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STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN COUNSELING EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article examines the unique position in which emerging counselors find themselves, as they seek to enter the professional field amidst a worldwide pandemic and numerous other national and global hardships. From a student perspective, the authors survey the distinctive traits of Christian counseling education, Christian counseling, generally speaking, and the importance of theological and spiritual formation for the emerging counselor. More specifically, the authors discuss three theological concepts that have been identified as critical in the development of their Christian counselor identity, foundation, and future practice. The first theological consideration is the essential role and ministry of the Holy Spirit who provides supernatural peace, joy, and comfort, aiding emerging counselors in their ability to be competent therapists in tenuous times; bridging the gap from education to practical application. The second concept considered is the *imago Dei*, as the hermeneutical lens by which the Christian counselor affirms the worth of all human beings created in the image of God, enabling the counselor to provide empathy and unconditional positive regard for all clients. The third consideration is the *missio Dei*, or mission of God, as a core conceptual belief by which to understand the role of the Christian counselor, and counseling profession, as a redemptive participation in and with the Spirit of God.

Introduction

It has been said that the pandemic will be over when we no longer use the word “Covid” in our everyday conversations. However, one can assume that the word “Covid” will be the topic of conversation long after the public health crisis is officially over. The initial COVID-19 outbreak of 2020 resulted in devastating losses that have manifested in a myriad of forms. To this point, Moreno and colleagues (2020) highlight that COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in known risk factors for mental health problems. Together with unpredictability and uncertainty, lockdown and physical distancing have led to social isolation, loss of income, loneliness, inactivity, limited access to essential services, increased access to food, alcohol, and online gambling, and decreased family and social support. These conditions have also been shown to induce mental health problems in previously healthy people and negatively affect those with pre-existing mental health disorders. The demand for mental health services significantly increased during the pandemic, as demonstrated by a 90% increase in calls to a national mental health service between September 2019 and April 2020 (Titov et al., 2020). Although advancements in accessibility to mental health treatment have been made through services like telehealth, the profession has had difficulty keeping up with the demand for counseling professionals, which is even higher than in pre-pandemic times (Rogers & Spring, 2021).

The current pandemic has also fueled increasing tensions between groups and individuals of different thoughts and experiences (e.g., Dimock & Wike, 2020; Gersma, 2021; Heltzel & Laurin, 2020). Every issue seems to have the potential to become a ‘hero’ versus ‘villain’ dichotomy, further dividing a world already in chaos (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). From issues around health, science, and prevention, to matters of race, gender, and sexuality, the potential for division is great, thus negatively impacting persons’ ability to pursue common ground (e.g., Berry & Sobieraj, 2014; Chua, 2018; Craig et al., 2020; Richeson, 2018). Such contention has also profoundly impacted Christians in the church, leading to ecclesial rifts (e.g., Baucham, 2021; Chan, 2021; McFarlan, 2020). No professional counselor was prepared for these radical challenges. The long-term impact and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent sociopolitical and cultural issues are yet to be determined, particularly as they relate to mental health. However, it could be suggested that emerging counselors who are entering the field now are uniquely positioned to navigate and help address the aftereffects of a global pandemic.

To this end, we (the authors) wish to speak about the importance of receiving Christian, faith-based counselor education and training at this crucial point in history. Having entered our graduate studies at the height of the pandemic, we recognize the importance of professional training that not only equips us

therapeutically, but also emphasizes the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the *imago Dei* and our identity in Christ, and our biblical mission as understood through the *missio Dei*. These three elements have grounded us in our pursuit of becoming professional counselors and assist us in navigating the profoundly tenuous times in which we live. We likewise foresee these elements as being foundational to our future work as counselors. This article will explore these three areas, preceded first by a brief consideration of the distinctiveness of Christian counseling education and Christian counseling, generally, that explicitly values biblical and theological integration.

