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THE *Soul* OF SUPERVISION INTEGRATING PRACTICE AND THEORY



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INTRODUCTION

✉ Margaret Benefiel and Geraldine Holton ✉

For nearly a decade, we have been teaching in a program in supervisory practice at the Milltown Institute (and now at All Hallows College)¹ in Dublin. The program, designed by Geraldine Holton, welcomes participants from various professions, including psychotherapists, pastoral counselors, spiritual directors, priests and ministers, chaplains, and educators. The contemplative tone, set early in the program, creates an invitational space for transformation.

We invite participants to bring their whole selves to the program: body, mind, heart, and soul. Through the collaborative learning group process (cohorts range from roughly 10 to 15 persons), participants build skills, learn theory, and experience deep transformation, learning in their bones a transformative model of supervision. Many participants find themselves drawn to the program because of its emphasis on soul; the spiritual component grounds and surrounds the experience.

The Soul of Supervision grew out of this supervisory practice program. With contributions by faculty in the program, participants, and other like-minded authors, the book invites readers into the transformative experience that program participants have had, and will invite program graduates into further transformation. The book also describes skills and examples of how those skills are used by practitioners of supervision in various ministries and professions.

Through the centuries, soul has been described in a wide variety of ways.² For Plato, for example, soul was the source of all change and transformation while for psychologist James Hillman, soul was the seat of calling, character and destiny. We believe that the soul of supervision is the contemplative stance within which the program and this book

it's the first book that begins to untangle what Irish supervision might mean. Where else would you find a book entitled, *The Soul of Supervision*, except in Ireland where the "soul" has such a lively history?

Its eleven chapters head straight for spirituality, spiritual direction, transformational learning, spiritual leadership, reflection, and emotional containing, as well as useful ways of engaging in supervision such as journaling and metaphor. Its "spiritual component grounds and surrounds the experience of supervision" as the authors of the introduction writes about the training course that inspired the book.

True, all the chapters are not written by Irish contributors: half the book comes from American authors. However, these authors have "clicked in" very neatly to the "soulful" and spirituality themes of the book and have given it an international flavor while retaining traditional themes of supervision. One of the authors recalls the Celtic tradition of heading off to sea and other lands in small boats without oars, and with only faith. This book does that too, metaphorically. While not as graphically stark as the sea-journey, the Irish-American connection speaks of that special relationship between the two countries. This book is undoubtedly a joint venture with the U.S. contributors, well-known and well-respected authors and specialists in their own right, especially in the field of pastoral supervision.

Of course, the problems with introducing or integrating spirituality into any professional format is that it can so easily narrow and restrict the work by focusing on one approach and come dangerously close to making one religious focus the meaning-maker for practice. To be asked to view your professional activities through the lens of religious tradition or a faith-wisdom (such as Christianity) will not sit easily with many people. There is still a strong reservation that if I engage in supervision with a supervisor who has a declared and definitive faith value then those values will be imposed at worst or at least unconsciously pervade the supervision room. This book, while unashamedly adopting a spirituality approach and one that is based in the Christian tradition, does not fall into that trap: rather the opposite in my view. It seeks to widen the discussion from a factual base (what is happening) to a meaning-making process that helps us read the facts or make sense of the facts through adopting a spiritual stance of wonder,

awe, mystery, stopping, critical reflection, wisdom, contemplation, and stillness. One must not move too fast or too quickly and end up with impulsive answers. Supervision here wants to play with the facts—creatively, metaphorically, dialogically and cross-professionally. This is a book about how to make cross-professional supervision work without imposing one profession on the other but harnessing the best of both in the service of the work. It has words and phrases not commonly heard in the mainstream supervision literature: of supervision as vocation, a calling, a ministry; supervision as contemplative stance and faithful action, creating watchful hearts and moving toward becoming a “soulful supervisor.” It’s first and foremost about a philosophy of supervision—what supervision means, at heart. Secondly, it presents a theology of supervision which has at its center the theme of spirituality in its widest form. Thirdly, it zones in on pastoral supervision and pastoral ministry as a reflective methodology of thinking about supervision rather than an imposed value-set. Finally, *The Soul of Supervision* offers supportive interventions applicable across professions (such as dialogue, journaling, emotional containing and the use of metaphor). When Geraldine first asked me to write a foreword to this new book on supervision, I was flattered. It’s always an honor to receive such a request. Besides the assumption that you have reached some credibility (maybe even gravitas) in the field in which the book is written, there is always the added honor of being placed alongside the author(s) as a peer. Living now in England, but having run an Advanced Diploma in Supervision which I directed and tutored in Ireland for a number of years, it was fascinating for me to realize the breadth and depth supervision has taken there more recently. Supervision in Ireland now has a distinctive international/diverse/Irish flavor. It wasn’t so much that the immigrant called supervision was at last being naturalized in Irish soil—it was much more. The authors had dug deep into Irish culture and spirituality and given birth to the supervision that was waiting to be born. It was more than integration, more than a marriage; it was a rediscovery of how supervision had lain at the heart of Celtic life undiscovered for so long. Maybe the fact that it has been lost is partially to blame for some of the troubles besetting Ireland—when reflection, learning from experience, contemplation, spiritual leadership, transparency, and

