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Opening Space for Dialogue Between Postmodern Therapists and Evangelical Couples

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Integrating spirituality and religion into clinical practice has become a significant area of interest for marriage and family therapists. The present article focuses more specifically on describing postmodern interventions that make therapy a meaningful and congruent experience for evangelical clients. The use of these interventions must grow out of an understanding of evangelical Christians as well as an ability to compare essential postmodern and evangelical thinking. Equipped with this basic knowledge and compatible interventions, the postmodern family therapist can implement an approach that is consistent with the language, relationships, and stories of evangelical clients. Finally, this article offers three case examples to illustrate this postmodern approach to the spiritual experiences of evangelical couples.

Keywords: *postmodern therapy; spirituality; evangelical; narrative*

In recent years, interest in religion and spirituality by mental health professionals has boomed (Morgan & Yarhouse, 2001). Of the mental health disciplines, marriage and family therapy has certainly been the most amenable to considering spiritual strivings and religious issues (Watson, 1997). Thayne (1997), observing this shift toward more openness, attributed it to postmodernism. Of the approaches that are grounded in postmodern philosophical assumptions, numerous authors have noted that the collaborative and narrative approaches are particularly well suited for addressing spiritual issues and working with religious clients in therapy (Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Kudlac, 1991; Prest & Keller, 1993; Stander, Piercy, MacKinnon, & Helmeke, 1994; Weingarten, 1998; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996).

Even though marriage family therapists have made significant strides to address spirituality in general, a review of the literature shows that work with specific denominational and religious groups has been neglected to date (Joanides, 1996). Stewart and Gale (1994) responded to this deficit by writing that "a generic approach to religious clients will not do, any

more than a generic approach to ethnic clients . . . will do" (p. 17). One specific religious group that has been neglected by marriage family therapist literature is evangelical Christians.

It is the assumption of this article that postmodern therapists are capable and willing to work with people who have different religious backgrounds than their own. However, a lack of information about evangelical beliefs and practices may interfere with their ability to be useful and credible with these clients. With greater religious knowledge and understanding, postmodern therapists may be able to approach evangelical clients with greater confidence, knowing that they are using an approach that is a congruent experience for evangelical clients.

Therefore, the overarching purpose of this article is to engender greater understanding of evangelical couples so that postmodern therapists may then use interventions that are fitting for these clients. To make therapy a meaningful and harmonious experience for their evangelical clients, postmodern therapists must accomplish two tasks. First, they must become knowledgeable of the common beliefs and practices of evangelical clients. Secondly, they must develop an awareness of how their own philosophical and theoretical ideas compare with the theological beliefs of their clients. In the following sections, we will explore these areas of thought with the intent of helping the postmodern therapist develop an approach that is consistent with the language, relationships, and stories of evangelical couples.

For ease of comparison, this article will describe both postmodern therapists and evangelical Christians in broad, general terms. However, this author is well aware that there are exceptions to how each group is characterized.

UNDERSTANDING EVANGELICAL CLIENTS

Nearly half of the Protestants in the United States now categorize themselves as evangelical Christians (Kosmin &

Lachman, 1993). And even though there are disparate strains of evangelicals, they do have a shared identity and characteristics (Stewart & Gale, 1994). It is beyond the scope of this article to fully examine evangelical theology and practices; however, certain religious ideas and behaviors are relevant to our later discussion. Therefore, only these beliefs and practices will be introduced.

Common Beliefs

Evangelical Christians agree on several theological beliefs. First, they believe in the Trinitarian nature of God (DiBlasio, 1988). "This means that God is one in essence, eternally subsisting in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Lindsell, 1980, p. 1491). Each person of the Trinity has a unique purpose. God the Holy Spirit transforms believers and "internalizes the presence of Jesus" (Stott, 1999, p. 93). Stott (1999) added, "I think all evangelical Christians agree and affirm the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Because of these functions, evangelicals place much emphasis upon the Holy Spirit" (p. 93).

