *innately sinful* (Jeremiah 17:9).

If *self*, also known as the heart of man, is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” as the Bible declares, then *self* is the *problem* rather than the solution.

Just as a leopard cannot change its spots, there is nothing within *self* that can change its sinful nature. Nothing in the theories or practices of psychotherapy can alter this fact.

So—in view of all of the horrendous evil that we see demonstrated daily throughout the world—why would psychotherapists hold to a premise that simple observation denies? They have no choice. Without God, only *self* remains.

And so the delusionary charade based upon the innate goodness of man goes on (as well as the terrible consequence) for people who have turned from God to a *deified* self.

The good news is that God knows the problem that besets humanity and He has provided the solution through His Son—a solution that will change the heart of every human who will turn to Him and accept His offer.

Christ's full payment for the sins of humanity not only makes those who receive His payment for themselves *new creatures* in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), but they are also sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, the only true Counselor and Comforter of all believers.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the One who enables the born-again Christian to understand the Manufacturer's Handbook and live out its instructions (John 14:26; Zechariah 4:6).

That's what the Bible declares; so why would those who profess to believe in the Bible forsake its wonderful claims? Jesus announced that He came that those who believed in Him "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). So why do believers look elsewhere?

One of the major reasons, again, is simple—and therefore correctible. If a believer is not reading his Bible and is relying on other sources for his biblical information, he will have only a vague idea of what's in it, and much of his thinking about it may be deluded or distorted.

That contributes to one's having a serious lack of confidence in God's Word. Such a person is rendered incapable of recognizing what's biblical and what's not. Yet the condition is hardly hopeless.

Biblical discernment doesn't depend upon scholarship or

knowing Greek and Hebrew or attending seminary or having an apologetics degree from a Bible college.

It's simply a matter of a believer's disciplined reading (meaning everyday!) of the Word of God, followed by a willingness to apply what one is reading to one's life.

How can a believer expect to recognize truth from error if he or she is not disciplined in reading and doing what the Scriptures teach?

Biblical discernment is basically a matter of comparing what's being promoted or taught in the world *or the church* with what the Bible teaches. A person cannot make that assessment if he is doubtful of biblical content.

What is needed is the very thing that the Jews in the synagogue of the Greek city of Berea were commended for: they searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things that the Apostle Paul was presenting were true to the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11). If those Jews were so commended, how much more should believers today follow their example.

Sadly, from my observations over more than three decades, the evangelical church has succumbed to nearly every seductive device the Adversary has dished out, all in support of his major strategy: *to destroy the effectiveness of God's Word in the church, as well as in the world.*

The seductive program began in the Garden of Eden with Eve: "Yea, hath God said...?"—a ploy to get her to rethink God's commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...followed by Satan's repudiation of God's judgment for disobeying Him: "Ye shall not surely die..." (Genesis 3:4).

It is important to note that *the sowing of doubt followed by the denial of the truth of God's Word* has been the Adversary's tactic in his quest to destroy mankind ever since. It should be obvious to every believer that Satan's chief

strategy is to *undermine the Scriptures*.

To the degree that a believer turns from the Word of God—whether through apathy, laziness, being spoon fed, having a self-serving interest, turning to outside sources, being deceived, listening to extra-biblical misinformation, etc., etc.—to that degree his ability to discern has deteriorated.

Without biblical discernment, a believer is ripe for any and all of Satan's deceptions, which brings us back to what may be the Adversary's most effective contemporary scam: "psyching out" the evangelical church.

It began, as most seductions do, in small doses and influences, all of them somewhat subtle and appearing to make sense.

In the mid-20th century, psychologists such as Erich Fromm began writing about love, and in particular the value of self-love.

Abraham Maslow, in the 1940s, included self-esteem near the top of his "hierarchy of needs." Evangelicals took note.

Norman Vincent Peale and psychiatrist Smiley Blanton early in the 1950s established the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry.

CAPS, the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, took root at the same time.

Also, at that time, the American Psychiatric Association set up luncheons around the US, in which psychiatrists suggested to the religious community that working together to meet the needs of their flocks would be a match made in heaven.

As that relationship grew, it was gradually impressed upon the pastors and priests that they were ill equipped to deal with most of issues of their congregations' problems of living.

Many pastors fell for that erroneous contention and returned

to school to earn degrees in psychology.

What began as a trickle turned into a flood from the 1970s through the 80s. Psychologist James Dobson released his book, *How to Build Self-Esteem in Your Child: Hide or Seek*.

Robert Schuller's book *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* was sent out gratis to 250,000 pastors.

