

BAPPS

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Psychoanalytic & Psychodynamic Supervision*

## Supervising God

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# Foreword

*Bruce Kinsey*

'When they start talking about God, you know it is all *psychotic*'. This last word spat out by my training supervisor's mouth as she imitated her own adored [and venerated] supervisor, whose crisp Austrian accent often entered conversations. The fact that I was a priest and struggling with my faith, therapy and training seemed to add to this persecutory game. Although I purged my room of anything resembling my other vocation, and dressed as I saw other male therapists [trading my clerical black for the ubiquitous brown of the late 1980s] several of the people who came to see me seemed to be bringing their faith, their spirituality and their struggles. Bringing these to the supervision that was arranged by the clinic where I was working was character building. 'Do you think they know?' I once tentatively asked. 'Of course they know; and so much more about you. You cannot hide yourself, your beliefs, who you are: once you engage with that, further work can begin'.

Ever since then that 'further work' has been going on for me and ideas of God, spirituality and therapy have often been around, interwoven into the narrative - not always explicitly of course, but often there waiting to be heard. Over the years I have appreciated people who have also tried to wrestle with such ideas and communicate, albeit often cautiously, the tensions and opportunities of a rich and varied landscape. In the last few years many attempts have been made to reassess the ideas of Freud and religion and get rid of the more simplistic interpretations of Freud into a more nuanced and flexible space<sup>1</sup>. I also knew I wanted to struggle with Jungian ideas and found the concept of 'the shadow side' wonderfully illuminating; especially when supervising in charitable and religious organisations. How is it, where there is such determined goodness there is also kindness that kills or at least often clouds the work; both in therapy and in supervision? Where does the bad go when there is such a determined culture of good, grace, redemption and love? In addition, although forgiveness remains such a powerful force for healing and change, there is often a lot of shit, pain, hurt and frustration to go through and work with first. Simplistic 'flights into health' or 'retreats into the divine' fail to satisfy. Hence we hear many things when there is talk of God, and not all of them are creative, life giving or helpful.

My own drifting journey of faith - more time in the desert than at the well - has greatly broadened my experiences and my experiences of the people who come to see me. But this is one of the areas of work that doesn't seem to stop or go away, and like Graham Greene's wonderful ambivalent whiskey priest, I know many priests or former priests now therapists who find [despite themselves] that they are drawn to work that surprises and engages them with these core issues.

The theme of 'Supervising God' has certainly produced some interesting responses that are really worth reflecting upon. Remarkably, in many it produced a paralysis, a complete inability to engage with the theme whatsoever, despite

much agonising. Many therapists often comfortable with the spiritual dimension felt completely unable to tackle a piece of writing on this theme despite being much exercised by the topic and eager to write a piece. The ineffable does by necessity present problems but this theme feels like a taboo area. Interestingly contributors have perhaps felt more confident with their 'theological' credentials and so in writing a piece some have perhaps given more sway to the theology and less to the supervisory dynamic. However, we believe that these articles are a good beginning and it may well encourage others to explore, think and write too. The idea of being pilgrim people learning and struggling remains a powerful dynamic. Perhaps in time there will be a sequel; 'The Return of the Divine.'

We are pleased to have such a broad spread of articles for this edition; it captures something of the potential and diversity of this domain. Frances Hawxwell's *Disease and the Holy* explores the use of Dante as a creative and freeing way of engaging with material that is brought to supervision from a supervisee's point of view. She also explores the caution that a supervisee may have in mentioning the religious or Holy in the supervisory relationship if they sense the supervisor's scepticism. We move to Dale Mathers' Buddhist perspective. In *The Four Divine Abodes* he underlines the importance of 'being with not knowing' and considers the four divine abodes as goals for supervision: compassion, loving-kindness, joy in the success of others, and equanimity. Rabbi Guy Hall then writes of the limits that have to be faced when dealing with religion and psychoanalysis. Whist acknowledging that to outsiders, religious teachings can appear bizarre he argues that this does not mean that all those who hold such views are psychotic, paranoid, narcissistic, or indulge in obsessive acts, although some are and do. Finally, the ideas of story and metaphor are developed in Canon Beaumont Stephenson's piece based on the idea that "*The world is filled with people ready and eager to serve God in a SUPERVISORY capacity.*" Here he explores the role of paradox and encourages a playful space in which to explore the potential for the creative and the destructive ideas of religion and faith. There is also a book review by Bruce Kinsey which considers a related type of supervision - that of pastoral or Church workers - and explores how some of the issues in pastoral supervision may overlap with more familiar territory.