Jesus Christ, God the Son, also has a specific ministry and is a focus for evangelicals. He was resurrected from the dead and now lives in the hearts of believers (Thurston, 2000). Stott (1999) referred to this as "the redeeming work of God the Son" (p. 25). Because of this core belief, many evangelicals will refer to their relationship to Jesus in very personal terms (DiBlasio, 1988).

Finally, evangelicals share a belief in the revelation, inspiration, and authority of Scripture (Stott, 1999). What does this mean? First, the word *revelation* means that God has taken the initiative to show his nature through Scripture. The word *inspiration* means that God has revealed himself by speaking to and through the human authors of the books of the Bible. This means that the Bible is the Word of God. Finally, *authority* indicates what must happen because God has revealed himself to and through human authors. "Because Scripture is the revelation of God by the inspiration of the Spirit, it has authority over us" (Stott, 1999, p. 54). As a result of its authority, evangelicals assert that the Bible must guide them in their beliefs and practices (Thurston, 2000).

Common Practices

In addition to shared beliefs, evangelicals have common practices. Among the foremost of these is regular participation in local churches. Church attendance is a habit (Stewart & Gale, 1994). At church, they are deeply involved with and discuss their problems with their pastors and church leaders, such as elders (DiBlasio, 1988). They typically seek out their

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that are compatible
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pastor first for counseling, who may then refer them to the marriage family therapist for further work (Thurston, 2000).

Other familiar practices include baptism, the Lord's Supper, Bible reading, and prayer (Stewart & Gale, 1994). Baptism and the Lord's Supper may be infrequent rituals, but prayer and Bible study are often daily practices for these Christians (DiBlasio, 1988). In addition to seeking the counsel of church leaders, evangelical couples are likely to consult the Bible and pray when facing marital difficulties (Stewart & Gale, 1994).

A COMPARISON OF POSTMODERN AND EVANGELICAL IDEAS

In this section, we will examine similarities as well as a significant difference between postmodern and evangelical Christian thinking. Why is this comparison important? First, this awareness may put postmodern family therapists at ease, knowing that their theoretical base of understanding, if phrased appropriately, is generally compatible with evangelical thinking. Second, knowing key differences will help postmodern therapists avoid language and ideas that could undermine the therapeutic relationship between them and their evangelical clients.

Similarities

The insufficiency of human reason. Both postmodernism and evangelicalism share a doubt in the powers of human reason. First, from a postmodern perspective, postmodernists reject belief in the progressive, rational, scientific discovery of knowledge. They doubt that reason and science can open the doors to truth (Payne, 2000). There are limits on the ability of human beings to know and describe reality in an absolute way, according to postmodern therapists. Anderson (1997) argued that the individual knower is not the source of or the one who validates knowledge.

Evangelicals agree that finite human beings do not have perfect knowledge of the truth (Groothuis, 2000). No one can say that he or she knows or understands the truth absolutely (Erickson, 2001). It is possible to commit errors in the knowing process. As finite human beings, people have only a limited grasp of the truth (Groothuis, 2000). As the Scripture says, "We only know in part" (I Cor. 13:12).

The source of truth. If reason is not adequate for revealing the truth, where does knowledge originate? On this topic, there is some agreement between evangelicals and postmodernists. However, postmodern therapists must be particularly

careful when discussing this idea with evangelical clients. The postmodernist argues that we have no immediate contact with reality through our minds; therefore, the only thing we have access to is the language that we use to create reality. Because language builds our sense of reality, and because human beings create language, postmodernists contend that knowledge arises in a social context (Drewery & Winslade, 1997). According to Gergen (1985), knowledge is “not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather something people do together” (p. 270). Anderson and Goolishian (1988) put it succinctly when they said that “language creates the natures we know” (p. 378).

Evangelicals agree with part of the postmodern argument, but they bring new meaning to the conversation. Evangelicals agree that truth is the product of social exchange, but they expand on the meaning of *social*. They say that our social context includes both humans and God. They disagree with Rorty (1989) who argued that only humans speak. Evangelicals would respond by saying that God also speaks. From an evangelical perspective, it is within the context of both human and spiritual relationships that spiritual truths are “revealed.”

