Theological reflection and education for ministry: the search for integration in theology

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Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry
The Search for Integration in Theology

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Pastoral supervision – a vehicle for theological reflection

The attempts to heal the division between theology and practice met with limited success. Although TFE is an accepted part of the curriculum in most theological schools its integrative influence continues to be marginal. This failure arises in part from a lack of credible models for theological reflection, which in turn is linked with the lack of adequate supervision in many TFE programs. It is to the contribution of pastoral supervision to the formation process that I now turn.

The place of pastoral supervision in the formation process

Pastoral theologian Kenneth Pohly’s definition of pastoral supervision picks up most of the ingredients of the formation process:

Pastoral supervision is a method of doing and reflecting on ministry in which a supervisor (teacher) and one or more supervisees (learners) covenant together to reflect critically on their ministry as a way of growing in self-awareness, ministering competence, theological understanding, and Christian commitment.1

His definition includes personal awareness, ministry skills, Christian commitment and theological understanding. In Pohly’s 1993 edition he does not include the term ‘spirituality’ and his book does not indicate why it was excluded. This exclusion surprises me, especially when autobiography and self-deception have a central place in his model of theological reflection. However, in his revised 2001 edition there are specific references to the term ‘spirituality’ and in this edition he says, ‘Spirituality is an issue that demands attention ... [it is] the search for a spirituality that can both satisfy the soul and transform our lifestyle’.2 While he does not explicitly use the term ‘spirituality’, in Chapter 6 he states his belief that spirituality is imbedded in his model of theological reflection as it is in the whole of his book.3

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2 Ibid., p. 90.
3 Ibid., pp. 151–75.
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On the surface Pohly is reluctant to precisely define or use the term 'spirituality', but the deeper reason may be in his struggle to define the purpose of pastoral supervision. We are given an insight into the process of his thinking in a paper presented by Pohly and Margaret Evans at a symposium on the integration of supervision. In their paper they conclude that: 'The purpose of pastoral supervision is formational.' The purpose of formation in pastoral supervision is focused on the integration between 'belief and action'. If Pohly believes that spirituality has to do with being an integrated person in the fullest sense, his model of theological reflection in Chapter 6 is abundant with authenticity and integrity. He is more specific in his understanding of this spiritual integration in his personal definition of Christian commitment, which, he says, is 'a giving of myself to the living of a spirit-filled life, which for me takes place within the Christian framework - a life consistent with and guided by one's relationship with God through Christ'.

Pohly's distinction between supervision and pastoral supervision has guided me. For the purpose of this study I define pastoral supervision as a method that reflects on particular acts of ministry in order to grow in theological understanding. Theological understanding is developed through the art of theological reflection.

The process of preparation for ministry usually includes six dimensions: academic formation, spiritual direction, ministerial formation (which includes personal identity, pastoral identity and pastoral leadership), pastoral supervision and theological reflection, and denominational ecclesiology. The aim is to immerse the student in this holistic formation process with the hope that, at the end of the theological training, students will be sufficiently formed to begin their ministry. Of course, formation is a life-long process and continues after students complete their theological studies. Careful support of new ministers through supervision and mentoring in the years following theological school is also necessary in order to continue the process of formation. Further, if formation is to be holistic, we need to find more effective ways of linking the academic study of theology with the other formation partners.

It has already been stated that there is a problem of fragmentation within theological education. Pastoral supervision makes the claim that because of its integrative nature it has the ability to promote the integration of academic formation and ministerial formation.

This chapter argues that pastoral supervision provides an integrative force for a number of the elements of the formation process. However, pastoral supervision is also aware of the dangers of claiming too much or too little in its contribution to the formation process. Consequently, most pastoral supervisors have tended to focus on the underserved aspects of formation about which the academic world has been less concerned.

The goal of pastoral supervision is to own its own and be self-aware of its own inadequacies and needs. We do not have to lose the academic foundation of pastoral supervision, but we must be aware of the challenges of integrating it with theological formation. The challenge of pastoral supervision is to be an enabling agent in the holistic formation of the student.

For the purpose of this study, I define the art of theological reflection as used in pastoral supervision to aid for an understanding of the primary tasks of supervision: one living with the faith, two congregating in the faith, and three the art of theological reflection. This chapter argues that pastoral supervision is the art of theological reflection. In this chapter we will discuss the following points:

1. The Multidisciplinary Nature of Pastoral Supervision: Integrating Supervision, Counseling and Spiritual Direction

2. The Ministry of Supervision

Pohly, The Ministry of Supervision, p. 90.

I am appreciative of Kenneth Pohly's clarification of the term 'Christian commitment'. This clarification occurred through personal correspondence in which he queried my interpretation of these words.
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The formation process. I believe that, historically, too much responsibility has been placed on TFE to direct the formation process. This has not been helpful in understanding TFE and will not change until the theological colleges are clear about their goals and the place of field education within the theological enterprise.

Theological reflection comes in a variety of models and methods and has its own inbuilt processes, regardless of whether supervision is involved. You do not have to have training in pastoral supervision to undertake theological reflection – it is undertaken by Christian people daily without consciously being aware of supervisory skills or models and methods for theological reflection. However, in a theological institution where people are being formed and trained for leadership in the church and the community, pastoral supervision as a vehicle for theological reflection creates insight, understanding and the depth required for such leadership. Pastoral supervision has a body of educational and theological knowledge that enables it to undertake such a task. It is my hope that the experience of pastoral supervision, especially within the context of theological reflection, will equip students to have some ability to self-supervise their ministry upon graduation.

