

# Biblical Counseling in the Spanish-Speaking World

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## Abstract

Spanish translations of Jay Adams's pioneering works slowly attracted pastors and counselors in Spain and Latin America to biblical counseling. Beginning before the turn of the millennium, the content of the biblical counseling courses of Westminster / Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) were taught in Mexico, where CCEF faculty books were increasingly translated. As new centers for biblical counseling training arose at Westminster West, California, at Faith Church in Lafayette, Indiana, and through the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, their international students began to take biblical counseling education to their home countries, many Spanish speaking. Finally, through the internet, biblical counseling training and practice have spread rapidly in Latin America and more slowly in Spain.

## Keywords

*Biblical counseling, consejería bíblica, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF), Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), Spanish-speaking, training, seminary*

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## Introduction

**T**he subject of this article is the expansion of biblical counseling to Spanish-speaking cultures. However, before surveying the international scene, it is worth noting that a surprising 38.3 million or 11.5% of Americans speak Spanish as their primary language in the home, and that is not counting Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the number of native Spanish speakers in the United States exceeds the population of most Spanish-speaking countries! Spanish-speaking Americans could be the first target audience of Spanish biblical counseling ministries, including training programs and publishers. Nonetheless, the more important training recipients for the purposes of this article are those who bring this ministry of the Word to their home countries, extending its reach. In the course of describing the origin and growth of these training ministries, some of their pros and cons will emerge as well.

A word of clarification of what is meant by biblical counseling is in order. The specific scope of this article is the Spanish-language expansion of the movement initiated and developed by the faculty of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) beginning with Jay Adams around 1970. Today CCEF is joined in expanding and extending biblical counseling principally by the ministries of Faith Church in Lafayette, Indiana, which include master's level seminary study, the Biblical Counseling Coalition, and certification through the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). Other ministries using “biblical counseling” in their name are not included in this article. In some cases, this is because I have personal experience with the ministry and know it to have a different conceptualization of the term; in other cases, I have no familiarity with the ministry and could only go by what I read online. I have almost certainly missed some ministries that deserve mention; this report is, inevitably, not exhaustive.

### I. *Distinctives and Challenges*

Some confusion arises from the way the term *biblical counseling* is used in Spanish-speaking countries. In the United States most people in Christian counseling are *intentionally integrationist*—they aim to integrate biblical

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<sup>1</sup> “The Prevalence of the Spanish Language within the US,” Milestone Localization, January 18, 2021, <https://www.milestoneloc.com/the-prevalence-of-the-spanish-language-within-the-us/#:~:text=53%20million%20Hispanic%20people%20live,a%20first%20or%20second%20language.>

principles with the secular psychologies because they believe each presides over its own domain, and wisdom from both is needed. This is probably true in Spanish-speaking countries as well. However, in recent years the term biblical counseling is gaining in popularity as a self-designation for ministries. Some educational institutions have simply changed the name of their program or course from “Christian counseling” to “biblical counseling” without changing any of the content. This practice can make it difficult to identify Spanish counseling resources that are genuinely biblical. Ministries that use “biblical counseling” in their name but which I know from personal experience to be integrationist at their core are not included in this article; rather, only those whose origins can be traced to CCEF or Faith/ACBC.

### **1. Lack of an Agreed-Upon Definition of “Biblical Counseling”**

The misuse of the designation “biblical counseling” is at least in part due to its lack of a standard definition. If someone says he is an amillennialist, it is understood what he means, or it can at least be looked up. But what does it mean to be a biblical counselor? The Spanish-language websites that offer a definition of biblical counseling tend to mention the following:

- Counseling belongs (wholly or mostly) to the church, and believers in general can and should engage in it.<sup>2</sup>
- The word of God is authoritative and sufficient to enable the believer to comprehend the problems of life in a fallen world.
- It is Christ centered.
- It is a form of discipleship.
- It is Spirit empowered; the Holy Spirit is the One who ultimately works change (sanctification) in a person’s heart.

No website mentions all of the above, but these characteristics appear repeatedly. In answer to the question of what the difference is between psychology and biblical counseling, Pastor Kike Torres identifies three characteristics that distinguish biblical counseling. Biblical counseling (1) honors the supremacy of the word, (2) prioritizes what the Bible prioritizes, and (3) has as its objective the glory of God.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I call counseling a “one-anothering” ministry, but the term is probably not originally from me.