The power of conversation. From the previous topic, it is obvious that conversations are important to both postmodernists and evangelicals. Postmodernists believe that what we know about truth or reality comes through conversation (Parry & Doan, 1994). Postmodernists believe that problems exist because people have not had the right kind of exchange (Griffith & Griffith, 1992). If problems are maintained in language, then they must subsequently be dissolved through dialogue (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). The following quote expresses it well: “Therapeutic conversations are the medium of change” (Wright et al., 1996, p. 108).

Evangelicals also believe that truth cannot be ascertained in isolation (Grenz, 1996). They believe that truth is revealed in the context of discussions with church communities and God. Speaking of evangelicals, Grenz (1996) said, “We must remind ourselves that our faith is highly social” (p. 168). More important still, the evangelical must be in dialogue with God. Willard (1999) put it this way, “Our union with God . . . consists chiefly in a conversational relationship with God” (p. 56). Therefore, for the evangelical, knowledge of spiritual truth arises in the context of spiritual conversations.

The value of language. Previous discussions in this section reveal that the concepts of reality, conversation, and language are intermingled. Language has a prominent place in both evangelical and postmodern thought. Recognizing the importance of language, Anderson (1997) wrote, “I kept returning to language, conversation, and relationship as the central parts of therapy” (p. 1). White (1995) put it this way,

We have to be very sensitive to the issue of language. Words are so important. In so many ways, words are the world. So, I hope that sensitivity to language shows up in my work with persons. (p. 30)

For the evangelical, words also matter. Evangelicals contend that “God has chosen the model of human speech to illustrate his communication to us” (Stott, 1999, p. 40). They believe that God has chosen language as his way of communicating his mind to people. God was so eager to communicate his message of love to humankind that he sent his words in the form of his Son, Jesus Christ (Stott, 1999). Scripture says, “In the beginning was the Word. . . . The Word became flesh” (John 1:1, 14).

The importance of experience. Both evangelicals and postmodern therapists recognize the importance of experience. Reacting to the modern assumption that knowledge resides in experts who use rare and highly developed skills to discover truths about the real world and then pass these discoveries on to others, postmodernists contend that all one can know is that which one has experienced. They assume that knowledge gained from specific experiences, “experiential knowledge,” is as worthy of respect as “expert knowledge” (Payne, 2000).

Narrative therapists emphasize the storying of experience. From a postmodern perspective, people have problems because they recognize and express only certain parts of their experience. The experiences that get expressed are called “dominant stories” (White & Epston, 1990). Zimmerman and Dickerson (1996) referred to these pruned parts of experience as “marginalized” experiences. White and Epston (1990) argued that preferred experiences that have been unnoticed, unattended, and unstoried need to be noticed and voiced as new stories.

Karl (2002) has identified the spiritual dimension as the most marginalized part of people’s lives. Several evangelical writers are drawing attention to this rich and fertile resource. Kilian and Parker (2001) noted, “Experience is important because it provides a means for knowing and relating to God” (p. 77). Benner (2002) wrote, “To really know God we must know his love experientially” (p. 33). Hart (2001), recognizing the evangelical emphasis on knowing God through Scripture, observed the importance of experiencing the Word of God “through all the senses” (p. 45). Cobb (1995) quoted Wesley as saying that “correct beliefs do not make [one a] Christian” (p. 165). Instead, “true religion” involves experiencing the Spirit in one’s heart.

Major Difference

Differences concerning “truth” have the potential to wreck the therapeutic relationship between postmodern therapists and their evangelical clients. Evangelicals perceive postmodernists as abandoning the concept of truth. When one first reads some of the postmodern writers, this does seem to be the postmodern position. Rorty (1989) wrote, “Truth cannot be out there” (p. 5). Freedman and Combs (1996) wrote, “There are no essential truths” (p. 22).