The publications committee is delighted that Eleanor Creed-Mills has joined us in our endeavours. Eleanor will be working on a future edition in tandem with Christine Driver in much the same way as Lynda Norton and I have shared the load as joint editors for this spring edition. The publication committee gives their sincere thanks to Catherine Coopers' unstinting administrative support and expertise, which enables us to produce a high quality 'Supervision Review.'

We do hope you enjoy reading the fascinating articles that follow.

<sup>1</sup> David M Black (ed) *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Competitors or Collaborators*: Routledge 2006

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# Disease and the Holy

Frances Hawxwell

## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the way in which a supervisee may hesitate to bring mention of the religious or the Holy into the supervisory relationship if he or she senses the supervisor's scepticism. I touch on a conflict between the religious and the modern secular psychotherapeutic worldview, and on the closeness between the religious and the pathological, supporting my comments with two vignettes from my work, one as supervisor, another as supervisee.*

**Keywords** Jung, Dante, religious, superego, penitence, the Holy.

A colleague recently commented that he thought that when the idea of God enters the psychotherapeutic consulting room, it does so encrusted with mud. Catholic myself, I could not remember one occasion when the mention of God by a supervisee had evoked anything other than scepticism in me. I had thought that my caution in regard to 'religious' utterances had been a reaction to the accretion of human rules, rigidities and prejudices which can present themselves as God's pronouncements. These often come across to supervisors as the moralism of the punitive superego. I think there is a difficulty in the secular consulting room not only with the 'mud', however, but with the Holy: the Holy, perhaps especially if one acknowledges its existence, is strange indeed to sit with, and strange to talk about with a third party. There are philosophical problems too when the worlds of the religious and the psychotherapeutic meet: there is a rift between understandings of the world which envisage moral absolutes, and the world of psychotherapy which tends to see good and evil in relative terms, with man the maker of his own meaning. Few of us expound on the nature of absolute goodness when we are talking with our psychotherapeutic colleagues, and the idea of sin is something of a foreigner to our conversations, too.

Speaking of a patient's homosexuality, a therapist in training admitted to me some years ago that he struggled to work with gay people because he believed that when they engaged in sex they were committing mortal sin. He saw his patient as subject to God's laws, whether the patient knew he was or not. I talked with him about recognizing his limits as a therapist, and about referring patients on if he felt that he was the wrong person to work with them. Thereafter, the therapist brought me cases in which the matter of divine law never again came up. Later I wondered what my supervisee felt about the way in which I had answered his comment, and what if anything he did with that moment of supervision as his work developed. There is a tendency in mainstream psychotherapy to focus on the pathological aspect of religious belief in the patient, and this can extend to the supervisory space, particularly when the belief in question is at variance with current liberal secular thinking. This paper explores the place of God in the supervisory work from the supervisee's point of view. I comment upon a vignette from my own supervised work.

Jung once said that our thoughts think us, and this was my experience as a therapist when an image from the work of the fourteenth century Catholic poet Dante<sup>1</sup> entered my mind late in my work with a patient who was consumed by feelings of bitterness, hatred and envy. I had taken more accounts of the sessions with this patient to supervision than I had with any other individual. My patient was intelligent, frank, likeable to me in many ways, keen to do the work, and was making real financial sacrifices to do so, but after a period of eighteen months in which she felt held by me, we had become stuck in her repeating experiences of me as bad or greedy mother. The patient's memory of love was faint, and her world seemed to be peopled with depriving presences. Over many years, drawing principally on attachment theory and object relations, and with conversations about my patient's uncertain sense of self and agency, my supervisor helped me to survive the experience of being with this frail but sometimes Medusa-like woman. I worked with the idea that my patient was terrified of her appetites, and of her aggression, and that she needed me to carry on being there for her through the times when she was most disappointed with me.

