

Running head: SPIRITUALITY IN COUNSELING

A 4-MAT Review: Spirituality in the Counseling Office

Nick Roy

Liberty University

A 4-MAT Review: Spirituality in the Counseling Office

In the book *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling* Mark McMinn (1996) is a clinical psychologist by training with a background in cognitive therapy. He stresses the importance of Christianity in the counseling office and gives numerous examples of how best to integrate Psychology with Christianity. He uses his cognitive therapy background as theoretical foundation. As a practicing psychologist, he stresses the importance of establishing trust in the therapeutic relationship with a client before confronting the client in order for the client to achieve lasting change.

As McMinn (1996) states, many counselors and Christian counselors in particular very rarely use the Bible in their counseling practice. In addition, he explains how hard core Christians, such as Jay Adams, very seldom look to psychology in their work. The book bridges this gap. He does not only insist on the use of Scripture, study of the Biblical texts, prayers and sacraments in counseling practice, but also gives practical advice, aiming to help to apply all this in practice. McMinn (1996) underlines the power of Scripture and enumerates all positive effects of the use of Scripture in counseling. Unfortunately, modern counselors seldom turn to Scripture in order to support their counseling models. McMinn (1996) does his best in order to correct this fault and attract the attention of counselors to the importance of the use of Scripture.

McMinn (1996) believes that to be an effective counselor means acknowledging that counseling is an intensely personal process that reflects the counselor's spiritual life as well as his or her educational and experiential background. McMinn's study whether to pray with a client, use of confession and scripture memory in the therapy process is also very interesting. Traditionally, counselors try to avoid any mention of religion in their practice. This type of an attitude can have negative consequences as most emotional disturbances can be related to sin and

confessing those sins in the privacy of the counseling a necessary part of the healing process.

McMinn (1996) argues that integrating the notion of sin and the process of confession in to the counseling practice can help clients grow spiritually.

McMinn (1996) discussions on the topic of forgiveness and redemption are also interesting. The concept of forgiveness as McMinn (1996) described is not one of simple emotional relief. In contrast to psychotherapy, forgiveness and redemption involves empathy, self-awareness, and humility. Redemption is a way of recovering, and God is allowing value and meaning to be restored to the client's life. Christianity and psychology are two complex disciplines and those on both sides of the debate have a difficult time understanding the relationships that each can bring to the healing process of their clients. By having a firm foundation in both psychology and theology, a counselor can help their clients understand this relationship.

Concrete Response

Occasionally I do some lay counseling on the weekend at my nearby church to get some experience. Being a lay counselor, who does not charge for the work, is a great way for me to gain some experience in counseling. Reading this book got me thinking about the use of religion in the counseling practice as a lay counselor. In my mind, being a lay counselor still requires me to abide by certain ethics codes for the counseling profession. Lay counselors are like regular counselors, but we do not charge for our work. Lay counselors are still responsible for not causing damage to the client's lives. In this area it would clearly be best to err on the side of caution, since some conditions will deteriorate if not tended to. I can say from observation that professional counselors are usually viewed with suspicion because of their secular theories and

the profit motive. In my mind, this is a good reason for more people to use lay counselors who have an interest in gaining a foundation in theology to integrate with the counseling practice.

I realize that psychology and religion cannot be separated and the problems described by that counselor can be resolved only if counselor uses psychology, theology and faith as means to help people. Traditional psychology has forgotten about its original destination to cure human souls. As a counselor, I feel the need for holistic counseling, which is healing the mind, body, and soul. I need the use of those secular theories to heal the mind and body, but I also need to use scripture and the spiritual disciplines to help a client heal their soul. Dealing with everyday problems and emotional comfort is why people come to counseling. I believe that only a counselor with a theological foundation can help people to truly deal with these kinds of problems.

Reflection

I think that this book can be a great practical guidebook for both a beginning counselor as well as the experienced counselor. The book can help a counselor bring religious interventions into their treatment plan. McMinn described how he became more psychodynamic after he participated in personal therapy (McMinn, 1996, p.156). The concepts and examples presented in this book appear to have a cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic approach. McMinn (1996) is a cognitive psychologist by training and experience who has attained a solid theological foundation to be able to integrate both disciplines in this book. If you don't read the inside cover of the book, one could get the illusion that McMinn (1996) is a priest and counselor. In my opinion, McMinn (1996) could possibly be a born again Christian. I am beginning to agree that to be an effective counselor; we should have a solid foundation in both psychology and theology.

The entire book is geared towards Christian counseling with a cognitive-behavioral and psychodynamic bent. The majority of people seeking counseling prefer to work with a counselor that is faith-based. This infuriates traditional psychologists. McMinn (1996) is meeting this need by targeting those counselors who are interested in integrating religious interventions into their practice. Traditional psychologists who would read this book would argue that this approach limits the number of people who can get help. However, in my mind, it is all about marketing. McMinn (1996) is targeting a niche in the market. If a psychologist is not targeting the faith-based clientele, then this book is not for them. This book is for the true believer that is interested in developing an open-mind and opening their doors to the clients that need help. The idea that religious interventions can scare away some clients is far-fetched in my mind as the majority of people seeking counseling want to deal with a faith-based counselor. Our society is based on Judeo-Christian philosophy.

He mentions throughout the book about establishing a scientific base. This is one reason for the divide between psychology and Christianity. Psychologists argue that religious interventions cannot be backed up by science. There have been some research studies, but religious people have been grouped together when religious beliefs are not the same (McMinn, 1996, p. 159). There is a need for more scientific studies using religious interventions, but how do you go about it? Is it ethical for a counselor to use his cases as part of his research, even though he might change the names of individuals and some of the circumstances to protect identities?

Action

Christian counseling is still a relatively new area of counseling that is gaining in popularity. Christian counseling is becoming more popular because of the universal nature of

dealing with moral issues. Emotional problems and moral issues are encountered all-over the world, and Christians are found all over the world.

As I get more experience in being a counselor, I would like to personally get a more theological foundation to apply to my counseling practice. I plan on pursuing my doctorate in psychology, and will narrow my search down to schools that best provide this blend of the two disciplines. There are several schools that come to mind, one of which is the school that McMinn (1996) taught at. I currently spend some time reflecting on scripture, and want to learn more about sin, confession, and redemption and its place in counseling. I would like to spend some time reflecting on the notions of sin, forgiveness redemption and pray and their place in counseling. I agree with McMinn (1996) as he stated that the practice of confession has declined as there has been a decline in religious beliefs. Popular culture has eroded our morals and turned many people away from God. This book, as well as the other books that I have read, have opened my eyes to a lot of new perspectives for the field of counseling.

References

McMinn, M. R. (1996). *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*. Forest: Tyndale House Publishers.