



**CO6101 Biblical Discernment and Secular Psychotherapies  
2 Credit Hours**

Summer 2026

July 6-10

M 1-4:30 PM; T-W-Th 9 AM-4:30 PM; F 9 AM-12 PM

Reformed Theological Seminary: Charlotte

**Professor Information**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course critically examines the foundational theories, practices, and assumptions of major secular psychotherapies through the lens of biblical theology. Students will be equipped to evaluate psychological models of treatment including psychoanalysis/psychodynamic, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, humanistic/existential, and systems approaches utilizing David Powlison's Analytic model and S's of a counseling system. Emphasis is placed on developing theological discernment, enabling students to distinguish truth from error.

Through reading, lectures, discussion, videos and role play demonstration, students will explore how biblical counseling differs from secular approaches not merely in methodology, but in presuppositions about human nature, sin, suffering, change, and ultimate hope. The course aims to prepare students to engage the broader counseling culture with intellectual integrity, spiritual maturity, and biblical wisdom.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By studying the materials presented in this course, listening to the lectures, and completing the assignments, the student will be able to:

- Critically analyze the anthropological, epistemological, and teleological assumptions embedded within various secular psychotherapies from a biblical perspective.
- Communicate their biblically informed critique and appreciation of secular psychotherapies with clarity, charity, and theological precision.
- Cultivate discernment in counseling practice that is rooted in Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Apply principles of biblical discernment to specific case studies, demonstrating the ability to integrate biblical truth with a nuanced understanding of human experience.

## COURSE MATERIALS

### *Books*

- Baker, Ernie. *Biblical Counseling and The Psychologies. Critical Issues in Biblical Counseling*. Shepherd Press, 2023.
- Ganschow, Julie A. *Trauma Redeemed: A Biblical Response to Medicalized Suffering*. Pure Water Press, 2025.
- Priolo, Lou. *Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling: What Historical Biblical Counselors Really Believe*. Conway, AR: Grace & Truth Books, 2023.
- Wedding, Danny, and Raymond J. Corsini, eds. *Current Psychotherapies*. 11<sup>th</sup> edition. Boston, MA: Cengage, 2019. [There are e-books and print copies - you may also purchase used copies of 10<sup>th</sup> edition or 9<sup>th</sup> edition]

*Readings in Canvas - A list is provided in the Reading Report Section.*

## ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

This course is entirely electronic for the submission of assignments. Each assignment will be uploaded to Canvas in the appropriate portal. If you are unfamiliar with this process, make sure you schedule a time in advance with the T.A. to learn how to use Canvas.

### 1. **Synthesis Paper: Presuppositions in Conflict**

*1,000–1,200 words (not including footnotes or bibliography), Turabian style.*

The goal of this paper is not to report what authors say but to construct an argument of your own, using the assigned readings as evidence.

**The question:** Drawing on Priolo's *Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling* and at least one of the Powlison readings, identify what you consider the single most consequential presuppositional conflict between biblical counseling and secular psychotherapy – and argue why it matters for counseling practice.

#### **What this requires:**

- A thesis that makes a claim. "Biblical and secular counseling differ in their view of human nature" is an observation. "The conflict over the source of authoritative knowledge – Scripture versus empirical research – is more foundational than anthropological disagreements because it determines how all other conflicts are adjudicated" is a thesis.
- Engagement with at least two assigned sources as evidence for your argument, not as subjects to be summarized.
- At least one serious objection to your thesis, and a response to it. A master's-level argument anticipates pushback.
- Precision over breadth. A well-developed argument about one conflict is stronger than a survey of five.

**What this is not:**

- A book report on Priolo
- A list of differences between biblical and secular counseling
- A personal testimony about your counseling philosophy

A note on evidence: Use "micro-quotes" (3-5 words) rather than block quotations. Your analysis of what the quote means should always be longer than the quote itself.

**2. Reading Reports**

Other than books, the below readings will be provided in Canvas. You will submit such a brief report of your reading progress in Canvas for each section, reporting % read and % skimmed.

**Introduction (Day 1)**

- Powlison, David. "How Does Scripture Teach Us to Redeem Psychology?"
- Powlison, David. "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)."
- Priolo, Lou. *Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling*.
- *CP*, "Introduction to 21st-Century Psychotherapies."

