

The Words and Music of Christian Counselling

presented by

Jeffrey Rutter

My first priority was to explain that Christian counselling is *integrative*. That is, by its very nature Christian counselling pulls together databases that, in some instances, are very far removed from each other. The goodness of fit between these various databases (e.g., psychology and theology) is something to keep an eye on. I used the photo of the Fijian prison guard (someone who wanted to crack skulls) in his position of guarding the arts and crafts studio as a way of telling you that sometimes the fit is less than optimal. Later in the presentation I used the 2x2 matrix to come back to this same point where psychology and theology are concerned. Psychology and theology represent differences both *between* and *within* their respective disciplines. The 2x2 matrix is simply trying to outline some of those differences where artistic / metaphorical imagery and language are concerned. Remember all that talk about Google images? I was trying to make a point about how far we have gone in the West towards regarding literal, propositional forms of truth (found on a regular Google search) as somehow more important than images (found on a Google Images search) and superior to poems and metaphors as well. I traced this back to classical Greek thought—particularly Stoicism (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoicism>) and would add that eastern Christianity (i.e., Greek) and the liberal church (particularly Episcopalian in the US) have had less trouble with this than we evangelicals have.

My talk in a nutshell was as follows:

- Psychology tends to look at the use of metaphors and stories as “soft” and unimpressive
- Even theology can privilege literal language (low symbolic hedge) over the more symbolic in its pursuit of propositional truth
- Conversations between psychology and theology involve paying attention to this important metaphorical / symbolic dimension
- Work with clients must also be sensitive to possible bias in these areas. Do we have a strong preference for one kind of language and/or interactive style or another? Language in the indicative mood vs. language in the invitational mood?
- Empirical support for use of metaphor has largely been lacking due to the difficulty of measuring outcomes in this area (it requires careful discourse analysis)
- Scholars in both psychology and theology are calling for more discourse analysis

- Christian counselors are advised—per the Griffith & Griffith book—to regard discourse very carefully because sometimes clients are saying more than we think they are
- The best way to know whether or not a client is saying something important is not to simply assume that we know what is sacred to them and what is not (based on our lives, for example) but to ask them, particularly when stories or metaphors come into play

Griffith, J. L. and Griffith, M. E. 2002, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy: How to Talk with People About Their Spiritual Lives*, Guilford, New York.