Distinctiveness of a Christian Counseling Program

According to Carter (1999), as the new millennium came in, Christian counseling was a growing entity that responded to people seeking guidance for religious-based issues. Christian counseling has grown and become more representative and inclusive to individuals inside and outside the church (Bondi, 2013). A lot has changed since 1999, and the counseling profession, overall, has continued to evolve; a profession that is projected to grow by 11% between 2020 and 2030 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). For counselors to be effective, there must be a solid educational foundation. For Christians entering the counseling profession, in particular, counseling education that values the integration of a biblical worldview and theological emphasis is of high importance, in addition to satisfying the mandated counseling coursework directed by state licensing boards (Alleman, 2015).

Additionally, some Christian counseling programs may have their own distinctive emphasis. As an example, the Master of Arts in Professional Counseling (MAPC) program at Oral Roberts University (ORU), in which the three authors of this article are students, explicitly emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in forming personal and professional identities. The program's mission statement is as follows:

The Master of Arts in Professional Counseling program (MAPC) is designed to prepare students for professional licensure and qualify them for the specialized ministry of counseling in the contexts of clinical settings, the local church, and community or faith-based agencies. The program enables students to thoughtfully integrate and ethically implement the most effective models and theories of counseling with a coherent Biblical/theological perspective and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's activity. Since helping hurting people is an essential element of the gospel, this program equips students to

therapeutically respond to the opportunities of global diversity in facilitating healing and wholeness in all areas of life. (Oral Roberts University, n.d., p. 6)

Within the available degree tracks (e.g., LPC, LMFT, LADC), there are additional courses intended to help students establish a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit, knowledge of Scripture, and training in how to engage with counseling literature and clinical practice from a Christian worldview. Students that obtain a master's in professional counseling from ORU will take the required classes for licensure, such as Counseling Methods and Professional Ethics, coupled with courses like Theology of Counseling and Christian Approaches to Counseling that prioritize integration and do not demand the bifurcation of one's identity between being a Christian and a counselor. All the while, the program does not sacrifice the fundamentals required for state licensure; striving to provide a well-balanced set of courses designed to prepare emerging counselors well for the national examination process and professional licensure.

In the end, Alleman (2015) notes that the fundamental purpose of Christian education programs is to prepare students to engage the world from a Christian-centered perspective. Christian counseling programs, in particular, focus on building up the spiritual person as well as the counselor (Alleman, 2015). Christian counseling programs also affect how counselors practice and integrate Christian and professional ethics (Sanders, 2013). While there are growing efforts to develop, in all counselors, the competencies needed to effectively and ethically counsel peoples from various spiritual and religious backgrounds (see the ASERVIC competencies, ACA, 2022), there are distinctive features and principles that guide the practice of Christians in the counseling profession.

Christian Counseling: What is it and What Does it Entail?

Christian counseling has distinct features that separate it from non-Christian counseling. While this statement, and topic overall, require far more discussion than this paper will allow, we wish to briefly note that the foundational differences of Christian counseling (versus secular counseling) are its affirmation of the lordship of Jesus Christ, and its reliance on the Holy Spirit (Tan, 2011). Moreover, the Christian counselor affirms that God has spoken to humanity (and still speaks), has provided salvation and the forgiveness of sins through his Son, Jesus Christ, and is both Creator and sustainer of the universe (Collins, 2007). Therefore, God is believed to be active and present, in all places and at all times (i.e., including the counseling session), and the Christian counselor is believed to be able to discern and participate in this divine action (see Decker et al., 2021, p. 9).

To this end, Collins (2007) proposes that Christian counselors have four distinct features: unique assumptions, unique goals, unique methods, and unique

giftedness. These features explain characteristics of Christian counselors that are distinctive. The unique assumptions explain the beliefs Christians have as related to the specific attributes of God (e.g., as already noted above; God as Creator and sustainer, Jesus as Savior, etc.). Unique goals consider the goals of spiritual growth and maturity as well as practices of confessing one's sins. Some unique methods seen in Christian counseling may be the addition of prayer, or the working through of behaviors contradictory to biblical principles. Christian counselors look at their abilities as a gift from God and therefore rely on the Spirit of God when using their counseling skills (see also Collins, 1996). All of these aspects are important when distinguishing Christian counselors from their secular counterparts.