<sup>3</sup> Questions answered by the author on the promotional page for Kike Torres’s book, *Una Nueva Vida: de Cristo en Adelante* (New York: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2023), <https://www.editorialhccp.com/vida/una-nueva-vida-de-cristo-en-adelante/>.

I will opine that all of the above are accurate descriptions of what we biblical counselors aspire to offer. There is yet another aspect not mentioned that proceeds from the supremacy of Scripture but deserves to be emphasized as a separate item in any list of distinctive characteristics of biblical counseling: For counseling to be biblical, the counselor needs to have a *biblical anthropology* or *doctrine of man*. I believe this is the most difficult criterion to attain because having a robust biblical model of the person entails years of deprogramming from many ideas that are so much a part of Western cultures that they are assumed or taken for granted.

This assertion requires an example to be clear. One popular false anthropology holds that a person has basic psychological “needs” and is even defined by them. However, when identified, the needs are all subjective, such as needs for affection, encouragement, and purpose, all of which would more accurately be called desires. Objective needs would include forgiveness, salvation, redemption, and regeneration. Larry Crabb found subjective needs to be at the core of the person. In his books on biblical counseling, he taught that man has two basic needs, security and significance (or relationship and impact).<sup>4</sup> Yet, such needs-based models are not biblical conceptualizations of the person; they are repackaged secular theories.

David McClelland posited that there were three different basic needs: affiliation, power, and achievement.<sup>5</sup> Affiliation is another way to say relationship; power and achievement together are equivalent to significance and impact. It is clear that needs-based models of the person derive from psychologists like McClelland, not from Scripture. This is not to say that there can be only *one* biblical model, just that a biblical model derives from inductive Bible study.

David Powlison uses the scriptural metaphor of two trees and a cross to analyze the beliefs and desires of the heart.<sup>6</sup> Other authors write about man from the perspective of creation, fall, and redemption. Still others focus on man as a worshiper who will worship either the true God or idols. In my biblical counseling curriculum, I devote an entire semester to a course on “theological anthropology” in order to clarify the difference between an

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Crabb, *Effective Biblical Counseling: A Model for Helping Caring Christians Become Capable Counselors* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Later, in his book *Understanding People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), Crabb changed the names of these two needs to relationship and impact.

<sup>5</sup> David McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> Powlison taught this model for over 25 years as a foundation to the understanding of how people change in his course “Dynamics of Biblical Change” (Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA).

anthropology that starts from an unquestioned premise and then finds Bible verses to support it and one that starts with the word of God and asks what the Creator says about human beings.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Interpretation into Spanish

Another challenge to establishing a biblical counseling ministry is that the Spanish language has no word that means exactly the same as “counseling” in English. In Spain, the word *consejería* without any context or modifiers could most easily be understood to mean professional financial advice. (Thus *consejería bíblica* could have been understood to mean biblical financial services!) As the field grew in Spain, *orientación*, *consejería*, *aconsejamiento*, and *asesoramiento* were all used to translate what we call counseling in English. The first Adams book translated into Spanish, *Competent to Counsel*, was called *Capacitado para Orientar*,<sup>8</sup> not *Capacitado para Aconsejar*. In the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE), the undisputed (at least to purists) authoritative source for the Spanish language, *consejería* only refers back to *consejo* (counsel or council), the definition closest to our concept being “opinion expressed in order to orient an action in a certain way.”<sup>9</sup> As Jaime Morales noted in his introduction to his course on biblical counseling, “The terms *consejería* and *aconsejamiento* are not part of the Spanish language according to the Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy, at least not with the connotation we give them.”<sup>10</sup> The result of this minor vocabulary handicap was that, while there is a lag time with any trend that crosses the Atlantic in either direction, in this case the delay in establishing counseling itself as a legitimate enterprise was perhaps exacerbated.

## 3. Pushback from Pastors

Finally, there has been pushback from pastors with respect to counseling. It was thought that

<sup>7</sup> Natalie Carley, *Antropología Teológica: La Doctrina Bíblica del Hombre*, MINTS Online, <https://mintsonline.org/curso-antropologia-teologica.php>.