However, this author does not understand postmodernism as having discarded the concept of truth. Instead, post-

modernists have abandoned the pursuit of truth. On close reading of postmodernists, one can see that they believe in reality. But they have concluded that no one can accurately know it. Because all we have are our perceptions of the truth, no one can claim to have grasped the “real” truth. Freedman and Combs (1996) did not say that truth does not exist; they simply said that “we can’t objectively know reality” (p. 33). Rorty (1989) wrote, “The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not” (pp. 5-6). Postmodern therapists Drewery and Winslade (1997) said it the clearest: “We do not argue that reality does not exist—only that we cannot know it directly” (p. 35).

When working with evangelical clients, postmodern therapists need to avoid expressing the belief that truth does not exist or that one should abandon one’s pursuit of truth. Evangelicals are unequivocal in their assertion that spiritual truth exists (Erickson, 2001). They refer to Scripture that writes of Jesus, “I am the way and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Evangelicals go on to argue that God is the source of that truth and that God communicates that truth to human beings (Erickson, 2001).

Although spiritual truth exists, evangelicals would insist that no one person knows or understands that truth absolutely (Groothuis, 2000). They understand that one’s understanding of the truth can be faulty. But does a limited grasp of the truth lead evangelicals to discard the concept of truth? Absolutely not.

Evangelicals would assert that postmodernists have made two important mistakes. First, they are wrong to abandon the pursuit of truth. And second, they argue that postmodernism has failed to see that there are some truths and stories that apply to all humankind. There are some universals that connect all people. As Moules (2000) pointed out, “Whereas modernity lost the individual in universalities, postmodernism may lose the universal . . . in the individual” (p. 231). Evangelicals proclaim that one story embodies the truth—the truth for all humankind. They assert that the story of Jesus is the truth for all people and all times (Grenz, 1996).

Ultimately, it seems that evangelicals hold two paradoxical beliefs. On one hand, they believe that it is possible to know the truth. But on the other hand, they suppose that the believer can commit errors in the knowing process (Erickson, 2001). The bottom line is that evangelicals continue in their quest for spiritual truth, and they believe that the story of Jesus personifies that truth.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Equipped with a greater understanding of evangelical thinking, what are the implications for clinical practice? Operating out of a postmodern framework, can we develop therapeutic interventions that are consistent with evangelical

beliefs, language, and practices? In this section, we will identify treatment possibilities for postmodern therapists who desire to work with the spiritual experiences of evangelical couples. In keeping with a postmodern perspective, these practices will emphasize relationships, conversations, and stories.

Support the Client’s Belief in the Concept of Truth

A postmodern therapist once said, “I am not interested in the truth. I only care about stories.” A statement such as this would certainly undermine the evangelical couples’ trust and confidence in the postmodern therapist because it is so different from their own belief system. An evangelical will not object if the therapist questions his or her understanding of the truth but will be offended if the therapist rejects the existence of truth. It is clearly part of the evangelical belief system to think of Jesus and Scripture as God’s revealed truth.

Be Curious About Biblical Teachings

Stewart and Gale (1994) have observed that therapists run the risk of losing their therapeutic effectiveness and being dismissed by evangelical clients if they contradict biblical teachings. Evangelicals believe that their actions should conform to Scriptural wisdom, so it is important to gather information about these biblical teachings. The therapist can ask the following types of questions: “What does your church teach about how husbands should treat their wives?” or “What is your understanding of what the Bible teaches about divorce?” Evangelicals will welcome questions about their understanding of Scripture, such as, “How did you come to understand that verse in the Bible that way?” But a statement such as “That belief is causing you a lot of trouble” could have negative therapeutic consequences.