The supervisory experience was as lively as the sessions themselves sometimes felt deadening. Depression and negative feeling can have an 'eternal' feel in the therapeutic space, however, and as the years went on I began to question the ethics of carrying on taking fees from someone who was attached to me but whom it was so difficult to help. Having endured long experiences of not knowing, I began to feel that there must be a limit to the extent to which this is useful. And

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<sup>1</sup> *Dante's Divine Comedy opens in a 'dark wood' of despair. Dante the protagonist-pilgrim has lost his way, but the shade of the Roman poet Virgil appears in the darkness, and leads him through Hell towards Purgatory and Paradise. Hell is a funnel-like pit which has been created in the earth by Satan's fall from Heaven. Making his way down with Virgil through Hell's tightening circles, Dante passes friends and acquaintances, as well as old enemies, and is shown a vast 'geography' of unrepented sin and resultant human wretchedness. By way of poetic justice, the extreme of each sin is its natural punishment: in Hell, man gets what he has stubbornly clung to, and he gets it for eternity. The sins worsen as Dante and Virgil approach the lowermost part where the treacherous are fixed with Satan in the ice. Climbing Satan's shanks and finding himself inexplicably turned upside-down, Dante discovers Hell's exit, and is released into the southern hemisphere. Here, surrounded by pure water, Purgatory rises as a stark and lovely mountain with the Earthly Paradise on the top. Climbing the cornices of Purgatory, place of penitence and cleansing, Dante re-encounters a young woman whom he has loved, idealized and lost on earth, and who represents the Divine in the poem. Paradise, the third part of Dante's great poem, describes the protagonist's sublime journey into the mysteries of Heaven and absolute Love. The Divine Comedy is at the same time a story told as if it has actually happened, and an allegory of the soul's relationship with God.*

then one day looking at my patient's face I 'saw' her as one of Dante's sinners stuck on a ledge in Dante's Hell.

Sensing that my supervisor was agnostic, and knowing that my patient was atheist, I kept quiet in supervision about my image of the patient as sinner. This was not the first time that a religious image had come to me. Previously I had while working 'seen' a suicidal Jewish patient as crucified, with myself as Mary lying grief-stricken in the darkness on the stony ground beneath her dead son on the cross. Telling this to my supervisor had led to a fertile exchange: it was the idea of sin which presented the problem. Even in the Church, one does not hear the word 'sin' used very much these days. I found myself studying Dante, and discovered more of the poetic-religious context within which the image of the sinner can be understood. Dante is not the purveyor of the gothic tale which Doré's familiar illustrations of *Inferno* might suggest, and the idea of sin is more than the doctrinal expression of a wagging finger. Beyond Dante's Hell is a poetic portrayal of human penitence and of the way in which concern for the other (in this case, God) helps the individual move towards relationship with Love. Divine Love is portrayed in spellbindingly beautiful terms; Dante's cosmos is contained by the goodness and justice of its Creator.

The connection with psychotherapeutic work became more obscure, not less, as the gap between Dante's worldview and ours became clearer to me. It was hard to see what connected the pilgrim's journey described in his *Comedy* with the stasis of a modern woman who was convinced that her mother did not love her and who seemed to live in what is often called the existential vacuum. What, for the purposes of this paper, was I to make of the fact that it seemed impossible for me to explore this question in supervision?