<sup>8</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970); Jay E. Adams, *Capacitado para orientar* (Barcelona: Editorial Portavoz, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> My rough translation of “Opinión que se expresa para orientar una actuación de una determinada manera,” from “consejo,” *Diccionario* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2022 update), <https://dle.rae.es/consejo#H36BPCo>.

<sup>10</sup> “Los términos *consejería* y *aconsejamiento* no pertenecen al español según el Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (DRAE), por lo menos no en la connotación que nosotros les damos.” Jaime Morales, “Principios bíblicos en el aconsejar,” extracto de “Consejería Bíblica Práctica,” MINTS Online, <https://mintsonline.org/blog/principios-biblicos-en-el-aconsejar/>.

counseling was an extreme measure for cases of extreme harm or need. If you asked the pastor for counseling or help, it was because you were already in bad shape and desperate. Pastors even avoided counseling since they felt unprepared and thus intimidated. It was always easier to recommend the church member seek a “professional.” Even today, this is how many understand counseling; for example, there are pastors who are beloved and used by God who, when someone comes to request counsel or help, they refer the person to their sermon archives.<sup>11</sup>

## II. *Various Cultural Contexts*<sup>12</sup>

### 1. *Receptivity to American Ideas and the Spanish Divide*

We are looking at the expansion of a movement that began in the United States. Different countries have different responses to the importation of American ideas. Spain is separate from the rest of the Spanish-speaking world not only geographically but culturally. Nothing brought in from outside, especially from the United States, is immediately embraced. In contrast, American ideas brought to Mexico are not only embraced but welcomed, especially when they come from a sister denomination, such as a Presbyterian denomination with which they share the Westminster Standards, and to whose seminaries they send their pastors to be educated. However, denominations are not as prevalent in some Spanish-speaking countries. Spain, for example, has mostly looser associations of churches that function more independently, called *federations*. It is less common for a Spanish pastor to study for the ministry in the United States and, from what I have observed, the Spanish in general have less interest in learning English.

The aforementioned observations illustrate how, despite the common language, the cultural differences between Spanish-speaking countries and even regions within a country can be quite large. Some of the most significant differences are seen between Spain and the rest of the Spanish-speaking countries. Spain is a more developed country, and its culture is more post-modern. Spain has a much higher median age than that of Latin American countries and a higher percentage of people who profess no faith at all. I

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<sup>11</sup> “Consejería era una medida extrema para casos de extremo daño o necesidad. Si tu pedías consejo al pastor o ayuda, era porque ya de plano estabas muy mal y desesperado. Aún hoy, sé que es el formato en que muchos entienden la consejería, y por ejemplo, hay pastores amados y usados por Dios, que cuando alguien viene a pedir consejo o ayuda, los refieren a sermones pasados que dieron.” “¿Consejería Bíblica vs. Suficiencia de la Palabra?” Coalición de Consejería Bíblica, <https://www.consejero.org/post/consejer%C3%ADa-b%C3%ADblica-vs-suficiencia-de-la-palabra>.

<sup>12</sup> Much of this section is based on my doctor of ministry project: Natalie Carley, “Dynamics of Biblical Change’ for Spanish Speaking People” (DMin Project, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 2010), 20–24.



think this makes Spanish believers more disconnected from their own cultures.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. *The Status of Evangelicals***

The place of Christian faith in Spanish-speaking cultures is markedly different from that in the United States. Evangelicals are a vocal minority in the United States and a political constituency to be reckoned with. In Mexico, evangelical organizations were only allowed to formally exist starting in the 1990s, and the degree to which they are recognized (for example, allowed to publish announcements of activities in local newspapers) in the community varies, although overall it is improving. The evangelical community is increasingly less marginalized in some parts of Latin America, but still not in Spain. Widespread ignorance of Protestant Christian faith in Spain is seen in that even the appeals of respected pastors cannot get the press to call Christians evangelicals (*evangélicos*) instead of evangelists (*evangelistas*)!

## **3. *Cultural Awareness in Teaching***

Spanish-speaking cultures differ from one another in vocabulary, not for theological concepts but for everyday things. When I taught in new cities, I made a point of asking before my first class the most common words for elements of my examples from everyday life. When possible, I had a native review my PowerPoint presentations beforehand to make sure that they did not contain any unrecognized words. I had been using a certain slide for ten years only to find when I went to Argentina that a word on it was unknown there.

