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Clinical Training in Explicitly Christian Doctoral Programs: Introduction to the Special Issue

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This article serves as a brief introduction to this special journal issue on clinical training in doctoral psychology programs described as explicitly Christian. Seven doctoral programs are described by their respective Directors of Clinical Training (DCT) in this special issue. In this introductory paper, we identify four common themes found across the program descriptions: 1) the enthusiasm for respective training missions, 2) the transformation observed in students, 3) the intentional progression of training, and 4) the varied meanings of the term “integration.”

In 2004 the two of us co-edited a special issue of *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity* focused on research training in explicitly Christian doctoral programs in clinical psychology (McMinn & Hill, 2004). We invited and collected manuscripts from research directors at 7 different programs and published two pertinent empirical studies as well. At the end of the day, it seemed like a good service to the profession—providing psychologists an understanding of what was happening in Christian doctoral training and potential students valuable information as they considered future study.

This special issue on clinical training in explicitly Christian doctoral programs follows a similar format. We invited the same 7 programs to participate—6 elected to do so—and we also invited a relatively new program, The Institute for Psychological Sciences (Psy.D. program). Other programs participating in this special issue include Azusa Pacific University (Psy.D. program), Fuller Theological Seminary (Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs), George Fox University (Psy.D. program), Regent University (Psy.D. program), Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University (Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs), and Wheaton College (Psy.D. program). Most of these programs are accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). Once again we asked key informants, this time Directors of Clinical Training (DCT), to describe their programs. We have also included a program evaluation of stu-

dent, faculty, and alumni perceptions of the effectiveness of clinical training.

To more fully understand and appreciate the clinical training that is provided at these seven programs, it is important to first articulate what is meant by an explicitly Christian doctoral program in the field of clinical psychology. Johnson, Campbell, and Dykstra (1997) identified what they called the *Faith Identified Psychologist* model, which best characterizes the training mission of most explicitly Christian doctoral programs. Best understood along a continuum between the *Religiously Sensitive Psychologist* model, where training is primarily psychological in nature but with awareness of religious issues as an add-on, and the *Psychologically Minded Pastor* model, where training is primarily theological in nature but complemented with some psychological training, the Faith Identified Psychologist model calls for a degree of sophistication in both psychology and theology. Graduates from programs that adopt this model are prepared to work within a particular faith context as psychologists; however, because they receive adequate breadth and depth of psychological training these graduates should also be competent to work with those who do not share their particular faith values. In most explicitly Christian doctoral programs, faculty are required to endorse particular faith beliefs as a condition of employment and the integration of psychology and Christianity is an explicit goal of training.

Several themes are worth noting in the various articles. First, observe the genuine enthusiasm that DCTs have for their respective training missions. It is gratifying to see the level of enthusiasm communicated by the women and men in

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charge of clinical training at each of the programs. It is also helpful to see the distinctions between various programs and how clinical training fits into the overall mission of each. Second, several DCTs discuss the transformation they observe in their students. It is as if something mysterious happens during the second and third years of doctoral training, resulting in soon-to-be-psychologists who are poised, confident, and professional. Much of this transformation seems to occur through the diverse and challenging clinical work conducted by students during doctoral training. Third, and related to the second, a number of the DCTs discuss the intentional progression of training, with students gaining increasing professional responsibility as they progress. Fourth, note that the term "integration" is used throughout the various articles in this issue. For some it is a precise term about how the Christian faith and the discipline of psychology interact. For others it refers to religious and spiritual awareness when doing psychotherapy, and there are many gradations between these two views of integration. We have been intentionally non-prescriptive about how integration is defined in this issue, allowing DCTs to use the

term as it is understood in their various institutions. This in itself may help provide a glimpse of the various cultures of training evident in these 7 doctoral programs.

Of course, we remind the reader (and perhaps potential graduate student) that clinical training is only part of the complete picture. Also important is the scientific research training (see McMinn & Hill, 2004) as well as the theological training provided by the programs. However, both the enthusiasm of DCTs and the results of the program evaluation suggest that clinical training is a prominent emphasis and relative strength of explicitly Christian doctoral programs. We trust this special issue provides a helpful look at this essential domain of training for clinical psychologists.

References

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