Furthermore, Holeman (2012) notes that counseling is just one avenue in which Christians who are mental health professionals can assist others from a spiritual perspective, especially as relates to issues in their relationships with themselves and God. The approach by which counselors do this may be different, but the goal is to implement the morals and ethics of Christ (Sanders, 2013). As stated earlier, some methods of Christian counselors look much different from that of other counselors. There is an emphasis on spirituality and one's relationship with their Creator that makes Christian counseling not only distinctive but also unique (Tan, 2011). Thus, theological competency and understanding helps the Christian counselor to provide care to clients that is not only clinically and therapeutically informed, but also adequately assists clients as they spiritually wrestle with questions of ultimacy and navigate the "relentless ambiguities of life" (Holeman, 2012, p. 25).

In light of the above, however, it is important to briefly acknowledge that not all professional Christian counselors, or Christians who counsel (depending on their preferred self-identification), work in faith-based contexts or with professing Christian clients. Thus, there is a need for professional sensitivity and ethical competency in determining when and if 'explicit' or 'implicit' integration is most contextually appropriate. Explicit integration involves the overt inclusion of spiritual and religious content in therapy and includes the use of prayer, Scripture, sacred texts, and the referral of clients to religious leaders. Implicit integration is more covert in nature, wherein the counselor does not directly discuss Christian content in therapy, or utilize spiritual and religious methods (e.g., prayer, the reading of sacred texts), but rather practices generally from a theistic worldview and principles. The counselor may also engage in intrapersonal integration in which the Christian counselor may silently/internally pray for a client during session, drawing upon his or her personal religious and spiritual experiences (Tan, 1996; see also Walker et al., 2004).

We recognize the differences between these types of integration, and the value that each offers. Ultimately, the Christian professional counselor must be sensitive

to the needs and beliefs of their clients and the contexts in which they work, and when and where explicit integration is not ethically and professionally permissible, the Christian counselor can still implicitly operate from a theistic, biblical worldview that affirms God's presence and redeeming action through the counseling process.

Theological Considerations for the Emerging Counselor

As has been discussed to this point, there are many core beliefs of Christian counselors that encourage them in both how and why they participate in the field of counseling. The essential distinctives of a Christian, faith-based counseling program are also established on these core beliefs and practices. In this section, we attempt to highlight and explain why the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit and the theological concepts of the *imago Dei* and *missio Dei* are particularly essential for the work of the emerging counselor, as we have come to discover and learn in our own counselor education.

The Holy Spirit and Counseling

Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit as the result of his inevitable departure from earth. Jesus states:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid. (*New International Version*, 2011, John 14:27)

Within each of these promises, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit will be there to provide truth and peace. We are only to ask with our hearts, and He provides this Advocate (John 14:16). Other translations (e.g., King James Version) use the word "Comforter," which we believe is the ultimate description of what it is to be in God's presence. Moreover, Romans 14: 17-19 states:

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (*New International Version*, 2011)

The Holy Spirit provides the ultimate comfort, in the form of peace and joy, for our souls here on earth, and commands us to make every effort to continue His

work in us. This we see as the essential catalyst for the emerging professional counselor to enter the counseling field.

Empowered through baptism in the Spirit, the Spirit enables us to pour out what has been poured into us (French, 2019). The ultimate gift of the Spirit is purpose and peace, in abundance, that pours out to all that encounter a person empowered by His presence. This very peace is supernatural because it can be encountered regardless of the circumstance of the individual encountering it. A person in the depths of worldly tangles can be provided peace within that very struggle. “The valley of the shadow of death” will always be a part of our lives, yet we shall fear no evil (*New International Version*, 2011, Psalm 23:4). That supernatural ability to live without fear in the midst of worldly hardships and threats is reflective of the supernatural working of the Spirit.