The differences between Spanish-speaking countries include political ones, which can also have a bearing on teaching if one wants to use culturally relevant examples, as I try to do. For example, when in Colombia I used a cartoon of Saddam Hussein to represent the abuse of authority, I was told that I should use a caricature of Hugo Chavez instead, so I made the substitution. However, I could not use this image in Ecuador or Bolivia, which have affiliations with Venezuela, all of their governments being populist. At least some political awareness is helpful to teach in a way that is more sensitive to students.

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<sup>13</sup> The precisionist in me has to say “cultures” because there is no one Spanish culture. The autonomous communities that comprise Spain are each proud of their own heritage and culture, and the Basque region, Catalonia, and Valencia have their own languages.

The more urban a culture is, the more like the United States it is, and vice versa. When I taught in a rural area, I had to take special care to ask questions beforehand to get an idea of the pressures that these people regularly face—for example, no traffic jam illustrations on the Island of Cozumel (where there is one road and few cars).

Economic factors are a large part of the pressures people in all countries of the world face today. I have had to expand the way that I teach about responding to life circumstances to address variations of the “health and wealth gospel.” The wealthier a culture, the more like the United States it is.

#### **4. Grassroots Appeal**

While historically there has been pushback from pastors on practicing counseling in general, there is now a grassroots appeal of biblical counseling to conservative pastors. The vast majority of Latin American pastors have not gone to seminary, where their beliefs might have been liberalized. Because biblical counseling is an outworking of the doctrines of the inerrancy and sufficiency of God’s word, it appeals to pastors of Reformed and other conservative denominations with a high view of Scripture. Through these pastors and churches, biblical counseling is spreading.

### **III. The Introduction of Biblical Counseling Training in Spanish-Speaking Countries**

Biblical counseling initially came to the Spanish-speaking world via the early works of Adams. Editorial Portavoz published *Competent to Counsel* (*Capacitado para Orientar*) in 1981, eleven years after its debut in English. Barcelona-based Editorial Clie, at that time the largest publisher of Christian (Protestant) books in Spanish, published the *Christian Counselor’s Manual* in Spanish in 1984.<sup>14</sup>

Clie’s primary markets are North America and Spain, where David Barcelo encountered the nouthetic counseling of Adams while studying psychology. As a result, he changed paths and went to the United States to study biblical counseling. He has been giving seminars on biblical counseling in churches and educational institutions ever since he returned to Spain in 2004.

Westminster alumnus David Legters worked to bring biblical counseling to pastoral education in the Yucatan. In 1987 he wrote to his alma mater requesting that they send someone to Mérida, Mexico, to teach biblical

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<sup>14</sup> Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973); Jay E. Adams, *Manual del consejero cristiano* (Terrassa: Libros Clie, 1984).



counseling at San Pablo Presbyterian Theological Seminary, which he co-founded.<sup>15</sup> There was no one at Westminster to meet this request at the time, but ten years later I was put in touch with “Don Bito” (the name by which he went), and he persuaded me of the value of this opportunity. Thus, after graduating from Westminster in 1998, I went to Mérida as a missionary, where I began to teach counseling courses to pastoral program students at San Pablo Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In 1999, I began teaching a two-year diploma program<sup>16</sup> of study offering Spanish translation versions of the Westminster/CCEF courses I had taken, with the permission of the original professors. Classes met each Saturday of the school year for two years. The program has grown and continues to this day.

Adams’s books also reached Latin America, and starting in the 2000s, Barcelo and I received invitations to travel from Spain and Mexico, respectively, to teach biblical counseling classes and conferences in countries in Latin America. Torres, Felix Ramirez, and others followed in the 2010s. Countries where biblical counseling has been taught in person in Spanish include at least Mexico, Nicaragua, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Peru.

