Enriching Ministry: Pastoral Supervision in Practice

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Enriching Ministry
Pastoral Supervision in Practice

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scm press
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**Introduction**

**Enriching Ministry – Pastoral Supervision in Practice**

MICHAEL PATERSON AND JESSICA ROSE

As anyone who has engaged in biblical studies will be aware, to avoid a reading of Scripture that is distorted for our own manipulative purposes, equal attention must be paid to:

- text,
- context and
- co-texts.

To do otherwise is to violate the sacred word. We can apply that hermeneutic principle to *Enriching Ministry – Pastoral Supervision in Practice*.

The text you hold in your hands engages people of faith in a conversation about supervision as a form of theology in practice. As such, it is underpinned by a belief in a God whose redemptive purposes are both thwarted and realized in the nitty-gritty realities of everyday pastoral life – in our attempts to care for each other, to guide and lead the communities entrusted to us, to unfold Scripture and tradition, to live lives worthy of our calling (Eph. 4.1), to foster ethical living and ultimately to set each other free (John 11.44). The text of this book rescues pastoral supervision from the charge of uncritically adopting a secular practice foreign to the kingdom culture of God’s people and firmly sets it within the dialogue between theology and the social sciences (Chapter 1), in which Trinitarian relationality is key (Chapter 2) and the supervisory ‘self’ is embodied, intentional and incarnate.
Michael Paterson and Jessica Rose (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 reminds us of how important it is to notice and take care with our particular use of language.

Context is addressed in two ways – the general and the specific. This book arises out of a general context in which the dangers of privatized and unaccountable ministries have been exposed and in response to which pastoral workers now struggle to keep up with ministerial codes of practice, policies for safeguarding, personal and professional development plans, learning and serving covenants and so on. It also arises in response to a specific context in which training programmes have overly focused on the tasks of ministry to the neglect of those who embody those ministries. As such, it is expressive of the call to reflexivity, common across the caring professions, which find in journaling, coaching, reflective practice and supervision highly effective media for lifelong learning and ongoing personal and professional formation. While this more general context pervades the entire book, attention is also focused on the more immediate contexts of ministerial formation (Chapter 8), executive coaching (Chapter 10), spiritual direction (Chapter 11) and healthcare chaplaincy (Chapter 12).

Among the co-texts of pastoral supervision, three feature in this book:

- the overlap with line management, counselling and spiritual direction, which are explored in Chapters 5, 9 and 11;
- the practical experience and grounded wisdom of supervisees and supervisors, which find explicit voice in Chapters 5, 6, and 7;
- the growing body of literature in the field, which underpins supervisory practice and training (Chapters 1, 12 and 13).

Supervision within the caring professions: an overview of the literary co-texts

Whereas the literature in pastoral supervision is slim, its counterpart in the wider helping professions is weighty. In an address to the American Association for Theological Field Education in 1969, Thomas Klink suggested that pastoral supervision had much to learn from the practices of the wider helping professions. Not until 1977 was his suggestion taken up and the detail filled in with the publication of Kenneth Pohly’s Pastoral Supervision in the United States and the launch of the US-based Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry (now known, since 2007, as Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry).

Pohly speaks for many when he observes:

[Supervision is a term that is loaded with baggage. It carries an image of bossism, of someone in authority looking over one’s shoulder and controlling every move, rewarding or punishing at will. It suggests a hierarchy of superiority/inferiority and dredges up threatening associations with the past. For this reason some people suggest abandoning the term and substituting something more palatable.]

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the variations in terminology and in emphasis, the literature portrays broad agreement that supervision offers an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on professional issues with one or more colleagues with a view to improving their ability to ‘deliver’ optimal care for those with whom they work.2

Within the community of faith, the term ‘supervision’ falls victim to what Flew coined ‘death by a thousand qualifications’.3 Croft proposes a view of ‘ministry in three dimensions’ in which the whole Church rather than only authorized individuals participate in episcopate (oversight) understood as ‘watching over each other in love’.4 Pohly picks up that strand and traces the history of

'oversight' within the covenantal relationship between God and God's people.\(^5\) Kittel's scholarly treatise severs the traditional link between 'the offices denoted by *episkopos* in the Greek speaking world' and 'the Christian office of bishop' and helpfully outlines the use of *episcope* and its compounds in the secular and religious realms.\(^6\)

With regard to pastoral supervision, *epeskapsato* is of particular interest as in Luke 1.68, 'God has visited (*epeskapsato*) his people and redeemed them'. Similarly, when the son of the widow of Nain is restored to life the people proclaim, 'Surely God has visited his people' (Luke 7.16). According to Kittel, 'divine visitation may carry with it a wonderful experience of grace' but 'also of judgment'.\(^7\)

In Luke 19.44 Jesus relates the time of his visitation (*kairos tes episkopes*) to his own coming to Jerusalem. *Episcope* understood as the kind of steady, reliable presence that does not shy away from assessment and judgement when required, provides pastoral supervisory practice with a solid and deeply attractive theological underpinning.

In 1902 Freud invited doctors to meet together to share observations on their experiences. The fruitfulness of these meetings resulted in his insistence a decade later that all doctors treating 'conditions of the mind' should undergo their own personal analysis as part of their training. It took a further ten years for this recommendation to become a training requirement. In 1925 supervised analysis was woven into with personal analysis and theoretical training as the third strand in psychoanalytic training. The ensuing decades saw supervision move from the 'commendable' to the 'normative' category, with the requirement in 1956 of 150 hours of supervision 'for the purpose of instruction, skill development, personal analysis and evaluation of the candidate's development'.\(^8\) Being rooted in the psychoanalytic tradition has left a lasting imprint upon the philosophy and practice of supervision and finds expression in two hotly contested issues within the literature:

- Who is supervision for?
- What is its focus or purpose?