Supernatural Peace in the Chaos of the Natural

The Holy Spirit brings the presence of God, not in a metaphorical description but an absolute sense (Moltmann, 1997). Humans have a *finite* capacity for empathy, peace, grace, love, and compassion for others (Rossi et al., 2012). However, in the *infinite* kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit provides a supernatural capacity to comfort others. As the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we receive from God” (*New International Version*, 2011). Through the Holy Spirit, God’s gift to humanity is compassion and comfort. As we receive it from God, it flows from us to those with whom we interact. We have an expectation of this incredible gift of the Spirit in all aspects of our lives, including the counseling room (Psalm 139:7-8; 2 Cor 1:21-22). One author, Olthuis (2006), words it perfectly when he writes, “...No matter how deep the darkness, often in the face of our own anxieties and doubts, we are encouraged to enter the darkness with others, knowing we are not alone” (p. 75). Our belief is that this gift manifests in abundance and pours out to all that encounter a person empowered by the presence of His Spirit (John 3:34; Olthuis, 2006). Moreover, it is the Holy Spirit who brings forth the “renewal of life” being sought in the setting of therapy (Moltmann, 1997, p. 24; see also Callaway & Whitney, 2022, p. 91). If we wholly lean on Him, we find the breath of God and utilize it to bring complete renewal to a life that can be impacted by His very presence alone.

Optimistically, we believe that those walking with the Holy Spirit find a way to bring His work out of the unseen and into the forefront of our conscience. We begin to encounter His work in every facet of their lives. An example we as interns and students encounter, as professed by many colleagues within the ORU program, is the paradoxical balance between the overwhelming nature of course content and

the tense surrounding culture, and the sense of peace we are provided by the power of the Holy Spirit that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). We find ourselves walking through life in a state of prayer, seeking the lens that allows us to see the work of the Spirit. Moltmann (1997) interprets such prayers as “a plea for the Spirit’s coming” (p. 11). Ephesians 6:18-19 states:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. (*New International Version*, 2011)

The implications of this interpretation are that when we, emerging counselors, go to prayer on behalf of the feelings of inadequacy faced when transitioning from the classroom to the counseling room, we are pleading for the Spirit to fill that gap, especially as we are entering the professional field at a crucial moment in history when the needs of humanity are abundant.

We are still in the midst of the seemingly endless tension of making meaning out of human suffering (Hall et al., 2010). Within this struggle, we need to rely on the Holy Spirit. The truth is that although we are trained theoretically for future intense interactions, we are novices in knowing how to navigate someone else’s suffering. The realization of the presence of the Holy Spirit is the limitless bridge to that gap, and the more we train ourselves to rely on His presence and to attune to His action in our midst, the smaller the gap becomes. The Holy Spirit’s presence assists us in preserving our peace, renewing our spirits, and providing consolation and guidance in the many moments we feel uncertain of how to proceed with our clients (Decker et al., 2021). When our spirits are renewed, and we are provided a peace in the process, we can more quickly recall and apply the training, skillset, and knowledge found within our education and field of study.

The *imago Dei* as the Critical Lens for Christian Counselors

The fundamental, philosophical question we all face when we concern ourselves with the pain of others is “why?” Why do we feel it is necessary to care for others so much that we have created entire professions out of it? By what moral standard, outside of one based on our Christian belief system, do we elevate the needs of others over the pursuit of self? It may seem crude to ask, but outside of the moral framework of the Bible, is there any lasting motivational factor that will sustain us in the professional counseling field as we encounter and help clients navigate the pain of this life? The motivation for the believer is based on a concept that dates to the creation itself. Genesis 1:26 states: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness...’” (*New International Version*, 2011). Here

are we introduced to the theological concept of the *imago Dei*; a Latin translation of ‘image of God’, a phrase considered to be coined by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, although the concept has been developed and written about dating back to Philo in the second century (Simango, 2016). From the point of creation, our identity is forever linked with the likeness of the God we worship (Barth, 2009). If our identity cannot be separated from God, then every person who enters the counseling room is to be valued in the highest regard as a fellow image-bearer and creation of God.

The *imago Dei* as a hermeneutical lens provides a crucial and transformative tool for the counseling room. Harkening back to the beginning of this article, we noted the increasingly dichotomous thinking that characterizes our current society and culture, including that of the church. The dehumanization of others who hold opposing views is so prevalent in our daily lives and social interactions—especially as evidenced in politics, social media, etc. (e.g., Baucham, 2021; Berry & Sobieraj, 2014; Chua, 2018; Craig et al., 2018; Kreps & Kriner, 2020; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2019). It seems especially important to caution emerging counselors about the dangers of formulating an oppositional and dichotomous lens from/through which they treat clients. Such an approach conflicts significantly with a Rogerian approach, which encourages the counselor always to maintain unconditional positive regard and empathy (Rogers, 1957). Even more importantly, such an approach contradicts the greatest commandments to love God and to love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40).