In 2009, after being recruited by Barcelo, I moved from Mexico to Barcelona with the goal of establishing a biblical counseling training program there. The larger, better-known Bible school, Instituto Bíblico y Seminario Teológico de España (IBSTE), was not interested in biblical counseling then, but Centro Evangélico de Estudios Bíblicos (CEEB) was. I presented a very pared-down version of my two-year diploma program to the faculty, and it was approved. In addition to those who attended in person, some students from Mexico and the Dominican Republic attended virtually, synchronistically. The first cohort of students graduated in 2013. Unfortunately, the program did not continue because I returned to the United States. Since 2014 only an occasional introductory biblical counseling course has been offered by CEEB, taught by one or another of my former students.

In 2014 the president of IBSTE (who had not been interested in biblical counseling five years earlier) wanted to put together a master’s degree program in biblical counseling with the help of me and others, but that did not materialize.

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<sup>15</sup> To give credit where credit is due, a CCEF student from Acapulco named Maggie Gonzalez connected me to San Pablo Seminary. Maggie gave some seminars on biblical counseling in Acapulco before becoming a clinical psychologist specializing in neurological disorders in children.

<sup>16</sup> This diploma is an extension program of San Pablo Seminary, which itself was equivalent to a Bible school rather than a graduate school at the time.

## **IV. Spanish Biblical Counseling Ministries Today**

### **1. United States**

As mentioned in the introduction, there are more Spanish-speakers in the United States than in most Spanish-speaking countries. Responding to this demographic, Faith Church in Lafayette offers their biblical counseling training programs fully in Spanish. (Although it has been considered, the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation has not branched out into Spanish-speaking training to date.) Steve Viars, the senior pastor of Faith, completed his Doctor of Ministry degree at Westminster under CCEF faculty. CCEF has given them the rights to publish CCEF faculty-authored books in Spanish, and they have picked up where others left off in publishing a large number of CCEF's minibooks<sup>17</sup> in Spanish.<sup>18</sup>

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary offers a fully online master of divinity in biblical counseling degree at a reduced price for students in their Hispanic program. Since 2004, they have offered “a master of divinity program taught entirely in Spanish—a first for an accredited Protestant seminary in the continental United States, according to the Association of Theological Schools.”<sup>19</sup> The biblical counseling specialty was added later.<sup>20</sup>

### **2. Spain**

Barcelo continues receiving invitations to give seminars on biblical counseling to more and more churches in Spain, South America, and Central America, and he teaches biblical counseling as a member of the faculty of the Argentina-based Seminario Bíblico William Carey. He would say that biblical counseling is expanding in Spain almost entirely at this grassroots level. At the institutional level, CEEB offers a single course or occasional seminar called “biblical counseling,” but it does not have a full program of study at this time.

<sup>17</sup> This is the term CCEF uses for its single-topic booklets.

<sup>18</sup> “Videos de Observación de Consejería Bíblica en Español,” Lafayette: Faith Resources, Faith Church, <https://faithresources.vhx.tv/products/videos-de-observacion-de-consejeria-biblica-en-espanol>.

<sup>19</sup> David Roach, “M.Div. Taught in Spanish Slated at Southern Seminary,” Baptist Press, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/m-div-taught-in-spanish-slanted-at-southern-seminary/>.

<sup>20</sup> “Maestría en Divinidad en Consejería Bíblica,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, <https://www.sbts.edu/hispanos/maestria-en-divinidad-en-consejeria-biblica/>.

### 3. *Mexico and Beyond in Latin America*

The diploma program in biblical counseling, which I began at San Pablo Seminary, Mérida, Mexico, in 1999, has continued under the direction of two of its graduates, Ramirez and Elsy Castellanos, who each also studied for a year at Westminster. The training of the Coalición de Consejería Bíblica (CCB), the Spanish iteration of the Biblical Counseling Coalition, of which CCEF's former Executive Director Powlison was a founding member, is intensive, but the training offered by the San Pablo diploma programs and the recently formed "Red de Consejeros Bíblicos" (Network of Biblical Counselors)<sup>21</sup> is *intense*, necessarily meaning it includes fewer students. Nonetheless, the program has grown, and cohorts have formed in other states in eastern Mexico. Growth has occurred via word of mouth. San Pablo now offers the diploma program entirely online and its professors are beginning to develop an online presence through YouTube videos and social media.