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spirituality disappear or get lost then truly the soul of supervision has disappeared and undoubtedly the soul of the nation with it. Ireland has had a long traditional reputation for contemplation, closeness to nature, and—interestingly—connecting and combining traditions. That is why I think this book lives on the cusp of the future; it gives a hint to what can be when leadership, organizations, intentional thoughtfulness, and contemplation are used to stop and think deeply about what we are doing and from where within us our practice comes.

While there are many frameworks from which to make sense of supervision—for example, learning, philosophy, professional stances, and theoretical orientations—this book moves towards a spirituality mode from which to make meaning of experience. Sometimes that mode is quite direct when “faithful action” from the Scriptures is viewed as a flexible lens through which to make meaning. At other times the framework calls on spiritual themes as guides—for example, a sense of wonder, contemplative review, intentional reflective practice, provoking thoughtfulness, reverence, awe and privilege. The book calls for a “ministry of supervision” that is characterized by reflective and collaborative, cross-professional supervision. While the terminology is often spiritual (soul in contemplative stance, pastoral supervision, the ministry of supervision), it is never narrow in a religious or denominational sense.

This is a new book not just in the sense that it’s hot off the presses. It’s new also in that it begins to connect supervision and spirituality in an Irish and international context where diversity and cross-professionalism is the order of the day. As one of the authors puts it: it is supervision “beyond mind, beyond ego and beyond fear.”

*Michael Carroll
July 1, 2010*

INTRODUCTION

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hiring agents to supervise volunteers. In both group and individual sessions, volunteers brought case studies which provided the material for supervision. By the turn of the century the basic components of contemporary social work supervision had been formulated.⁸

In the 1920's Sigmund Freud followed an apprenticeship model to introduce supervision of psychoanalysts in training, which led to clinicians bringing their client work to supervisors for discussion. By the beginning of the 1960s, the expectation in psychoanalytic circles was that psychoanalysts would receive 150 hours of supervision.⁹

In the field of education, supervision was introduced in schools to "maintain common standards of instruction" and to help in "deciding on the retention or promotion of individual teachers."¹⁰ It quickly gained the appellation "Snoopervision." Between 1920 and 1950, two theories of educational supervision emerged. "Scientific supervision" emphasized the administrative and teaching functions of supervision. "Democratic supervision" stressed support and professional development for the teacher. The "democratic" approach has become the predominant approach in the field of education today.

Clinical Pastoral Education, developed by Anton T. Boisen (1876–1965) for hospital chaplains, drew on methods used in the supervision of psychotherapists and social workers and integrated a theological aspect. Boisen viewed theological reflection through the use of the verbatim and clinical case reports as studying "the living human document." Supervision of ministers in training built on the CPE model,¹¹ as did supervision of spiritual directors.¹²

Supervision has been recognized as a profession in its own right since the 1980s.¹³ Supervision in its contemporary manifestation focuses on 1) ensuring that supervisees' clients are served well and 2) the supervisee's growth and development. Supervision is now being used in the professions of education, psychotherapy, ministry, social work, chaplaincy, spiritual direction, and nursing, among others.

The authors of this book draw primarily on understandings of supervision developed in the helping professions, viewing the supervisor as the supervisee's ally, helping supervisees grow, develop, and serve their clients well. While there will always be tension between the two functions of accountability and support, the authors of the following

chapters seek to present theories and examples of supervision that focus on helping supervisees be their best selves, thus serving their clients (and the organizations in which they work) well, fulfilling both functions faithfully.