Link Spirituality and Religion Together

Speaking to a group of professionals recently, a postmodern therapist stated his preference for spirituality over religion. This reflects the tendency of many postmodern therapists to separate the concepts of spirituality and religion (Prest & Keller, 1993). However, Haug (1998) warned us that some religious clients may experience use of the term *spirituality* as discounting. This most likely would be the reaction of evangelicals. For the evangelical, religion and spirituality are connected entities. Hurding (1995) defined *evangelical spirituality* as “that dimension of human existence which emphasizes the living out of commitment to God in every area of life, in relationship to Christ, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and as part of the fellowship of the Church” (p. 294). In this definition, spirituality and religion are obviously interwoven, because religion involves an organized social structure and includes beliefs about how people can relate to the divine (Miller & Thoresen, 1999).

Encourage Experiences That Are Supported by Scripture

We have already identified both the evangelical's and postmodernist's affinity for experience. Therefore, the postmodern therapist's emphasis on experience will fit well with the evangelical client's desire for spiritual/religious experiences. The evangelical will welcome invitations by the postmodern therapist to notice and story "unstoried" spiritual experiences. However, the therapist must remember that the evangelical couple will want their experience to be congruent with biblical teachings. Peace (1998) expressed an evangelical perspective when he pointed out that the Bible stands at the center of any subjective spiritual experience.

Invite Stories About Spiritual Rituals

The postmodern therapist will assume that spiritual experiences are expressed in stories. One type of spiritual experience that is important to evangelicals is a "spiritual ritual." Griffith and Griffith (2002) defined *spiritual rituals* as religious routines that are repeated over and over at regularly prescribed times. For the evangelical, they may include habits such as lifting hands in praise, singing familiar worship songs, kneeling at certain times in the service, or receiving communion. For the activity to fit Griffith and Griffith's definition of a ritual, it must promote a sense of a direct encounter with God and stir emotions of wonder.

Welcome Stories About Spiritual Practices

Stories can also be created from spiritual practices. Griffith and Griffith (2002) pointed out two characteristics of spiritual practices. First, they are typically enacted in solitude, whereas rituals occur during times of community worship. Second, they cause a change in the person's consciousness. For the evangelical, spiritual practices could include behaviors such as fasting, meditative prayer, daily devotions, memorizing Scripture, and even spiritual dancing.

Invite Conversations With God

Several postmodern therapists, recognizing that family members often view God as part of the family system (Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998; Butler & Harper, 1994; Stewart & Gale, 1994), have argued that God should be included in the therapy system (J. L. Griffith, 1986; M. E. Griffith, 1999; Kudlac, 1991). This practice is built on Anderson's (1997) concept of the "problem-organized system," which refers to all individuals who are communicating with each other about a problem.

Because many evangelical couples are in conversation or would like to be in conversation with God about their problems, it behooves the postmodern therapist to ask about these conversations. Keeping in mind the evangelical belief in the Trinity, and recognizing that each person has a unique way of understanding his or her conversation with God, the

postmodern therapist will want to discover with whom the client is conversing: God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. It is important to identify the key characters in the story.

Ask About Conversations With Church Leaders

While the evangelical couple is seeing you in marital therapy, they may be conversing with their pastor, leaders in the church, or members of a Bible study. Griffith and Griffith (2002) referred to these relationships as the person's "spiritual community." It is important to inquire about these relationships by asking questions such as "With whom do you discuss your problems?" and "Do you have a group of people who help support your spiritual life?" Once therapists have identified members of the evangelical couples' spiritual community, they can ask about these conversations, looking for new stories and possibilities. To use Anderson's (1997) words,

I consider myself a guest, albeit a temporary one, who visits clients for a brief moment, who participates with them in a small slice of life, and who floats in and out of continuous and changing conversations they are having with others. (p. 99)

CASE ILLUSTRATIONS

Case One

Bill and Marci. Bill and Marci, a middle-aged couple, attended a rural Southern Baptist church. In our first session, they informed me that their marriage had been turbulent from the start, and during our second session, Marci revealed that she had recently ended a lengthy affair. Taking a position of curiosity, I asked her, "How were you able to end the affair?" I was somewhat surprised by her answer: "I asked God to help me end it," she said. After discovering that she talked with God, I invited her to tell me a story about that conversation. I asked, "What did God say to you when you asked for help?" It was obvious to me that God was an important resource for her when she replied, "He said that he wanted better for me and that he forgave me." Referring to God in the reflecting position, I asked Marci a follow-up question, "What do you think God thought about the affair?" Slowly, she replied, "I think he was hurt and was waiting for me to come to him for help. Once I turned to him, he was there to help me." I thanked her for sharing that conversation with me.