Meanwhile, in 2012 the Mexican pastor Torres began studying the ACBC-certified training program of biblical counseling at Faith Church,<sup>22</sup> and in 2015 he initiated a ministry for ACBC certification in Spanish at his church on the west side of Mexico (unaware of the training program that already existed in the Yucatan). This ministry has grown in a manner parallel to the San Pablo diploma programs, but it has expanded much more through Torres's boundless energy, his vision to reach internationals, and the backing of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) with whom Torres received his certification. His Horizonte Church in Querétaro (on the other side of Mexico from Yucatan) hosts a well-attended week-long annual conference "Con Tu Consejo" (With Your Counsel), which his website says reaches hundreds of people from over three hundred different churches. This conference also offers his intensive fundamentals program for ACBC certification. He heads the CCB.<sup>23</sup> In recent years Torres has been impressively active in networking and extending biblical counseling in Latin America, and he has a strong online presence, which includes YouTube videos. Conferences and seminars comprise most of the training, making it more accessible to students who cannot commit to weekly classes and assignments.

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<sup>21</sup> The network's co-founders and principal instructors are Pastor Ramirez, Castellanos, Dr. Froylan Ceballos, and Leticia Vivas.

<sup>22</sup> Conversation with Kike Torres, January 6, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Torres also added fundamental counseling courses to the offerings of Seminario de Estudios Bíblicos Aplicados al Ministerio (Seminary of Biblical Studies Applied in Ministry, or SEBAM), which he founded in Querétaro, Mexico.

The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors has a Spanish website listing their certified study centers, which include Torres's center in Mexico as well as a center in Ecuador.<sup>24</sup> (A center in Chile was listed, but it appears inactive at this time.) Students at these centers attend conferences in person or online to become certified biblical counselors. The website also shows a map with the location of certified ACBC counselors in South America: Peru, one; Ecuador, three; Paraguay, one; Chile, one; and Argentina, one. Biblical counselors are also listed in Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.<sup>25</sup>

Although I did not find it on the ACBC site, the Reformed Seminario Bíblico William Carey in Argentina offers a fully online diploma in biblical counseling that is ACBC certified.<sup>26</sup>

Jairo Suarez, an ACBC-certified biblical counselor, is leading the initiatives of the Biblical Counseling Coalition in Colombia. Julio Benitez, president of the Seminario Reformado Latinoamericano (Reformed Latin American Seminary, formerly known as Gospel to Colombia), based in Medellín and having eighteen branch sites, is in the process of creating a master's degree program in biblical counseling that teaches CCEF material. Historically, the majority of pastors in Colombia (as in Latin America in general) did not practice counseling their sheep except in some grave cases, in which case they addressed "inner healing" or "spiritual warfare." However, in recent years due to the influence of biblical counseling literature and the internet, some neo-Calvinist pastors have been studying biblical counseling and beginning to apply its principles.

#### **4. Online-Only Ministries**

The ministry Coram Deo has a podcast and a team of biblical counselors who offer their services, paid by the hour, through their website.<sup>27</sup> Front and center on their main biblical counseling page, Coram Deo directly addresses the problem (mentioned at the beginning of this article) with the use of the term "biblical counseling" in Spanish to identify ideologically

<sup>24</sup> "Get Training," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/training/get-training/training-centers-map/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Find a Counselor," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/find-a-counselor/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Diplomado en Consejería Bíblica," Seminario Carey, 2023, <https://www.seminariocarey.org/academica/diplomado-en-consejeria/>.

<sup>27</sup> "Servicios de Consejería," Coram Deo, <https://proyectoCoramDeo.com/citas>. The Coram Deo website also contains links to the ministries that they have determined are truly biblical counseling. However, the list is not complete or updated. At least one link is broken.

diverse ministries. They warn readers to distinguish biblical counseling training along the lines of CCEF and ACBC from other “biblical counseling” education that they explain is actually integrationist.

Alejandra Sura, a bilingual native of Costa Rica, who completed a master’s in biblical counseling at Westminster, has built a substantial online Spanish biblical counseling ministry over the past few years. She can be found on all the major social media sites. At this writing, she has 68,000 followers on Instagram and 16,000 subscribers on her YouTube channel, where she posts short videos on biblical counseling. She and her husband both offer counseling virtually through the *Coram Deo* website.