For some, supervision is theological reflection. However, this is a general statement and needs clarification. The many models of and methods for theological reflection and pastoral supervision need to be adept in enabling these models to be used in such a way that they will achieve what they are expected to achieve. As an aid for theological reflection, supervision is a method of integration, with the primary focus on what happens at the intersection of what one believes and how one lives out that belief. At these intersections supervision is concerned with the congruity between belief and practice. The test of the quality of supervision is the way the supervisor offers and uses the appropriate skills and how the supervisor models congruity in his or her life and teaching. Theological reflection is to be centered in discovering one's operative theology as it unfolds in human experience. There is a dynamic quality to theological reflection, which does not tolerate mere repetition and is more concerned with interpretation leading to change. It recognises that the goal of theological reflection is transformation rather than restoration and so there is a close mutual relationship between theological reflection and pastoral supervision, although each is separate and each has a particular responsibility for promoting integration.

It is with these understandings of pastoral supervision that I will now develop an educational model of supervision for theological reflection and then outline the characteristics of supervision that make it a vehicle for theological reflection.

An educational model of supervision for theological reflection

CPE and TFE have provided leadership in developing educational models of supervision, and yet, both movements have struggled to produce an educational model specifically related to theological reflection. I am aware that there is considerable discussion and sometimes controversy about developing an
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integrative educational model for theological reflection. The theological reflection process requires a particular educational model. The TFE program at UCTC has a comprehensive training program for pastoral supervisors that includes educational and supervision models for TFE, but has not, up until this point, developed models specifically for theological reflection. While I have appreciated theological field educator Donald Beisswenger’s insight into the educational process of a number of supervisory modes, his examples do not specifically locate a model for theological reflection.

Beisswenger’s grid shows seven modes of supervision in field education: work - evaluator, instructor, apprentice, trainer, resource, consultant and spiritual guide - and ‘dominant educational mechanisms’ in terms of five factors (primary goal, supervisor’s task, focus of attention, dynamics and locus of dominant control). A particular mode, utilizing the five factors appropriate to that mode, constitutes a model of supervision. Beisswenger points out that schools tend to use one or a combination of modes, with one usually being dominant. I have adapted Beisswenger’s structure in order to develop my own educational model of supervision for theological reflection.

An educational model for supervision for theological reflection requires at least four prerequisites for students to function effectively in it. Ideally, the model is most effective in the latter part of their training after they have acquired some understanding and coherence of the following requirements.

**Prerequisites**

- Skill development
- Personal growth
- Cultural and social awareness
- Theological awareness.

**Skill development**

The emphasis here is on the development of particular skills within the field education placement. This could involve learning techniques and approaches to pastoral care and counselling, conducting marriages and funerals, worship and administration. The educational method is didactic and experiential. The supervisor can also model techniques and approaches for the student. The goal of supervision is to develop skills, rather than develop how the students feel about each other. Skill development is important for the theological model, as the outcome of most models usually requires skill implementation. Psychologist Antony Williams names these four learning approaches: [w] personal growth, [w] skill development, [w] cultural and social awareness, and [w] theological awareness. These pages outline a number of educational approaches for supervision.

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7 Pohly, *The Ministry of Supervision*, pp. 93–9. These pages outline a number of educational approaches for supervision.

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names these skills ‘procedural knowledge’. Speaking from a psychotherapeutic model and highlighting the importance of wisdom in supervision he says:

[w]ise clinicians need a rich procedural knowledge – how to do things; after all, they are not scholars as such, but people who act in a world with other people. They are in the field of decisions, judgments and practices that have to be made by clients in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity.

The rich procedural knowledge of the supervisor also includes challenging skills, involving self-disclosure, appropriate confrontation and immediacy. Warmth, genuineness, and empathy are also crucial supervisory qualities, although I believe these are inherent in the personality of the supervisor rather than skills to be learned.

Personal growth

In personal growth the emphasis is upon developing insight, affective sensitivity and interpersonal functioning. Ministry students are encouraged to use their intuition, to see through situations. They are encouraged to understand their own life stories in order to understand other people’s narratives and to understand why they have developed these particular narratives. Perhaps the most important personal insight for the student is to recognize ambiguity as fundamental to the nature of things, as intrinsic to human life, rather than as the exception. The goal of supervision is that students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and recognize the dangers of self-deception.

As we’ve already seen, this is crucial for authentic theological reflection. Normally personal growth is a high priority for students today, but what is often lacking is the ability to bring this personal growth and awareness to their ministry. Therefore the focus in supervisory sessions must be not only on students’ personal growth, but also on how they use this in order to assist other people to grow. The CPE movement is at its best in promoting personal, pastoral and professional growth. The methods used provide a link between the pastor’s wellbeing and that of the patient or client. For some students some aspects of personal growth and insight are lacking, so counselling and/or psychotherapy may be required.