**Psychodynamic/Psychoanalytic Psychotherapies (Day 2)**

- *CP*, "Psychodynamic Psychotherapies." (Psychoanalytic in older editions)
- *CP*, "Interpersonal Psychotherapy."

**Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapies (Day 2 -3)**

- *CP*, "Behavior Therapy."
- *CP*, "Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy."
- *CP*, "Cognitive Therapy."

**Third-Wave CBT and "Evidence-Based" Practices (Day 3)**

- Shedler, Jonathan. "Where Is the Evidence for 'Evidence-Based' Therapy?"
- Neacsiu and Linehan, "Borderline Personality Disorder." Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
- Hayes et al. "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Model, Processes and Outcomes." (stop at Research on ACT, p. 10)
- Harris, Russell. "Embracing Your Demons: An Overview of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy."

**Trauma-Informed Psychotherapy (Day 4)**

- Scheeringa, Michael S. "Evaluating Evidence behind Popular Trauma Narratives."
- Everhart, Erik. "Examination of Neuropsychological Models and Interventions Associated with Trauma."
- Statler, Matthew. "God's Redemptive Use of Trauma." Part 1 and Part 2
- Biblical Counseling Coalition. "BCC Statement on EMDR."
- Gangel, Kyle. "Counseling Theory Matters: Understanding and Evaluating Polyvagal Theory."
- Ganschow, Julie A. *Trauma Redeemed: A Biblical Response to Medicalized Suffering*.

### Humanistic/Existential Psychotherapies (Day 4)

- CP, "Client-Centered Therapy."
- CP, "Existential Psychotherapy."
- CP, "Gestalt Therapy."

### Systems Psychotherapies (Day 5)

- CP, "Family Therapy."
- CP, "Multicultural Theories of Psychotherapy."

## 3. Summary Study Guide

Create a study guide for the final, with 5 sections that are approximately 3-4 pages each: Psychodynamic/Psychoanalytic Psychotherapies, Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapies, Third-Wave CBT, Humanistic/Existential Psychotherapies, and Systems Psychotherapies.

Each section should cover (note these are not exactly as the S's presented in class):

- **Source of authority:** *Who are the authorities who determine what is "true" in this type of psychotherapy, the main proponents?*
- **Sin:** *What is the problem? What is the cause or source of the problem? What is their anthropology/how do they view humans?*
- **Salvation:** *What is the proposed solution to the problem? What is their end goal? What is their gospel?*
- **Sanctification:** *How specifically do they about change? What methods do they use?*
- **Servants of the System:** *What is the role/stance of the therapist? e.g., coach, consultant, reparenter (nurturer and corrector), container, analyst, facilitator, witness, collaborator, etc.*
- **Sparring:** *Where does it clash with a biblical worldview?*

## 4. Final Exam

Students are required to take a Final Exam in essay form, which will be based on the study guide. See instructions below for LockDown Browser.

## 5. Class Attendance and Participation

Attendance at every session is expected. Because this course is an intensive format, each session is substantive and cannot be replicated through notes or recordings. Students who miss a session without prior communication with the professor will find it difficult to maintain a passing participation grade.

Participation is evaluated across three dimensions: engagement in small group work, contribution to role play and case study exercises, and quality of questions and responses during lecture.

Note that preparation is not graded separately – but it will be evident. Students who have not done the reading will struggle to contribute meaningfully in any of these contexts, and that will be reflected in their participation grade.

## COURSE GRADING

### *Percentage and Due Dates*

Reading Reports <b>due Aug 14</b>	15%
Synthesis Paper for <i>Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling</i> <b>due Aug 14</b>	15%
Summary Study Guide <b>due Aug 21</b>	35%
Final exam <b>due by Aug 28</b>	20%
Class Participation	15%

### **Standard RTS Grading Scale**

### *Late Assignments*

Assignments are due as indicated on Canvas under the assignments. Assignments not submitted on time are considered late and are penalized 3% for the first day late, and 1% for each day late thereafter.

### *Extensions Policy for Assignments:*

In extenuating circumstances, a deadline extension of **up to one week** may be granted at the discretion of the professor. Requests for extensions of **more than one week** must be submitted to the Registrar for consideration by the Academic Dean in consultation with the professor. Extensions are granted only for significant emergencies or unforeseen circumstances, and a grade penalty may be applied. *All extension requests must be made prior to the assignment deadline.* No retrospective extensions will be granted.