Fortunately, a biblical worldview and theology of persons and personhood provide us with a hermeneutic that destroys the development of dichotomous thinking that might prevent the counselor from operating with unconditional positive regard for all clients. Regarding our understanding of the theology of personhood, it is essential to be aware of how God views and remembers all of us (Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalm 139:13-16; John 3:16;). Swinton (2000) emphasizes, “To be remembered by God is to realize that we are of eternal worth and value in God’s sight. In remembering someone, we acknowledge the person as worthy of memory, and acceptable as a full person” (p. 127). It is our commitment to God that drives us into a community with others, regardless of what we create to separate ourselves. It is this theology of personhood that we embrace as emerging counselors.

The theological concept of *imago Dei* reminds us that before all other endless identities are formed, specifically ones that emphasize our differences, there existed (and still exists) a core identity that eternally connects all of us (Galatians 3:28). Humans are, first and foremost, created in the image of God (Peterson, 2016). Therefore, believers are to do nothing but love one another unconditionally, as God loves us in the same way (John 13:34). In Malachi 2:10, an excellent question

is posed: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with each other?” (*New International Version*, 2011). The difficulties we face in identity formation result from missing our true identity as God’s creation and His image-bearers. Within a Christian-based counseling program, such as ours, we have this crucial theology and hermeneutical lens by which to see clients and incorporate them into the counseling setting. We are fortunate to have fully realized our inherent value as those created by and in the image of God as we learn to have genuine compassion for future clients; a tool that is distinctive to our program (and likely others like it), undergirded by biblical principles and a Christian worldview (Oral Roberts University, n.d., p. 5).

Within the counseling field, there exist the ethical standards by which we are called to operate. ACA (American Counseling Association) code A.1.a, the first code listed, states, “The primary responsibility of the counselor is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients” (ACA, 2014, p. 4). What can provide more of a solid foundation of dignity than having the internal belief that all humans are made in the image of the God we worship? While secular counseling programs and ethical standards can strongly promote the respect and welfare of clients, we suggest that a biblical theology of personhood is that which can empower the Christian counselor to respect their clients and promote their welfare truly; beyond what counselors can accomplish simply in their own strength and through abiding by ethical standards alone. For, to see all clients as image bearers of God confronts any proclivity to approach clients in a dehumanizing way, as to do so contradicts our core beliefs and values as Christians. So, when we encounter clients on the opposite side of any issue, we must rely heavily on the Holy Spirit to give us a godly perspective of those persons as his creation and image-bearers and to treat them with dignity borne out of the love of God.

The *missio Dei* and the Counseling Profession

Christian Counseling education programs, such as the one offered at ORU, present a unique approach to the formation of the helping professional. As emerging counselors who are Christians, we believe and are taught that our training and skills are being developed to participate in God’s greater purpose. That greater purpose was given to us by Christ, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...” (*New International Version*, 2011, Luke 4:18-19). Christ proclaimed his mission that was given as a result of the Spirit of God coming ‘upon’ him. Therefore, those who proclaim Christ and share in his body will also share in the same mission. This is accomplished through the gifting of the very same Spirit (John 14:26-27).

Translated from Latin, *missio Dei* means ‘Mission of God’ (Schwanz & Coleson, 2011). Moltmann (1997) succinctly explains, “God’s mission is nothing less than the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father through the Son into this world, so that this world should not perish but live” (p. 19). It is through the Holy Spirit that the mission of God can be carried out on the earth. How does a counselor participate in this mission to bring life? Hardy (2011) urges students to understand the importance of preparation for the mission. Our understanding is expressed in his sentiment:

I am not missional simply because I state God’s mission. I am not missional simply because I have a desire to participate in God’s mission. I am not missional simply because I can do things that are labeled missional. No. I am missional, first, because I am in a dynamic relationship with the missional God who formed me. I am missional, first, because I was formed for mission. (p. 178)

Hardy (2011) asserts that we are missional to the extent that we are dynamically relational with God. This means that the breadth of our relationship with God allows for greater participation in His mission. Without a deep relationship with the Father, we are not fully equipped to participate in His life-giving.