Cultural and social awareness

There is a tendency in some field education programs to limit the focus of activity, reflection and supervision to skills development and personal growth, neglecting the way social and public forces and structures can profoundly influence the understanding and practice of ministry. I believe that there are few programs that would consider cultural and social awareness as being part of the theological
reflection process. As we've already noted, the praxis model is difficult and threatening to implement as it examines the broader cultural, social, political and economic factors pertinent to the situation. Theological field educator Russell Seabright believes that: 'Each student should have the experience of reflecting upon the “tyrannies”, the insurmountables, having his/her consciousness about it reach new dimensions, and engage in activity designed to transform it.'\(^9\) Practical theologian Lynn Rhodes continues to be concerned about power, role and authority for women in the life of the church, believing that institutions and churches still carry within them basic sexist and patriarchal modes of meaning and forms of ministry and that what we do as supervisors is shaped by that reality. Rhodes writes that the supervisor should have skills of social analysis, including power analysis, and that it is critical that women learn to analyze power relationships.\(^1\)

**Theological awareness**

It is crucial that students bring their formal academic learning and knowledge to the theological reflection enterprise. Crucial to the theological reflection process is their knowledge and understanding of biblical and systematic theology and ecclesiology.

While students vary in their development in these prerequisites it is important that they have attained some level of skill, personal growth and cultural and theological awareness in the process for theological reflection to function. I am also assuming that theological reflection is best done in a community and that the following dominant educational processes reflect this.

**Dominant educational processes**

**Theory**

Action/reflection model of learning, beginning with experience as discussed in Chapter 2.

**Goals**

The goals are to foster critical enquiry and to discern the movement of God in human experience in order that the student becomes a more effective minister.

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Supervisor’s task

The supervisor’s task is to encourage students to reflect theologically through conversation rather than argument or competition. The adoption and adaptation of some of the teaching methods from the social sciences has enhanced the supervisory process. Not the least has been the clinical rhombus of Ekstein and Wallerstein. Their approach is popularly known in CPE circles as ‘parallel process’. The parallel process describes how a supervisor, student or client’s anxiety causes impasses to develop between supervisor and student or between student and client. Particular importance is placed on the impasse that develops initially between student and client and how this impasse can be resolved in supervision. Indeed, for Mueller and Kell, resolution of impasses becomes the central focus of supervision.

According to our paradigm of supervision, all three sources of conflict and anxiety – the client in relation to others, the client and therapist in relation to each other, and the therapist and supervisor in relation to each other – must find a way into the supervisory relationship if it is to be productive. The way in which the supervisor interacts with the therapist or assists him to cope with the conflict generated in each of these relationships as the conflicts unfold, merge and interact, defines the supervisory process. Unless all three sources of conflict and their interaction become part of the process, supervision will provide no new dimensions to the development of the therapist that can’t be obtained with less expenditure of time, energy, and emotional commitment elsewhere.

Supervisors who use the parallel process concept will greatly strengthen the students’ understanding of interactional patterns and help them to resolve their impasses with clients. Further, the use of the parallel process will highlight the interactional patterns between the personal and communal experience of the student minister, the tradition and the culture. Sometimes, when their views are threatened, there is a great amount of anxiety, resistance and lack of trust in the theological reflection process among students. An appropriate understanding of the parallel process and use of skills by the supervisor to break down this impasse can lead to an opening up by the student and a renewal of engagement. This process has been discussed at length because it is not only an effective supervisory method in that it works, but it also occurs within the normal relationship between supervisor, student and the person being helped; it does not have to be understood pathologically. It happens because people are human. This is an important statement because much of what has occurred in the supervisory process has been psychotherapeutically driven.

Another of the supervisor’s tasks is to assist in identifying the voices in

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the theological reflection group with the hope that the group becomes a spontaneous theological reflection community, rather than a group that just talks about theological reflection. The supervisor also provides students with reading material on models and methods for theological reflection.

Specific focus of the group

The focus is upon theological reflection on case studies and life experiences as well as on critical readings of models of theological reflection.

Overall focus of the group

The group develops the resources named as the four prerequisites and enhances them by linking them with the three partners of personal and communal experience, the tradition and the culture. The focus of the group is on process and its partners are viewed as a mutually interdependent unit in which each affects the other through critical reflection. The outcome is that students will develop their own preferred models for theological reflection.

Relationship

There has been much discussion in supervision of the relationship between supervisor and student. Because of the mutuality emphasized in this model there is a temptation to claim a peer relationship between supervisor and student. However, there are two hindrances to this claim. The first is that the theological institution requires an evaluation process, one that prevents supervisor and student from ever attaining true peer or colleague relationships. This tension between evaluation and supervision remains, but its import is reduced when the supervisor is genuinely willing to enter the process with the students and be as accountable as they are. When the supervisor is willing to stand beside and be with students, a collaborative relationship develops in which the supervisor and students are a mutually interdependent unit. This is crucial for the process of theological reflection. Furthermore, the collaborative relationship allows students to develop an internal sense of evaluation through self-evaluation, rather than being wholly dependent on the external evaluation established by the theological institution. Unless the evaluation is internalized it is unlikely that the students will integrate that which has been imposed upon them.