## V. Resources

### 1. Publishers

When I started teaching biblical counseling in 1998, I could count on one hand the number of solid biblical counseling books available in Spanish to assign as reading material to students. Now there are so many that I cannot list all the authors or publishers, let alone the titles themselves. What follows are what I have found to be the most important sources of biblical counseling books in Spanish.

As mentioned, Faith Church in Lafayette publishes a number of resources in Spanish, including CCEF faculty-authored books and numerous mini-books, books by Tedd Tripp, Paul Tripp, Robert Jones, Leslie Vernick, Elyse Fitzpatrick, John MacArthur, Ken Sande, Nancy De Moss Wolgemuth, and others.<sup>28</sup>

The ministry *Faro de Gracia* is both a publisher and distributor of Reformed resources in Spanish. Some of their list of offerings overlaps with that of Faith, and they have some resources that Faith does not. *Faro de Gracia* purchased the rights to distribute Ed Welch’s *Blame It on the Brain?* and *When People Are Big and God Is Small* from the small Spanish publisher Peregrino.

Nonprofit *Poiema Publicaciones* is “a reformed, gospel-centered publishing ministry based in Medellín, Colombia.”<sup>29</sup> Although relatively new to the scene, *Poiema* publishes or distributes over 100 titles in Spanish, some of which are not available from other distributors (but can be found on Amazon, of course!).

<sup>28</sup> “Recursos en Español,” Faith Resources, Faith Church, 2023, <https://store.faithlafayette.org/espanol-spanish/recursos-en-espanol>.

<sup>29</sup> “What Books Have Already Been Published in Spanish by Poiema?,” *Poiema Publicaciones*, <https://poiema.co/pages/poiema-english>.

Editorial EBI has a blog that features entries by biblical counselors such as Ed Welch, Julie Lowe, and Elyse Fitzpatrick.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Videos and Articles

At the turn of the millennium, I did not know of any biblical counseling videos available online or through mail order. I uploaded as many articles from CCEF's *Journal of Biblical Counseling* as my Mexican colleagues<sup>31</sup> and I could translate to our website. Now, almost all of these articles have been made into the minibooks I mentioned. Although it has not been updated, our website still has a number of articles not available elsewhere.<sup>32</sup>

The Spanish Biblical Counseling Coalition's website has articles, a blog, audio recordings, and videos.<sup>33</sup> It also has a list of most of the most important Spanish biblical counseling books.

The Spanish ACBC website has a substantial library of articles, conference messages, and podcasts.<sup>34</sup> One can find many videos by other professors of biblical counseling online by searching by name and topic.

## 3. Recommended Books

So many biblical counseling books by so many new authors have been published in Spanish in the last decade or so that it can be difficult to keep up with them all. Nonetheless, my colleagues and I still consider the early books by CCEF faculty that were published in Spanish to be the most indispensable foundational resources for Spanish speakers who want to study how to do biblical counseling or to improve their counseling. We recommend the books assigned as required reading<sup>35</sup> for the San Pablo diploma program courses:

- *Encuentros de Poder (Power Encounters)* and the minibook *Enojo: Escapando el Laberinto (Anger: Escaping the Maze)*, by David Powlison
- *Cuando la Gente es Grande y Dios es Pequeño (When People Are Big and God Is Small)* and *¿Es el Cerebro el Culpable? (Blame It on the Brain?)*, by Ed Welch

<sup>30</sup> "Blog," Editorial EBI, <https://ebi-blog.org/category/consejeria/>.

<sup>31</sup> The "Red de Consejeros Bíblicos [Network of Biblical Counselors]" based in Mérida, Yucatan, Mexico.

<sup>32</sup> "Recursos," Consejeros Bíblicos, Red de Consejeros Bíblicos, <http://www.consejerosbiblicos.com/recursos/>.

<sup>33</sup> "Libros," Coalición de Consejería Bíblica," <https://www.consejero.org/libros>.

<sup>34</sup> "Recursos Destacados," Asociación de Consejeros Bíblicos Certificados, <https://biblical-counseling.com/es/resource-library/>.

<sup>35</sup> The list fluctuates somewhat and is not exhaustive.