Toward the end of the 1980s, the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC), an organization that strongly advocates the integration of psychology and the Bible, had its beginning. Today it boasts on its masthead: "Nearly 50,000 Members and Growing Stronger Every Day."

The list of leaders who have spoken at AACC conferences constitutes a veritable *Who's Who?* of the evangelical community, many of them ignorant of AACC's promotion of mixing psychological concepts with the Scriptures.

My Middle Eastern friends would characterize what I've described as the launching of psychology in the church as "the camel getting its nose in the tent."

It should come as no surprise, then, that years later the camel is right at home *within* the tent. That "beast," however, has displaced God's way and His truth and is causing much destruction within the body of Christ.

Unless there is a dramatic recognition of the antibiblical nature of psychological counseling and its "spiritualized" counterparts (inner healing, Theophostic Counseling, Bethel's Sozo, etc.), the worst is yet to come.

What makes me think so?

First of all, Scripture tells us so and it specifically addresses the foundational teaching of psychotherapy, which I will get to later.

Secondly, as an example of its potential "peril," we need to consider the impact upon the upcoming generation of

evangelicals.

Let me give you an analogy. Many young evangelicals today are aware that evolution is a false science—a pseudoscience—thanks to the teaching and influence of organizations such as the Institute for Creation Research and Answers in Genesis and individuals such as Carl Kerby, Jobe Martin, and many others.

Psychological counseling, however, is also a *pseudoscience* (which we have documented in numerous TBC articles and books that we have offered for years).

Can you name any ministries equivalent in influence to that of ICR or AiG that are pointing out the pseudoscientific nature of *psychotherapy*?

I don't mean to say that there aren't some out there, but they are small voices crying in the wilderness.

Furthermore, although such ministries do not have a wide audience, nevertheless, the research and, more importantly, the Word of God support their views.

Let's start with the research.

Here are a couple of well-known tenets that psychological researchers have exposed as myths. Again, the resource materials we offer at The Berean Call contain the documentation for what I am presenting.

A major myth that has deceived many in the church is that psychological counseling is scientific. No. It is not nor can it be.

Attempting to evaluate the status of psychology, the American Psychological Association appointed psychologist and philosopher Dr. Sigmund Koch to plan and direct a study that was subsidized by the National Science Foundation.

This study involved eighty eminent scholars assessing the facts, theories, and methods of psychotherapy. The results

of this extensive endeavor were published in a seven-volume series entitled *Psychology: A Study of a Science*.

Dr. Koch sums up the panel's findings in these words: "I think it by this time utterly and finally clear that [psychological counseling] cannot be a coherent science."

Research psychologist Dr. Gordon Allport concurs:

"The individual, whatever else he may be, is an internally consistent and unique organization of bodily and mental processes. But since he is unique, science finds him an embarrassment. Science, it is said, deals only with broad, preferably universal, laws. . . . Individuality cannot be studied by science, but only by history, art, or biography."

Dr. Karl Popper, regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science, after a thorough study of psychotherapy, came to this conclusion about the subjective nature of psychological interpretations of behavior: "though posing as sciences, had in fact more in common with primitive myths than with science; that they resembled astrology rather than astronomy."

Another huge myth that has duped millions in the church is the belief that counseling is for professionals only.

Numerous studies, many of which compared professional psychotherapists (psychiatrists and clinical psychologists) with non-professionals, demonstrated the superiority of the results of the non-professionals.

After reviewing the research comparing trained and untrained psychological counselors Truax and Mitchell report: "There is no evidence that the usual traditional graduate training program has any positive value in producing therapists who are more helpful than nonprofessionals."

Researcher/psychiatrist Jerome Frank adds what his peers don't wish to broadcast, and that is the "inability of scientific

research to demonstrate conclusively that professional psychotherapists produce results sufficiently better than those of non-professionals.”

It isn't hard to figure out why that is the case, if you know this about the concepts and practices of psychotherapy. There are more than 500 different psychotherapeutic systems and thousands of methods and techniques. Most of them are contradictory to one another and many are utterly bizarre.

Nearly all psychological counselors are eclectic in their approach—that is, they utilize a mixture of the therapies that they learned as they pursued their degrees.

So when a client comes to them with a problem, he or she has to buy into the eclectic solution of the therapist.

A non-professional doesn't go there; he simply looks to his own life experiences.

Best-selling author psychologist Dr. Bernie Zilbergeld writes in his book, *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change*: “...most problems faced by people would be better solved by talking to friends, spouses, relatives or anyone else who appears to be doing well what you believe you're doing poorly.