The second issue that modifies collegial relationships derives from the assumption that a supervisor has skills, knowledge and competence to which a student aspires. Through this process of supervision the student gains access to that knowledge and competence. The student may not completely access all that the supervisor has to offer, but the supervisor is responsible for providing as many opportunities as possible for learning. This educational view of supervision reminds us that supervision is a process taking place between two people who are not just communication but also a process of mutual learning and support.
The group becomes a group that just talks and life experiences as such. The group is on process and each affects the students will develop their relationship between the supervisor and the student. However, the theological institution and student from ever between evaluation and supervisor is genuinely accountable as they are. Students, a collaborative students are a mutually collaborative theological reflection. To develop an internal wholly dependent on the institution. Unless the will integrate that which derives from the competence to which a student gains access to that the access all that the person is for providing as many view of supervision which two people who are not peers. It also reminds us that the task of the student is to move toward peership, while the task of the supervisor is to provide opportunities for that movement. Counselor and theological educator Kenneth Mitchell says, 'peerhood is not the nature of supervision, but the goal of supervision'.

Clearly, supervisors have competence and knowledge about ministry that students do not. This was self-evident in my time of directing a CPE program in a hospital setting. Not only was I more competent in pastoral care to patients, but I was also legally responsible for students in the hospital. I am sure my modelling of pastoral care enabled them to be more effective pastors, however, my knowledge is limited though it has been enhanced and deepened by the collaborative relationships I enjoy with students. A reduced hierarchy between supervisor and student encourages the student to become more active and responsible during supervision.

**Control**

At this point I see the relationship between the supervisor and the student as a collaborative one, with some institutional restraints that modify a peer relationship. The significance of this relationship is that the supervisor and the student function as a mutually interdependent unit.

Having established an integrative educational base for supervision I will now describe the characteristics of pastoral supervision and their place within theological reflection.

**Characteristics of supervision that facilitate integration**

What makes supervision pastoral? The scope of this book will not permit an in depth discussion on this question, but it is enough to say that: ‘The ministry of pastoral supervision, as related to Christ’s own oversight and shepherding, seems to have been taking place in the life of the church since near its beginning.’ The concept and basis for pastoral supervision is its Christian heritage.

**Pastoral and ethical boundaries**

Pastoral supervision is something that Christians do as part of their ministry, whatever that ministry may be. But it is pastoral in function as well as office in the sense of its shepherding nature, that is, its care giving. If this basic care is not present then supervision is not pastoral. Nancy Ramsay, a pastoral theologian,

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extends the metaphor of shepherd to include trustee, which incorporates the privilege and responsibility that students entrust to the supervisor. According to Scripture, the shepherd is to assure safety and justice for the vulnerable. Supervision must be a context in which the vulnerability of the troubled is protected. Supervisors assure students that the boundaries – personal and sexual – will never be violated. Trustee similarly conveys that one is worthy of trust – a trust that is more than safekeeping and just action. It also includes modelling an ethical vision that is trustworthy. Pastoral supervision involves shaping a student’s ethical standards for the practice of ministry.

While pastoral supervision is concerned with assisting the student to respect other people’s boundaries, it is also concerned for the student’s own personal boundaries. Pastoral supervision therefore addresses the delicate balance involved in being what pastoral theologian Glen Asquith calls a ‘wounded healer’ for others. Oglesby, a pastoral theologian, points out that being present to others and available to others in pastoral relationships can result in the erosion of the self. Supervision helps the student pastor to set appropriate boundaries in such a way that the relationship itself becomes a healing source. The pastoral supervisory relationship can provide the student with a model of love that sets limits, but which also enables the student to experience a vital, healing relationship.

Even though the symbolicism has been reduced in today’s world, the pastoral office still has symbolic meaning for many. Urban Holmes III speaks of the pastor in terms of the archetypal figure of the shaman, whose role in history has left the image of the one who mediates between the people and the spirits’ buried within our consciousness and thus affects our relationship with people. Coming to terms with this symbolic power in the lives of others is an issue of pastoral identity, and hence an issue for the supervisory relationship. Students may deny, minimize or even maximize the impact of this symbolic power because of the anxiety it often produces in others and the particular responsibilities it brings. Pastoral supervision seeks to enable students to appropriately claim this identity and power and integrate it into their self-concept. This is done in part by the way in which the supervisor models the appropriate use of his or her own identity and power in the supervisory relationship. The test of the quality of supervision is centred in how the supervisor offers and uses the appropriate skills and models congruity in his or her life and teaching. For instance, if the supervisor believes that supervision is

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Pastoral

Pastoral care involves not only the correlation between the self and the other, but also the student’s personal resources. Supervision is an integral part of the pastoral care process. It helps the student to connect with the pastoral culture: ‘To be a shaman is to be in the intentional community and at the intersection of the personal and the pastoral. Supervision is the intersection of the personal and the pastoral. Supervision is a way of connecting the personal and the pastoral in the pastoral education process.