- *Instrumentos en las Manos del Redentor (Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands)*, *Edad de Oportunidad (Age of Opportunity)*, *¿Qué Estabas Esperando? (What Did You Expect?: Redeeming the Realities of Marriage)*, and *Guerra de Palabras (War of Words)*, by Paul Tripp
- *Cómo Pastorear el Corazón de Tu Hijo (Shepherding a Child's Heart)*, by Tedd Tripp
- *El Pacificador (The Peacemaker)*, by Ken Sande
- *La Consejería: Cómo Aconsejar Bíblicamente (Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically)*, by John MacArthur and the Master's College faculty

Finally, we also consider the textbooks I wrote for my students to be foundational—namely, the aforementioned *Antropología Teológica (Theological Anthropology)* and *La Dinámica del Cambio Bíblico (The Dynamics of Biblical Change)*.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

As one might surmise from the sheer number of ministries cited, there has been an explosion of Spanish biblical counseling ministries, especially training programs, in the past ten to fifteen years. At the time that I wrote my doctor of ministry project (completed in 2010), there were scant Spanish language biblical counseling written resources, and (I perceived) a paucity of Spanish-speaking biblical counselors. My Mexican pastor Wilbur Madera was a prolific translator of CCEF faculty-authored books for me to use in my classes, but getting them picked up by a Spanish publisher was an arduous task.<sup>37</sup>

Now biblical counseling has gained so much popularity that presidents of at least two seminaries to whom I made unsuccessful appeals for biblical counseling in the mid-2000s now have courses called introductions to biblical counseling. Institutes whose loyalty to integrationist approaches or even

<sup>36</sup> “Recursos,” Consejeros Bíblicos, Red de Consejeros Bíblicos, <http://www.consejerosbiblicos.com/recursos/>. Both courses can be found under “Cursos.” They have not been professionally edited.

<sup>37</sup> David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), was published/translated first because I could more easily negotiate the foreign language rights (i.e., between CCEF and Baker Books). Later, I negotiated rights to print and distribute 200 copies of Ed Welch's *Blame It on the Brain?* to my students before I convinced Peregrino in Spain to formally publish it as well as Ed Welch's *When People Are Big and God Is Small*, both of which I edited for faithfulness to the English meaning. In my years of reading translations of books alongside the original, I noticed that if the translator did not have a solid working knowledge of the material, his translations were sometimes not faithful to the meaning of the original.

secular psychologies was behind their refusal of my appeal have ostensibly done an ideological about-face. I should not be surprised by the burgeoning Spanish biblical counseling ministries because in 2010 I wrote that my teaching was timely in that it took advantage of what I saw as perhaps a unique window of opportunity in the development of Latin American Christian thinking about the person to reach Christian leaders before these cultures become as “psychologized” as that of the United States.<sup>38</sup>

My concern with the innovative modular training programs is that, while the content is solid, the overall quality of the learning experience is diminished by this method. The mere proliferation of these new learning venues seems to have brought with it the tendency to ask less of the student. Traditional courses require assignments that are turned in, graded, and returned to the student throughout the semester. This mentoring via ongoing correction and feedback enriches learning. Today courses consisting of week-long conferences or seminars or watching a series of videos online without assignments are the new norm.

The standout ministry in this sea of virtual seminars is the ACBC. Their curriculum seems to have expanded rather than contracted. ACBC certification also requires the student to pass some final exams in counseling and theology and have 50 hours of supervised counseling (which is mentoring). By allowing only ACBC-certified counselors to teach the seminars and supervise the students, they maintain consistency of content and control over who teaches it.

A master’s degree program or even a two-year diploma program requires a substantially larger investment of time and in some cases money. Even if it will prepare him or her more thoroughly, a student who has to earn a living is less likely to have the desire or the resources to invest in a two- to four-year program of study online, let alone residential, often in a distant city. Another drawback of a master’s degree in biblical counseling completed in Spanish is that it does not prepare its graduates to obtain any type of government licensure, which is often needed to receive third-party (insurance) payments for counseling.

In other words, virtual learning, even via seminars, is the more realistic choice for most people. It is so much more accessible that it is the way of the future—or rather, the present. It spreads wider, if not deeper. Moreover, the Lord can use all of these ministries—degree programs or nondegree programs, in person or virtual—to open believers to the riches of his word applied to life, the ministry that we call biblical counseling.

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<sup>38</sup> Carley, “‘Dynamics of Biblical Change’ for Spanish Speaking People,” 12.