Who is supervision for?

Although this question is inextricably linked to that of purpose, what makes it worth considering in its own right are the myriad assumptions that underpin the range of terms used to describe the parties involved. While the literature largely concurs in referring to the person who conducts the session as the 'supervisor', the origins of the practice within psychoanalysis can be detected in terming those on the receiving end as 'students' or 'trainees' rather than supervisees or practitioners. The significance is more than semantic since choosing to refer to the practitioner as 'trainee' or 'student' locates supervision within professional initiation processes rather than within a philosophy of lifelong learning (that is, supervision is for trainees and the professionally immature), implies a hierarchy of knowing in the relationships involved, betrays a power imbalance between the two parties - with all the concomitant ensuing dynamics that involves - and paves the way for understanding the role of supervisor in terms of assessing performance and quality control. It is interesting to note that this is the dominant understanding expressed in the literature of supervision emanating from the United States within both Clinical Pastoral Education and the caring professions at large.

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\(^8\) Pohly, *Transforming the Rough Places*, p. 43.
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What is the purpose or focus of supervision?

Turning now to the purpose or focus of supervision, Pohly asks:

Is the aim of supervision to do therapy [to clients] through students, instruct students in how to do therapy, or provide therapy for students? Or is it all three of these?

Supervision as ‘remote’ therapy or care

In the early stages of practice when novice practitioners lack confidence, it is not uncommon for them to project a medical model on to supervision and expect the supervisor to diagnose what is going on for the ‘client’, prescribe a remedy and dispense a treatment plan. Unconsciously, such novices regard supervision as ‘remote’ care. Nevertheless, while developmental stages in practitioner development are widely discussed in the literature, none of the writers supports an understanding of supervision as therapy or pastoral care at one remove.

Supervision as education

The pedagogical aim of supervision is well aired in the literature. ‘The supervisor is an instructor’, writes Tarachow, ‘whose task it is to teach and demonstrate the theory and skills the practitioner needs to acquire competence.’ In the 1987 entry ‘Supervision, Pastoral’ in A Dictionary of Pastoral Care, John Millar takes a similar view: ‘The Supervisor instructs by examining, framing and exploring different explanations and possibilities of what is taking place between student and client.’

In more recent years the influence of educational theorists such as Dewey, Schön and Kolb is acknowledged and clearly detectable in writers who fundamentally understand supervision as a learning environment. More particularly, the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s notion of a space in which a child feels safe enough to play is widely taken up by writers who emphasize the importance of supervision as a space conducive to learning, a space for creative play and a space for integrative learning. Most of the published models identify the capacity for learning inherent in supervision. Thus, Michael Carroll sees supervision as a ‘learning relationship’ and names ‘teaching’ the second of his seven tasks of supervision. Kadushin speaks of the ‘educative’ function, Proctor the ‘formative’ task and Hawkins the ‘developmental’ function of supervision.

Supervision as transformation

Pohly’s third question, ‘is the aim of supervision to provide therapy for students?’ receives a clear ‘no’ in the literature. While many writers acknowledge the inevitable effect on one’s personal life of bearing witness to countless tales of suffering and human exigencies, the literature concurs in asserting that only material which arises in response to the client’s story or impacts upon the ability to ‘stay with’ the client has a place in supervision. Other material belongs in personal counselling, spiritual direction or line management.

Nevertheless, the literature shows an increasing awareness of the therapeutic benefits of supervision for the practitioner without it losing its client or other centredness. Foskett and Lyall are among those who underscore the value of a regular space in which integration of self, practice and world view can take place. Recent years have seen a flurry of new books which go one stage

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9 Pohly, Transforming the Rough Places, p. 44; emphasis in the original.
further and speak of the transformative impulse of supervision.\textsuperscript{16} Underlying that transformative impulse are three things:

- an emphasis on relationship as a catalyst for transformational learning;
- an awareness that the acquisition of skills and competences do not of themselves make someone a good practitioner;
- an agreement that practitioners need to become clear who they are in order to ensure that in making intentional use of the self their 'professional actions' remain 'aligned with personal beliefs and values'.\textsuperscript{17}

**From therapeutic to pastoral supervision**

So far we have traced the psychotherapeutic roots of supervision, explored the \textit{telos} of the practice and critically evaluated unspoken assumptions. In so doing we agree with Ward that the therapeutic literature 'has offered useful insights to theologians and reflective practitioners'.\textsuperscript{18} Nevertheless, using the analogy of a swimming pool, we are anxious to ensure that the deep end of enquiry is not ceded to the world of the psychological therapies, while theology and the practices of faith communities are consigned to swim 'in the shallow end of meaning'.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, with Ward, we want 'to locate the work of supervision more centrally within a learning church and the ministry it offers in today's world'.\textsuperscript{20} To that end we now turn to issues of theological significance.


\textsuperscript{17} D. Somerville and J. Keeling, 2004, 'A Practical Approach to Promote Reflective Practice within Nursing', \textit{Nursing Times}, 100:12, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{18} Ward, \textit{Lifelong Learning}, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{19} 'The deep end of "truth" has been ceded to science, while theology swims in the shallow end of "meaning".' R. Reno, 2000, 'The Radical Orthodoxy Project', \textit{First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life}, February, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{20} Ward, \textit{Lifelong Learning}, p. 5.