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Which incorporates the pastor's vulnerability. According to Nash and others, a vulnerable pastor is one who incorporates the personal and sexual — a person who is worthy of trust — a person who includes modelling an authentic life, shaping a student's personal balance involved in forming a 'healed healer' for others and for oneself and for others who are in such a way that the pastoral supervisory relationship is not one-sided but which respects and acknowledges the spiritual and personal experience of the minister and encourages dialogue between these three sources. However, the gifts of pastoral supervision are most usefully exercised at the intersections of life's situations. Supervision works best when seeking to connect perspectives and qualities that are separated by our religious and secular culture: judgement/grace, fear/faith, conformity/rebellion, being/doing, feeling/thinking, subject/object. Pastoral supervision is comfortable with being at the intersection of doing and reflection and, particularly, the historical tension between classical theology and practical theology. It is at these intersections that the possibility of integration occurs. As an aid for theological reflection, supervision is a method of integration whose primary focus is on what happens at the intersection of what one believes and how one lives out that belief. At these intersections supervision is concerned with the congruity between belief and practice.

Pastoral supervision is reflective

Supervision occurs within a conversation in which students reflect critically on their personhood, ministry and faith. While there are identifiable stages through which this conversation normally flows the objective is for students to confront themselves in ministry as a way of making appropriate faith (action) statements. It is reflective in that the supervisors assist the students to see themselves and their ministry more accurately, clearly and creatively. It is important for students to know who they are, why they do things and how they relate to other people. The analogy of the mirror is helpful here. Supervision is like holding a mirror before the students so they can see how others perceive them. As some mirrors are convex and some concave, every person offers a different perspective to participants.


Mirrors may be feedback from authority figures or reflection from peers. The concept of mirrors makes students responsible for their own future. Having seen themselves, some students decide to make the changes they need to make. The process of reflection enables students to take ownership of what they see reflected back to them from another angle of vision. It is when students take ownership and responsibility for decisions and for their future that the possibility of integration occurs.

Pastoral supervision is revelatory

One of the goals of pastoral supervision is to promote honesty. Supervision is tolerant of the students’ weaknesses and shortcomings. It understands, but does not tolerate, dishonesty and self-deception. These mitigate against wholeness and promote fragmentation, which, as we have seen, is already rampant in the theological enterprise. Pastoral supervision calls for authenticity and integrity. Pastoral supervision is aware of the subtleties of some self-deception and seeks to address these issues in the supervisory relationship. It provides a disciplined way of examining who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Its function is to encourage openness to culture, experience and tradition in order to find a place where God reveals God’s self. God continues to work in our lives, bringing new and creative ways into being in us. Pastoral supervision provides a process that can enable people to reflect on the movement of the spirit of God in their lives.

Pastoral supervision is confessional

Pastoral supervision is confessional in the sense that, in advocating wholeness, it requires that students not only acknowledge and face their strengths and weaknesses, but also accept and integrate them. The Apostle Paul illustrates such a confession in his statement: ‘I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.’ Paul knew himself and was able to address his strengths and weaknesses. Through his confession and God’s grace he was not only able to minister and care for people, but also to open himself to transformation. It is only as students confess their weaknesses and strengths that the whole person can be addressed in the supervisory relationship. The task of supervision is to bring the person to wholeness and health.

The idea of pastoral supervision as confession is explored in an article written by theologian William Close on hermeneutics and identity formation:

Belonging not to ‘explanation’ but to ‘understanding’, identity statements emerge as symbolic confessions at the end of the hermeneutical exercise. Like all confessions they draw together the whole person and those parts of the setting with which the person has

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Pastoral supervision is confessional in the sense that, in advocating wholeness, it requires that students not only acknowledge and face their strengths and weaknesses, but also accept and integrate them. The Apostle Paul illustrates such a confession in his statement: ‘I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.’ Paul knew himself and was able to address his strengths and weaknesses. Through his confession and God’s grace he was not only able to minister and care for people, but also to open himself to transformation. It is only as students confess their weaknesses and strengths that the whole person can be addressed in the supervisory relationship. The task of supervision is to bring the person to wholeness and health.

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Pastoral supervision is covenantal

Pohly uses the term ‘the right to fail’ to describe the essence of the covenantal relationship in pastoral supervision. He relates this to the field education learning document, which is called a ‘learning covenant’ rather than a ‘learning contract’. Generally, a contract connotes legal enforcement. Pastoral supervision has adopted the Biblical word ‘covenant’ because the agreement between two people or a group of people is more than a legal agreement. The supervisory covenant is a commitment to life and growth. It is a statement, often written, of intent, which binds the supervisor-student-group in a mutually agreed upon process to see that particular segments of ministry are undertaken and, together with life experiences, reflected upon. In this sense the agreement is legal – it has the elements of accountability and mutuality. However, because such a covenant runs the risk of being inadequate by some standards, limited by a lack of vision, perhaps impossible to fulfill because we expect too much or because of a mismatch between supervisor and student or placement and student, the covenant may be broken.

It is with such an understanding that we refer in supervision to the right to fail. In my experience if we try to enforce the contract we create anger, frustration and mediocrity. Covenant does not eliminate failure; however, instead of reinforcing the failure that many people in any case feel, we give people the right to fail and, hopefully, to learn from this experience. We renegotiate the covenant in more realistic terms and use it as an opportunity for growth and new life.

A belief in the future

The becoming human process that is provided for and actively encouraged in pastoral supervision specifically implies a belief in the future. God is always the God in front of us. The present moment is not locked in, not finished. It is open to the future and, for this reason, we are able to trust process; to grow means to allow for future change, optimistically, hopefully. In spite of the current struggle there is hope of becoming a more integrated person and a more effective pastor. There is present in pastoral supervision a vision of and towards the future.