In an individual session with Bill a month later, he began to talk about one of his goals: getting closer to God. Because he brought the subject up, I asked him, "Bill, do you have any ideas on how to get closer to God?" He had several. He responded, "Joining a men's group at church would help, because it would be a good environment for learning. I also need to read my Bible and pray more." Building on his response, I inquired, "Have you been in a men's group before?" "Yes, one time," was his reply. Trying to create more

of a story out of this past experience, I asked another question: "What kind of things did you talk about, and how was that helpful for you?" He answered, "We talked about our struggles and successes in living the Christian life. Being accountable to this group of men helped me follow the Lord."

Discussion. In the case above, I was clearly implementing some of the suggested interventions. With Marci, once I realized that God was part of her problem-organized system, I inquired about her conversation with God. Realizing that she viewed God as speaking to her, I asked, "What did God say to you? . . ." In an attempt to build on this experience and create more of a story out of it, I inquired, "What do you think God thought? . . ."

This spiritually sensitive approach was also part of my conversation with Bill. In his case, spirituality and religion were obviously connected. To reach his goal of "getting closer to God," he wanted to join a men's group at church, read the Bible, and pray. For Bill, spirituality and religion were linked together, and it was important for me to support his religious practices. One way to encourage him was by expressing an interest in his spiritual community. Notice that I did not ask about his beliefs. Instead, I inquired about his experience in a men's group. My question was, "What kind of things did you talk about, and how was that helpful for you?"

Case Two

Jane and Dave. I started seeing Jane and Dave soon after a crisis: Jane's suicide attempt. Hoping to alleviate her depression, they were seeing me for the goal of increasing their emotional and physical intimacy. In addition, Jane stated in our third session that she wanted to "be able to talk to God better." As is true of many evangelical couples, they were attending a mainstream Protestant denomination church.

During most of our sessions, we focused on their marital relationship and goals. However, in a session exactly a year after they began therapy, Jane began to talk about her spiritual life. This surprised me because it was not a subject that she had talked about. Looking back in my notes to our third session, I commented to Jane, "Being able to talk with God was one of your goals. It seems that we have neglected that goal. How is that going for you?" Her response was again surprising, "Oh, that's 10 times better than it used to be!" Wanting to know more, I asked, "How did that happen?" Her response was simple, "I opened my heart to Jesus." In an effort to expand on this spiritual experience, I inquired, "Jane, how has opening your heart to Jesus affected your life?" She replied, "Now I have peace with God. I feel his presence. I am happier. Now, I can slow down and appreciate life. Now, I can enjoy the sunset," she replied. "That sounds so wonderful," is all I could say.

Discussion. This case illustrates the importance of entering into a conversation about spiritual experiences when the opportunity arises. I noticed that she preferred to talk about

Jesus, so I used her language: "How has opening your heart to Jesus affected your life?" Her response to this question definitely helped us highlight important changes that were happening in her life. As a result of a renewed spiritual dimension, she was now happier and more aware of the world around her. I believe she was able to talk with me about this area of her life because my language was congruent with her own practices and beliefs.

Case Three

Lloyd and Beth. Unlike the other couples, Lloyd and Beth attended a large, metropolitan, nondenominational, evangelical church. After 2 years of marriage, they still loved and were committed to each other, but they realized that their marriage needed help. Beth had become increasingly critical and resentful of her husband. And even though they tried to avoid conflicts and "not rock the boat," their marriage was sinking.