Structure of the Book

Part I focuses on supervision as reflective practice in a variety of settings. In chapter 1, Geraldine Holton sets the stage by using the metaphor of wisdom's garden to cultivate reflective practice in supervision across professions. In chapter 2, David McCormack explores journaling as self-supervision in an adult education setting. Chapter 3, by Debora Jackson, focuses on supervision as leadership development for ministerial students. In chapter 4, Martin McAlinden continues the focus on supervision in ministry by exploring ongoing supervision for priests. Yuko Uesugi, in chapter 5, elucidates a transformative approach to reflective practice in CPE supervision. Maureen Conroy, in chapter 6, presents a contemplative approach to supervising spiritual directors. In chapter 7, Margaret Benefiel explores supervision in organizations.

Part II moves from practice to theory, stepping back and formulating theories, models, and frameworks for understanding the reflective practices that were introduced in part I. Jack Finnegan, in chapter 8, explores a dialogical model for clinical supervision. Janet Ruffing extends the traditional contemplative model of supervision for spiritual directors in chapter 9, building on Barry Estadt's pastoral counseling model of supervision. Robert Moore presents a process model of supervision based on empathy in chapter 10.

Part III concludes the book with a dialogue between Robin Shohet, a pioneering leader in the field of supervision,¹⁴ and Geraldine Holton, exploring the interplay between practice and theory.

It is our hope that these offerings will provide an invitation to explore the soul of supervision, for both supervisors and supervisees. We invite you to take a meta stance as you step into the pages of this book expectantly, open to transformation.

List of Contributors

Margaret Benefiel, Ph. D., has trained and supervised spiritual directors and currently focuses on supervision and spiritual direction in and for organizations. She teaches at Andover Newton Theological School in Boston and at All Hallows College in Dublin and serves as Executive Officer of ExecutiveSoul.com. She is the author of *Soul at Work* and *The Soul of a Leader*, as well as numerous articles.

Maureen Conroy, RSM, D.Min., has been educating spiritual directors and supervisors since 1982 at the Upper Room Spiritual Center, New Jersey, and at various places throughout the world. She wrote the first book on supervision of spiritual directors, *Looking into the Well: Supervision of Spiritual Directors*. Maureen is the author of many articles and four other books including *The Discerning Heart*.

Jack Finnegan, Associate Professor of Spirituality at the Milltown Institute in Dublin, teaches supervisory practice there. A founding member of the Supervisors Association of Ireland and founding chair of the National Association for Pastoral Counselling and Psychotherapy in Ireland, he presently chairs the All Ireland Spiritual Guidance Association. Author of *Audacity of Spirit: The Meaning and Shaping of Spirituality Today*, he has contributed to a number of edited collections in spirituality.

Geraldine Holton, a leading practitioner and trainer of psychotherapists, spiritual directors, and supervisors in Ireland and the United States, is currently engaged in doctoral research addressing cross-professional supervision. Chair of the Supervisors' Association of Ireland, she designed and directs an MA in Supervisory Practice at the Milltown Institute and All Hallows College in Dublin, and is the co-founder of An Croi Wisdom Learning Community, Drogheda.

Rev. Debora Jackson, M. Div., ME, MFE, MSM, is the Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Needham, Massachusetts. Her calling to the pastorate has focused on congregational renewal and revitalization. She is also an independent consultant specializing in leadership development and organizational effectiveness.

Martin McAlinden is a priest of the Diocese of Dromore and has been in parish ministry for the past twenty years. He studied pastoral theology at Loyola University in Chicago which prepared him to work in adult faith formation. More recently he trained as a supervisor at the Milltown Institute in Dublin and currently offers pastoral supervision to clergy.

David McCormack is a lecturer in Adult and Community Education at National University of Ireland Maynooth. He works as a trainer and supervisor in a range of professional and organizational settings and is currently engaged in doctoral research at the University of Bristol on autoethnographic writing as an approach to reflective practice.

Robert M. Moore, DPsych, a registered psychoanalytic psychotherapist (ICP) and certified group psychotherapist (AGPA), works in private practice in Belfast. He offers leadership training, organizational consultancy, and retreats for Religious Congregations and Dioceses throughout Ireland and Britain. He also serves on the program team for the Doctorate in Psychotherapy at the Metanoia Institute, London.

Janet K. Ruffing, RSM, is professor in the practice of spirituality and ministerial leadership at Yale Divinity School. She is the author of *Uncovering Stories of Faith, Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings*, and editor of *Mysticism and Social Transformation*. She is one of the founding members of Spiritual Directors International and frequently leads workshops for spiritual directors.

Robin Shohet is co-author of *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (OU Press 2006, 3rd edition) and editor of *Passionate Supervision* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2007). He lives with his family at the Findhorn Foundation, a spiritual community in the North of Scotland. He has been coming to Ireland to teach since 1978 and it is still his favorite place to work.