23 Pohly, Transforming the Rough Places, p. 144.
24 Ibid., p. 144.
25 The work of Dean Olafsen is acknowledged for this insight. Dean writes of supervision as being ‘eschatological’ in an article entitled ‘The process of supervision as a
Pastoral supervision is contextual

Pastoral supervision is contextual and operates at many different levels of ministry, within and outside the church. The key to pastoral supervision is the facilitation of theological reflection in these different contexts.

These pastoral, ethical, intersectional, reflective, revelatory, confessional, covenantal, future and contextual characteristics of pastoral supervision have a deep influence on the way it seeks to facilitate integration in theological reflection.

Formation, theology and pastoral supervision

My understanding of pastoral supervision can be expressed in a series of assertions. To think and feel about theology, culture and supervision is to engage in theological reflection. And to engage in theological reflection is always to proceed contextually and inductively from experience. Each of these assertions represents a particular stance within the debates concerning theological education, theological reflection and pastoral supervision that have been reviewed in this book. I am committed to the case study approach, not least because of the priority it gives to hand over experience.

I also believe that defining moments in pastoral supervision occur when experience runs counter to expectations. These critical moments are surprising and often challenge beliefs and formation. They are points of departure from what has hitherto been known. They are often subtle and personal and dealing with them requires great sensitivity and perception on the part of the supervisor. The integrity of this kind of theological reflection requires a reciprocal and mutual relationship with the students and may require appropriate self-disclosure by the pastoral supervisor, always within ethical boundaries and with concern for the use of power and authority.

I cannot claim originality in using the term ‘critical moments’, nor can I claim originality in asserting ‘that it is precisely this critical component of formation that provides the way to authentic practical theological reflection’. However, I can claim its truth in my own life and ministry and my responses of pastoral supervision to these critical moments. While, for the above reasons, I can identify many critical moments in the ministry of students, I will illustrate a critical moment in a ministry with which I was involved.

I was presenting to my faculty colleagues at a seminar on work in progress relating to my understanding and purpose of theological reflection. Specifically, the means of ministry formation', Ministry, Society and Theology, Vol. 8, No. 2, 88-97, November 1994.


Ibid., 261. The above volume contains a number of articles on a symposium entitled 'Theology and Supervision'. These critical moments are also known as 'convictional moments', 'holy moments' and the 'lived moment'.

During the course of this session, I was torn between impotence, irrelevance and my own mediocrity. At that instant I became face to face with belonging. I composed myself and then, a few moments later, I began the theological reflections that I have described as existential moments. Another colleague who examined my work and article wanted to use a different title for the book, but it was nearly the same:

‘What a moment!’ he said. ‘It seems as if my body was near.

At this point, I could not hand over the seminar to them. I had their hands on their faces with tears streaming down the sides of my words:

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Pastoral supervision – a vehicle for theological reflection

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moments', nor can I claim component of formation that reflection'. However, I can my responses of pastoral and reasons, I can identify will illustrate a critical seminar on work in progress reflection. Specifically, the title of the paper was ‘The Art of Theological Reflection’. The subtitle was ‘How do I encounter God today?’ The paper was a reflection on my cancer and its impact on my faith. I was nervous and anxious about presenting this paper because I feared that some of my colleagues might intellectualize and critically dissect it, thus jeopardizing the personal integrity of my effort. I was also struggling in my confidence to present a paper that would be accepted academically and be of publishable quality. I feared judgement. I read the paper and was surprised to realize that my colleagues were listening attentively. My confidence increased to the extent that I was able to speak with little reference to my text. I addressed the issue of self-deception and its threat to authenticity and theological reflection. I was nearly home. Then I came to the section headed ‘A broken body’. I read the words:

‘What does it mean to have a broken body? While I am in remission and feeling quite well – I know my body is broken. It has been cut; a foreign substance has been placed in my body. It tires easily; I know something is not right. It is an impotent body. What does it mean to be a man with a broken, impotent body?’

At this point, I could not go any further. Tears came to my eyes and I placed my hand over them. It seemed ages before I looked up and faced my colleagues. Some had their heads down, but I could feel their care; others were looking at me, some with tears in their eyes. There were neither words nor an attempt to interpret what was happening to me, let alone them. Their deep empathy allowed me to complete my words.

‘What does it mean for a man and a women who love each other deeply? However, it has sacramental meaning when you place it in the context of Jesus’ words: “This is my body, broken for you.”’

During this critical time I was feeling the full impact of my physical and sexual impotence. I was also feeling hopeless and helpless because nothing could be done medically to reverse the impotence. I had talked about my impotence, but in the instant I had taken ownership of it I felt its overwhelming impact. At this moment I came face to face with my God.

I completed reading my paper. There was a depth of silence for many minutes, and then, words of deep appreciation issued. After a time the critical and theological reflection commenced. One colleague remarked: ‘This has been an existential moment; it made me think of the impotence of Christ on the cross.’ Another colleague wondered about the Christology in this experience. A number examined the place of self-deception in their own lives, while another colleague wanted to understand more the method we employed in my TRS. The response from my colleagues was a mixture of inductive and deductive thinking.