“If I personally had a relationship problem and I couldn't work it out with my partner, I wouldn't go and see a shrink. I would look around me for the kind of relationship I admire.... That's who I would go to. I want somebody who's showing by his life that he can do it.”

Now that's just good, commonsense advice from a man who understands the field of psychotherapy.

One last piece of information (which is all I have time for)—this one relates to the professional side of counseling.

The *DIAGNOSTIC & STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS* is referred to as the Bible of Psychotherapy. Professionals use it as a guidebook, and its numerical codes are necessary to charge to a client's medical insurance.

In 1952, this American Psychiatric Association-produced book listed 106 Mental Disorders. The list grew to 182 in 1968, then to 265 in 1980, and to 292 in 1987. The count in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition *DSM* is 374 mental disorders.

They include alleged mental problems such as OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANT DISORDER or O.D.D, which I find more than a little odd.

Children or adults are labeled with this disorder who show QUOTE, "hostile behavior toward authority figures." UNQUOTE The symptoms include QUOTE "losing one's temper," "arguing with adults," "deliberately doing things that will annoy other people," and "blaming others for his or her own mistakes or misbehavior." UNQUOTE

Although psychotherapy is all about self...if a person is TOO self-centered or TOO selfish he may suffer from NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER. I guess we have to be careful not to build one's self-esteem beyond the norm set by psychology.

If a person is SHY or TOO QUIET, very likely he or she is afflicted with SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER.

Kids should no longer be concerned if they aren't doing well in school because it isn't their fault; for instance, if a boy is failing English, we're told he may be suffering from the MENTAL DISORDER OF WRITTEN EXPRESSION (315.2).

Symptoms consist of QUOTE "difficulties in the individual's ability to compose written texts evidenced by grammatical or punctuation errors within sentences", "poor paragraph organization", "multiple [mis]spellings", and "excessively poor handwriting." UNQUOTE

Anyone here have difficulty with math in school? It may not have been your fault. You were probably a victim of MATHEMATICS DISORDER (315.1).

If a person (like myself) has an ANTAGONISTIC VIEW OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING, refusing to subject himself to therapy, the psychotherapist can still get paid for an initial visit by classifying such a person as suffering from NONCOMPLIANCE WITH TREATMENT DISORDER. CODE V15.81

But what if the mental health practitioners can't find anything specific in the DSM to label a person with? No problem...because there is UNSPECIFIED MENTAL DISORDER, which for the purposes of health insurance coverage, gives a code for QUOTE "specific mental disorder[s] not included in the DSM-IV." UNQUOTE

Just how the mental disorders qualified for listing—or were later disqualified—in the DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL was not exactly a rigorous scientific process. It's called a vote.

#### DSM-HOMOSEXUALITY

The most notorious example of this process had to do with homosexuality. Prior to 1973, homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder.

However, the National Gay Task Force began pressuring (actually, harassing) the American Psychiatric Association and was successful in getting the organization to change its view of homosexuality from a deviant/abnormal behavior to a "sexual preference." The APA subsequently "voted" to remove homosexuality from its "mental disorder" list.

#### DSM ON SPIRITUALITY

In the section of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* under the heading of "Other conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention" is code V62.89, Religious or Spiritual Problem

Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith, or questioning of spiritual values....

One wonders what part of a psychotherapist's training prepared him or her to deal with issues of faith and spiritual values.

On the other hand, we need to look at what evangelical Christians are thinking or not thinking when they turn to professional psychotherapists. There is one thing that I can assure you that they are *not* thinking: they are not thinking biblically.

I have stated earlier, and it needs to be repeated over and over until it becomes a mental reflex: psychological counseling is a major destroyer of a believer's belief in the sufficiency of God's Word.

If a believer doesn't believe that the Word of God is all-sufficient, he will turn elsewhere...and that elsewhere is a way that seems right to a man but it ends in ways that turns from God's truth, according to Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25.

In all that I'm presenting here, I hope this thought sticks: Christ supplemented is Christ supplanted.

What is being supplanted by psychotherapeutic concepts? These biblical truths:

Mankind is in bondage to sin, is reaping the consequences of sin, and is under the divine penalty of sin, which is separation from God forever.

Only God can deliver him from that condition, which by His grace He has made available to all those who turn to Him for the gift of salvation provided by Jesus Christ alone.

God's Word is His instruction manual for living one's life in the only way that is acceptable to God, and which will enable a believer to live a fruitful and productive life, glorifying to our Lord and Savior.