## ADDITIONAL DETAILS

### *Accommodations*

In order to ensure full class participation, any student with a disabling condition requiring special accommodations (e.g., recordings, special adaptive equipment, special note-taking or test-taking needs) is strongly encouraged to contact the professor at the beginning of the course to make appropriate arrangements.

### *Disclaimer*

During the course of the semester the professor reserves the right to modify any portion of this syllabus as deemed necessary to the professor because of events and circumstances that occur during the term.

### *Classroom Policies*

1. All classroom policies at RTS Charlotte are expected to be followed.
2. Guidelines for papers (including reflections and exams) submitted in this course can be found as a separate document on Canvas. **Reading this document and following its instructions is essential for you to pass this course.**

3. Students are required to cite all sources consulted for a written assignment. Students who plagiarize or cheat in any other manner are guilty of academic misconduct and will be reported to the Dean of Students. This will result in disciplinary action up to and including failure of the course and academic dismissal.
4. Laptops are welcome in class for note taking only. Only word processing programs may be open during class; no browsers, email programs, social media feeds, or any other program is to be used. Please silence cell phones and do not text, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, or whatever else desperately beckons for your attention during class.

*Student Instructions for Exams with LockDown Browser*

1. Install the LockDown Browser application on the computer you intend to use for exams, prior to sitting for the exam, using this link:  
<https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=998253613>
  - a. This link is ONLY for RTS students and covers Mac and Windows applications.
  - b. Be sure that you are able to log in to your Canvas account from the LockDown Browser before the day of the exam.
  - c. If you use internet filtering software (for example, Covenant Eyes) you may need to disable it before beginning an exam with LockDown Browser. Some types of filtering software can block your computer's connection to Canvas. Also, please be sure to add an exception for our Canvas URL: <https://rts.instructure.com>
2. The exam proctor should not be a current RTS student (current = taken a class within the past year but not yet graduated) or a member of the library staff.
3. The proctor must observe the student taking the exam and ensure that there are no devices or resources available other than the computer being used for the exam.
4. Access the exam during the date window specified for that exam.
  - a. Sign in with the proctor.
  - b. Start the LockDown Browser application using a wired or known reliable Wi-Fi connection. We do not recommend using restaurant or coffee shop Wi-Fi to take exams.
  - c. Have your student ID number and proctor details available to input into the exam.
  - d. Log in to your Canvas account.
  - e. Navigate to the exam. You will not be able to access the exam with a standard web browser. For additional details on using LockDown Browser, review this [Student Quick Start Guide \(PDF\)](#).
  - f. The time clock will begin once you open the exam.
  - g. The exam must be completed in one sitting. You may not exit and return to the exam later.
  - h. The exam will contain questions regarding an honor pledge, and certification that your proctor was present during the entire exam period.
  - i. Sign out with the proctor.
5. Proctors may be contacted to verify information regarding exam administration.

6. In the rare case of a technical issue (for example, if power goes out during exam) the proctor will document the date and time when the issue was reported. Once you open the exam using the LockDown Browser, you will not be able to access other programs on your computer.

**Please also adhere to the following RTS internet usage protocol:**

*RTS Charlotte Classroom Technology Usage*

RTS Charlotte recognizes how essential it is for students to have reliable, campus-wide access to the internet. For that reason, we have made Wi-Fi available for our student body, not only in the library and student lounges, but also in the classrooms. We know that students need to use the internet to download class materials, access files on the Cloud, and locate other important information. However, we also recognize that internet access in the classroom provides opportunity for abuse and misuse. Some students have unfortunately used their internet access to engage in many activities that distract them from the classroom lectures (e.g., surfing the web, checking sports scores, playing games). Not only does such activity hamper a student's own seminary education, but it distracts other students who can easily view the screens of nearby students. In addition, donors and classroom guests (who often sit in the back) can see this inappropriate internet usage, which reflects poorly on RTS. Classroom etiquette includes leaving cell phones turned off, refraining from surfing the Internet or playing computer games or other distracting activities. In addition, students must respect standards set by individual professors regarding the use of technology during their class.