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Critical reflection

I have undertaken a considerable amount of critical reflection since this critical moment. A colleague, while being supportive, asked some probing questions concerning my methodology. If I had been more immediate in my responses I would have pointed out to my colleague that what had been occurring in this interdisciplinary seminar was a living reminder of the method used in the TRS. Or, to my colleague who classified this critical moment as an existential moment I could have said that it was an existential moment, but it was more. For me it was a deeply felt spiritual moment in which my spirit met the spirit of God. Another colleague was also concerned about my method being true to the Christian tradition. In retrospect I could have pointed out that in the presence of this company did they not think that the presence of the Spirit of Jesus was fully alive and encapsulated in this moment?

The critical moment and authentic theological reflection

This critical incident has allowed me, through being faced with reality, to take ownership of my impotence and the helplessness I felt to change this situation. It has given me a deeper insight into people who, for many reasons other than sexual, feel impotent and unable to change things. It has touched my sense of social justice for those people who feel impotent to change things. However, it was the unconditional presence of my colleagues that gave me hope. This is a good lesson for all pastoral supervisors. I am aware that this moment could have been destroyed if my colleagues had entered into didactic and speculative theological reflection, but the spiritual moment came first and the critical theological reflection followed.

This case study illustrates that for theological reflection to have real meaning it must begin with such a critical incident. Even so, the above example illustrates that it is not enough to believe that one is proceeding inductively when starting with the case material itself. Theological reflection must start inductively from these critical incidents. And so formation, theology and the immediacy of the spiritual insight come together to make possible the emergence of new theological convictions about the nature of God.

It is the spiritual component of this critical moment that provides a way for authentic theological reflection. There has been considerable debate about the place of pastoral supervision and its ability to facilitate spiritual direction in the formation process. One view is that it is difficult to accommodate the spiritual

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29 These critical moments are a Divine-human encounter and are poignantly and ultimately represented in the meaning of the Eucharist. The meaning of the critical moment is only one expression of spirituality, but in my opinion plays a significant role in the student’s formation processes.
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dimension of formation within the supervisory process. While there are common features in theological reflection and spiritual direction, such as a concern for integration and a valuing of vulnerability, pastoral supervision has a pedagogical difficulty in simultaneously fostering spiritual growth and critical theological reflection. Pastoral supervision’s primary focus is facilitating the student’s education for ministry.\(^\text{30}\) While there is a variety of forms of spiritual direction, ‘the common theme is walking with people as they develop their relationship with God. The task is to open the structure and space in which the seeker can learn and grow’.\(^\text{31}\) If integration and the issue of vulnerability are part of spirituality, which I believe to be so, and are present in these critical moments, then pastoral supervision has a responsibility to address these issues. Again, it should be noted that the claim is that the spirituality present in this critical moment provides an avenue for authentic theological reflection.

However, spiritual direction includes more than integration and vulnerability. In order to pay due respect to the wholeness of spiritual direction, it should be placed in another section of the formation program and a spiritual director appointed to give oversight to the program. In order to avoid further fragmentation of the formation process, the spiritual director would need to understand the importance of integration and vulnerability to spirituality.

Pastoral supervision requires sensitivity in locating these critical moments. My critical moment was obvious; others are not. Pastoral theologians Van den Blink and James Poling describe such a subtle moment in the ministry of a student when they write:

There was, however, a discrepancy in her behaviour. She was not the kind of woman who found it difficult to express feeling. And yet in this instance, so briefly as to escape the attention of most in the group, she had not been able to acknowledge her emotion openly.\(^\text{32}\)

It was the pastoral supervisor who picked up on the brief discrepancy in the woman’s behaviour. Upon recognizing this discrepancy and acknowledging this emotion she got in touch with a deep despair in herself, which was a profoundly sad conviction that there was no hope and that all the ministerial activity was only masking that reality.\(^\text{33}\) It often takes great skill on the part of the pastoral supervisor to assist the student through the anxiety of the moment. The moment can easily be lost by the anxiety contained within it.

It is for this reason that another pastoral theologian, John Patton, believes that at these critical moments ‘one must “bracket” all speculative and constructive
views of the event so that there can be disciplined "seeing". These critical moments can be subverted by moving from the inductive to the deductive, where critical reflection prevails. If this moment is being threatened it is the responsibility of pastoral supervision to hold on to it through direct intervention.

Central to all critical reflection is judgement. I feared judgement by my colleagues' evaluation of my presentation, but the eventual outcome was an abundance of grace. In all evaluation we experience judgement and grace. For our students there is often more judgement than grace. From a theological point of view evaluation reveals and activates both God's judgement and grace. The message of the Bible is clear: judgement and grace are realities of our experience and they come to us uniquely when we confront Jesus' life and teachings, death and resurrection. Jesus judges and restores us. It is in these terms that we experience pastoral supervision. Pohly grasps the truth of this when he says:

We come under judgement every time we bring a piece of our life experience to another person or [a] group for reflection. To share the events of brokenness, division, hostility, failure, doubt, and indecision which mark our ministry – or even those moments of joy and success to be celebrated – is to lay ourselves open to the criticism of our colleagues as well as God. None of us enjoys having our colleagues evaluate a sermon we have preached, a situation we have bungled, or communication that has broken down. That can be frightening, anxiety-producing, intimidating; it is certainly an invitation to judgement. It can also be challenging, restorative, and exhilarating. It becomes this when grace is experienced as well as judgement. We experience grace every time we discover that others have the same problems and questions; whenever we find that we are accepted and loved not only for who we are but because we have been willing to reveal a part of ourselves for others to know and appreciate; each time we are affirmed as a person and minister who is struggling with the key human issues. We come under grace in all those moments when we feel the support and trust of our colleagues who are now able to give themselves to us because we have given ourselves to them.