There is a huge amount that I don't have time to cover, yet some of which may come out in our Q&A session. Nevertheless, let me wind this up by alerting you to some bad news that comes directly from the Scriptures.

This study group conference has for numerous years centered around biblical prophecy, which I believe is the greatest apologetic for proving that God's Word is just that: God's Word.

Well, here is a prophecy that is being fulfilled today that uniquely applies to our day and involves everything I've presented in this paper.

Second Timothy chapter 3 verses 1 through 2 and continuing:

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves...*

*...covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

*3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

*4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

*5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

This is bad news prophecy: "last days"... "perilous times"... the primary cause of which has its foundation in men being lovers of their own selves.

But why does the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, put this in a PROPHETIC CONTEXT?

Hasn't SELF been a HUGE PROBLEM for mankind ever since the fall of humanity in the Garden? Of course.

But until the introduction of dynamic psychotherapy as a so-called science 115 or so years ago—beginning with Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and others...

...until the rise of humanistic psychotherapy with Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and a host of other latter-day luminaries of psychology...a preoccupation with SELF was viewed throughout history as simply “selfishness.”

Never, prior to modern psychotherapy, has SELF been promoted as THE SALVATION for humanity’s mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being.

IT’S A LAST DAYS PHENOMENON! An undeniable fulfillment of prophecy!

Now here is, in my opinion, the really bad news as it relates to our evangelical young people. They are being led by the pied pipers of so-called Christian psychology and through the greed of professing Christian universities to become practitioners in a field that is diametrically opposed to what the Word of God teaches.

It’s tragic enough that the upcoming generation is functionally biblically illiterate —they know how to read, and they have Bibles, but they don’t read them. Now add to that grievous condition the fact that they are being *ushered into* psychology.

A survey by the prestigious *Princeton Review* noted that psychology was listed as the number-two choice of major by all college students.

It’s very likely that the percentage is even higher for Christian students at professing Christian colleges because of their belief in the *myth* that psychology is a scientific way of helping people and that jobs may be available for them as counselors at evangelical churches.

There is also other encouragement for them to seek such careers.

Dr. James Dobson is one of the many highly influential evangelicals ushering this next generation into psychotherapy.

He writes: "Christian psychology is a worthy profession for a young believer, provided his faith is strong enough to withstand the humanistic concepts to which he will be exposed...."

Dr. Dobson couldn't be more wrong in his counsel to young believers.

To begin with, "Christian psychology" is a misleading term. According to the Christian Association of Psychological Studies, "there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology...as yet there is not an acceptable theory, mode of research, or treatment methodology that is distinctly Christian."

As noted, scarce is the young believer today whose faith is strong enough and whose discernment level high enough (because of his study of the Word of God) to withstand the onslaught from such a pursuit.

And finally, it isn't merely a matter of being able to stand against some of the humanistic concepts in psychotherapy. The entire *field* of psychological counseling is *rooted* in the humanistic concept of self.

It is rare for a Christian academic institution to reject psychology for biblical reasons (although there are a few that have). Some offer psychological counseling for the same reasons that they teach evolution in their so-called science departments—they accept it by faith.

Furthermore, for most it's a matter of "filthy lucre," i.e., it's an economic proposition: students keep the school afloat financially.

If the school does not offer psychology, "the number-two most popular major," the students will go elsewhere; if they

go elsewhere, the school sinks economically.

What all of this leads up to is a generation of evangelicals who will have been heavily psychologized and further conditioned against the belief in the *sufficiency of the Word of God*.

And because most of the church is supportive of the psychological way, there will be few warnings regarding the spiritual disaster that lies ahead. Is there any hope of averting such a tragic end result?

Yes...but the term "hope" may be too optimistic. Nevertheless, a good example comes from the Book of Nehemiah.

Upon returning to Jerusalem from Babylon, Nehemiah was confronted by a development that outraged him: the Jewish leaders had given to Tobiah, the servant of the wicked Sanballat and enemy of Israel, a "*chamber in the courts of the house of God*."

Nehemiah's response, as a man of God, as a type of the Holy Spirit, as a watchman who oversaw the building of the wall surrounding Jerusalem for protection, was God ordained: "And it grieved me sore: therefore I *cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber*" (Nehemiah 13:7-8).

Unless today's men of God, shepherds of God's flock, those whom God has privileged in leadership positions, do likewise with the "psychological stuff" that is in the church, they are unwittingly contributing to the last days apostasy (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

And by failing to warn this and the next generation, their "blood," i.e., the resulting spiritual destruction, will fall upon those who will be held accountable—those who *could* have done something but did nothing. It doesn't have to be that way.