In order to address this issue, we must appeal to the integrity of the students as ones who are preparing for a lifetime of ministry to Christ and his church. We expect each student to take personal responsibility for proper classroom technology usage and to encourage others around them to do the same. All RTS-Charlotte students are accountable to the policies stated in the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog and are therefore expected to use technology in the classroom only for appropriate class-related activities. Student conduct is under the supervision of the Dean of Students.


**REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
SYSTEM

**Course Objectives Related to MACC Student Learning Outcomes**

Course: CO6101 Biblical Discernment and Secular Psychotherapies  
 Professor: Dr. Jenn Shiomi Chen  
 Campus: Charlotte  
 Date: Summer 2026

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>MACC Student Learning Outcomes</u></b></p> <p><i>In order to measure the success of the MACC curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MAC outcomes.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Rubric</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strong</li> <li>➤ Moderate</li> <li>➤ Minimal</li> <li>➤ None</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>COUNSELING KNOWLEDGE</u></b> Demonstrate knowledge of counseling theories and modern anthropology.</p>	<p>Strong</p>	<p>This course assists students in critically analyzing the foundational anthropologies of major secular psychotherapies to evaluate how they define the human condition.</p>
<p><b><u>COUNSELING SKILL</u></b> Ability to apply biblical truths and common-grace insights in a variety of counseling settings.</p>	<p>Strong</p>	<p>Students are provided an evaluative framework for evaluating the major secular counseling theories and methodology from a biblical worldview, while still appreciating helpful observations found in secular psychology.</p>
<p><b><u>SCRIPTURE</u></b> Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture and ability to apply to modern counseling circumstances.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>	<p>Scripture is presented as the authoritative standard against which all counseling systems are evaluated, with biblical categories of anthropology, sin, suffering, and change applied to each secular framework.</p>
<p><b><u>REFORMED THEOLOGY</u></b> Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice and ability to apply to modern counseling circumstances.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>	<p>A Reformed theological framework shapes the course's presuppositional approach. Powlison's analytic model reflects a Reformed understanding of human nature, authority, and sanctification applied to counseling.</p>
<p><b><u>SANCTIFICATION</u></b> Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.</p>	<p>Strong</p>	<p>The course directly engages competing accounts of human change — secular psychotherapy's models of healing versus the biblical account of sanctification. Students evaluate what each system offers as its "gospel" and means of transformation, deepening their own understanding of sanctification in the process.</p>
<p><b><u>WINSOMELY REFORMED</u></b> Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>	<p>Students are trained to engage secular approaches charitably before critiquing them, while maintaining biblical conviction — modeling the truth-in-love posture expected of a winsomely Reformed counselor.</p>

### Course Objectives Related to MDiv\* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: CO6101 Biblical Discernment and Secular Psychotherapies  
 Professor: Dr. Jenn Shiomi Chen  
 Campus: Charlotte  
 Date: Summer 2026

<b><u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u></b>		<b><u>Rubric</u></b>	<b><u>Mini-Justification</u></b>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong</li> <li>• Moderate</li> <li>• Minimal</li> <li>• None</li> </ul>	
<b>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</b>	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students develop written articulation through a synthesis paper, study guide, and essay exam. Oral articulation is exercised through discussion, case studies, and role play across the intensive format.
<b>Scripture</b>	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Moderate	Scripture is presented as the authoritative standard against which all counseling systems are evaluated, with biblical categories of anthropology, sin, suffering, and change applied to each secular framework.
<b>Reformed Theology</b>	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	A Reformed theological framework shapes the course's presuppositional approach. Powlison's analytic model reflects a Reformed understanding of human nature, authority, and sanctification applied to counseling.
<b>Sanctification</b>	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	The course directly contrasts secular psychotherapy's models of change with the biblical account of sanctification, requiring students to evaluate each system's anthropology, means of transformation, and ultimate hope.
<b>Worldview</b>	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	The course is structured around worldview analysis, examining the presuppositions embedded in secular psychotherapy and contrasting them with a biblical worldview across every major therapeutic tradition covered.
<b>Winsomely Reformed</b>	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Moderate	Students are trained to engage secular approaches charitably before critiquing them, while maintaining biblical conviction — modeling the truth-in-love posture expected of a winsomely Reformed pastor.
<b>Pastoral Ministry</b>	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Moderate	This course equips students to shepherd congregants navigating psychological suffering and to engage the broader counseling culture with discernment, credibility, and biblical compassion.