Students experiencing pastoral supervision will encounter both judgement and grace, each of which is a key to growth in the development of ministry.

It is important to recognize that pastoral supervision acts as a facilitator or vehicle for theological reflection. It has a body of educational and theological knowledge that enables it to undertake this task. I have outlined some of the art and science involved in such an undertaking in those critical moments in a person's life. This body of knowledge continues to be made available in the critical reflection that is required in the different models described for theological reflection. It will become apparent in Chapter 4 where I describe its processes in the TRS.

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34 Patton, From Ministry to Theology, p. 37.
35 Pohly, The Ministry of Supervision, pp. 149-150.
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Learning as a life-long process in supervision

In addressing the issue of lifelong learning for the minister, there are many opportunities today for ongoing post-ordination learning and refreshment courses for ministers: ongoing supervision, CPE, short term programmes in continuing education, spiritual direction, doctor of ministry programs and further theological education study, to name a few. I have highlighted two aspects of supervision in order that the full benefit of supervision is made available to the minister.

Train-the-trainers program in pastoral supervision

Increasingly, church bodies are providing post-ordination supervision for their ministers. Some are developing organized train-the-trainer programs where selected people are trained to train others in some of the art and skills in pastoral supervision. This training does not equip the participant to be a professional supervisor, but does provide the necessary resources to assist ministers in a particular context. In general terms at the conclusion of the training participants will be:

- equipped to train people in their synods/presbyteries/constituencies in theological practice and the skills in pastoral supervision
- familiar with the components of pastoral supervision
- alert to the issues and skills necessary for effective pastoral supervision

The outcome of this training is to equip people to be trainers for people engaged in pastoral supervision. The people who are selected for training will already have the following interests and capacities, and they are people:

- who have a vital interest in pastoral supervision and education
- who already have reflective insight and skills in pastoral supervision
- who are committed to ongoing education in pastoral supervision in synods/presbyteries/constituencies

The benefit of this type of programme is that it provides a structured way in which to train supervisors who will in turn continue to train supervisors in their particular region/s. It also provides an ongoing 'pool' of supervisors.

Supervision to address the issues of transference and countertransference

Supervision provides an opportunity to address the impact of transference and countertransference on our personal and pastoral relationships. I am aware that

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35 One such programme has been developed by the UCA. Ministerial Education Commission 2002. Participant’s Booklet: Peer supervision material.
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these two phenomena have been largely neglected or avoided in the pastoral care literature over the last decade.37

In my opinion the church has paid a high price for this neglect in the area of transference love and sexual dangers. Whilst I do not wish to elaborate in this book on the sometimes-complicated issues of transference and countertransference, it is sufficient to say that unresolved past issues could have a negative impact on the minister’s relationship with those for whom she/he cares. Likewise, the person coming to the minister for pastoral care can impose past negative experiences onto the minister. Sometimes complications may arise and it may be necessary for the minister to seek help from a psychiatrist or counsellor to deal with these matters.

Clinical Pastoral Educator Graeme Gibbons believes that negative transferences can be counteracted through positive transference. Gibbons highlights this positive aspect of transference in ministry when both supervisor and supervisee bring both transference and countertransference to the relationship.38 He identifies three elements of transference or needs important to the supervisor and supervisee relationship: mirroring, idealizing and twinship. He defines mirroring as embracing the need to be nurtured, valued, recognized and accepted; idealization as the supervisee’s need to merge with the strength and calmness of the supervisor; and twinship as a requirement of the supervisor to offer a quality of essential likeness with which the supervisee can identify and feel at home. Gibbons believes it is important for the supervisor to respond to these three needs, as they are important for the establishment of the personal identity of the minister.

However, having noted this about positive transference, the point needs to be made that these positive transferences in supervision and therapy are temporary homes of love which are preparation for a new understanding of love in any relationship with other and God. We may need these safe, insightful, interpretative and understanding places before we can venture into the immediate and sometimes dangerous world.

Whilst there are dangers in idealizing transference in relationships it must be acknowledged that the above insights are more productive than some negative approaches to transference and countertransference.39 Whilst not all will engage in therapy during their time of ministry, for many it has been an essential ingredient for a holistic and integrated life.

37 Until quite recently there has been an absence of pastoral care literature on this topic in USA and Australia since the mid 1980s. The UK and New Zealand have paid more attention to the impact of transference and countertransference on personal and pastoral relationships during this period.

38 Graeme Gibbons, “A good supervisor is able to do” Supervision: Introducing a process of reflection on ministry experience. From the document of the UCA: Supervising the Supervisor. Gibbons work is based on the insights of Heinz Kohut, the founder of the self psychology movement.

39 See John E. Paver, The impact of Transference and Countertransference on Ministry and Pastoral Supervision, Unpublished paper, 2002. In this paper I discuss a number of approaches to transference, which includes a theological rationale.