Tying this back to our training to become counselors, we have found that the additional spiritual preparation provided to us through our program at ORU has allowed us to attune to and more fully open ourselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The countless hours we devote to reading theories, practicing techniques, and developing a professional identity are paired with the time taken to secure a solid theological position that will guide our future practice. This process of spiritual formation, and in some cases, reformation, requires us to lean into our partnership with the Paraclete. Through this, we will step out of our training and into the professional field as conduits through which the empowering work of the Holy Spirit can be made known. The joy and confidence we have in knowing that we are participating in the *missio Dei* is what allows the wellspring of life to overflow through us and into the counseling session.

Practical Implications

So how do the *imago Dei* and *missio Dei* integrate with the practical knowledge gained during the graduate experience? As previously stated, emerging counseling students are faced with a gap between the theoretical knowledge gained in pursuing

a master's degree and applying spirituality in a personal, yet ethical, capacity in therapy. In the space between education and application, there must be a sustained and disciplined reliance on, and relationship with, the Holy Spirit. To counsel in a way that is profoundly shaped and informed by a theology of the *imago Dei*, and an understanding of our purpose through the *missio Dei*, the counselor must be aware of the need to develop a robust and dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit; the One who enables us to love as God has loved us (1 John 4:7-12), and the one who empowers Christ's disciples to participate in God's redeeming mission (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). Developing a strong theology from which counselors can understand the partnership between the Holy Spirit and the counseling process is essential, not only for the sake of theological knowledge, but for the transformation of one's praxis, too.

As the relationship with the Paraclete develops, it permeates every aspect of the developing counselor's life. As Holeman (2012) explains:

[B]eing a theologically reflective practitioner includes the capacity of *living theologically* throughout your clinical work. When theological reflection gets in your bones, it shapes who you are with others, including your clients. Theological integration at this level happens in the person of the counselor and is made manifest in the counseling relationship. (p. 75)

Regarding the above point and counseling education, we suggest that a significant benefit of enrollment in a Christian-oriented counseling program, such as the one in which we study, is the spiritual formation that occurs throughout the process. Peers and staff are united in the pursuit of a deeper relationship with God. The intentional process of placing oneself in a posture of complete reliance on the Spirit is critical to the developing helping professional. As we continue toward obtaining our degrees, gaining licensure, and beyond, it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to go into the field and empower others (Decker et al., 2021).

In sum:

[P]rovided that theologically reflective practitioners remain grounded in God, seek to be open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and conduct their work in a manner that is God-honoring, client-respecting, and ethically appropriate, then the Holy Spirit can do what the Holy Spirit does best—help people more fully embody the image of God in their daily lives. (Holeman, 2012, p. 77)

Conclusion

In summary of the exploration of the framework, implication, and applications of the emerging counselor's interaction with a Christian belief system, their education, and journey into the professional world, we consider it necessary and advantageous to utilize tools provided by the foundation of the Christian belief system. The emerging counselor, empowered by Holy Spirit, has a foundational expectation to maintain empathy, unconditional positive regard, and a mission to bring life to this world, which is well-informed and supported by the theological concepts and doctrines of *imago Dei* and *missio Dei*.

The emerging counselor, who is trained in compliance with the highest educational standards for professional counseling (i.e., CACREP standards), and who is also equipped with a biblical and theological understanding of creation and personhood and God's redemptive mission in the world (in which the counselor is empowered to participate), is able to embody the full potential of the counseling profession. The key tenets described above revealed themselves to be crucial during the profoundly tenuous times of the pandemic. The field is inevitably going to grow, change, and challenge all who choose to enter it. However, it is our proposition that the tools described above, which are made available to all who believe and follow Jesus, elevate the essential abilities of the counselor to empathize, endure, and press forward within the ever-growing chaos of the surrounding world.

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