In one of our early sessions, I learned about Beth's spiritual practice of meditative prayer. During our conversation, Beth mentioned that she had been meditating on John 5:17. She said, "While I was meditating on that verse, God told me that he is always working in my life. He said that he wants to bring me joy." The following is a partial transcript of the conversation that ensued:

Gregg: What did you make of that?

Beth: I used to think that God was only working while I was praying. After hearing what God said, now I am thinking that God is working all the time.

Gregg: So your new thought is that God is working even when you're not aware of it. It's not up to you to change everything. Is that right?

Beth: Yeah.

Gregg: Did you have any more new thoughts?

Beth: Yes, I thought it was neat that God said that he wants to bring me joy.

Gregg: So, instead of having to work so hard, you can enjoy the good things that God brings to you. How do those new thoughts affect you?

Beth: It takes some of the pressure off. It helps to know that God is at work changing Lloyd and me. It also changes my view of God.

Gregg: How's that?

Beth: I have always thought of God as wanting me to work hard. There was no place for enjoying him and life. Now I know that I don't have to worry about fixing everything. I can relax and have some fun.

Gregg: Have you had some time to think about how these new thoughts might play out in terms of how you relate with Lloyd?

Beth: No, not yet.

Discussion. Several aspects of the spiritually sensitive approach advocated in this article are illustrated by this case. First, I welcomed a story based on Beth's spiritual practice of meditative prayer. I was inviting her to dialogue about an important spiritual/religious experience. Her meditative

prayer had clearly evoked a sense of a direct encounter with God. Second, I showed curiosity regarding her understanding of Scripture when I asked, "What did you make of that?" Throughout the conversation, it was important for me to support Beth in her pursuit of truth in Scripture. And even as she was developing new beliefs about God, I supported her in her desire to reconcile these new ideas with Scripture. Finally, because of her belief in the authority of Scripture, I asked her how her understanding of the Bible would affect her interactions with her husband.

CONCLUSION

Sidestepping the notion that postmodernists and evangelicals belong in two separate and closed camps, this article argues for and models openness between the two groups. Avoiding a posture of suspicion and antagonism, and assuming a postmodern position of not knowing, this article suggests an approach that effectively uses the religious beliefs and practices of evangelical couples. This article identifies five essential beliefs of postmodern family therapists that are compatible with the thinking of evangelical clients. However, when it comes to the subject of truth, postmodern therapists must be sensitive to the use of language.

This article proposes a framework that relies on mutual respect and accommodates the positions of both postmodernists and evangelicals. Based on an understanding of the similarities and differences between postmodern and evangelical thinking, this article proposes eight interventions that are compatible with evangelical beliefs, language, and practices. For example, postmodern therapists must be curious about biblical teachings, encourage experiences that are supported by Scripture, and ask about conversations with church leaders, along with other interventions. Using this spiritually sensitive approach with evangelical clients, we have seen that this postmodern approach can open therapy to new stories—new stories that can bring new possibilities to therapy with this specific religious group.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

I am hopeful that this article will encourage more discussion about the reconciliation of postmodern therapies with specific religious groups. In this article, I examine the integration of postmodernism and evangelical Christianity, but I am hopeful that other writers will explore the joining of postmodern therapies with other religious belief systems. Undoubtedly, such a dialogue will result in reforms for postmodernism.

Authors within the field of marriage and family therapy have already begun to suggest what these changes will look like. According to Linares (2001), this new postmodernism will "defend an ethical paradigm of intelligence" (p. 410). Pilgrim (2000) said it will recognize that "it is not reality which is socially constructed but our ways of understanding

it" (p. 14). Moules (2000) agreed that we need not abandon our belief in truths or universals. Referring to the work of Sprenak, Moules suggested that postmodernism has much to learn from the great wisdom traditions of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

I believe that postmodernism has room for these reforms. It is my hope that others will join in this effort to create a new therapeutic reality that takes into account the teachings of various religions and of specific subgroups within these religions. Taking these differences into account, we can create methodologies that employ postmodern assumptions and are religiously sensitive to specific religious groups.

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