Because the image of the sinner stayed with me, I did eventually share it with my supervisor. I trusted her enough to take the risk of making a 'mistake' by bringing up the topic of sin. She said it was interesting that the figure of a judge should be coming into the work at that point, and I replied that the 'judge' might of course be something emerging in me. I had been looking at Dante's circles in Hell, half-wondering whether my patient was stuck with the gluttonous, the avaricious, or the wilfully angry. Later, I was to read that the figure of Minos in Dante's *Inferno* can be seen as an image of the punitive superego - standing as he does, terrible, at the entrance of Hell proper - judging the damned by winding his tail round his body; the number of curls reflecting the circles to which they are to stay for eternity.

I did not really think that I was a latter-day Minos. Feeling my way back into the image I felt more like Dante the aghast traveller, being shown the effect on the individual of the choices which he makes while in life. Each of the circles in Hell reflects the sufferer's never-repenting vice, and I was troubled by the way in which



*Image; Gustav Doré – Dante Aglieri – Inferno- Plate 13 (Canto V Minos)*

in spite of the long work which we had done my patient seemed to be hanging on to old hatreds and envies. There are different images of judgment in the Divine Comedy. Judgment is more than “Minos”. What had fascinated me in Dante was the demonstration of the idea, echoed centuries later by C S Lewis in his book “The Last Battle”, that man judges himself in his acceptance or rejection of the Divine. This offered me a new way of thinking about the patient as agent. I began to talk with my patient about how it might be that she was unconsciously choosing states of mind, which, influenced by her concretized interpretation of the developmental model of psychotherapy, she believed were determined by her early experience. Still interested in the treatment by Dante of the question of choice, I took my thoughts about this out of supervision to the ‘internal supervisor’, who was more interested in the theological question of free will than I could reasonably expect my actual supervisor to be. Dante’s ideas about the cardinal importance of man’s choice, along with his numinous image of Love and man’s relationship with it began to sustain me in my work with my patient. To say the least, Dante’s work offered me a different story from the narrative which my patient and I had been exploring for years. Something harder to express was happening as well. Something in my reading of Dante led to my feeling ‘seized by the Holy’. One can suggest a link between the feeling of being overwhelmed by love and the baby’s experience of bathing in the love of his mother’s eyes. Whichever it was, it was having a remarkable effect on me.

Had I been my own supervisor, I might have wanted to ask, had there been the time, how much Dante's world had to do with the patient's actual material. It has been suggested to me by colleagues with whom I shared my thoughts that the patient 'disappears' at times behind my love of Dante and fascination for the link between his work and the psychotherapeutic picture of psyche. The patient had at the outset of our work mentioned a book which suggested that Dante's journey through Hell resembled the experience of the analysand undergoing a depth therapy. I was to wonder whether I had 'abandoned' her by following the path which she had suggested. I had the feeling that my supervisor regarded mythical-religious thinking in the supervisory context as an escape from relationship. Perhaps she was right. However, she had also said to me in the past that my patient probably felt unable to have an effect on anybody. Unknown to her, the patient had had a transformatory effect on me. This brought a new energy into my relationship with her.

Reflecting on my experiences as supervisor and supervisee, I think part of the supervisor's difficulty when a supervisee raises the question of the Divine reflects her sense that the supervisee may be unconscious when she or he does so. The arrival of the Absolute can feel like a killer of symbolic thinking, and the supervisor has to consider whether the supervisee is able to think around his or her experience of it. Seen in this way, the crucifixion, as an image of tragic suffering, or the Nativity, as an image of extraordinary birth, remain subjects which can be worked with, being more 'human', whilst the ideas of sin and of absolute Good in some way repel comment.

Thinking back over the experience of being supervised during a time when I felt something of God enter the therapeutic space, I realize that the therapist's wounds are open at the moment when he or she is seized. The pathological does sit near the religious and the Holy, and as supervisor and supervisee, I have become more aware of that through my reflection on this paper.

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# Supervising God: The Four Divine Abodes

Dale Mathers

## **Abstract**

*This short paper takes the theme 'Supervising God' and considers the influence of a Buddhist perspective - which it is argued promotes open system thinking - upon Supervision. Starting from a position of 'being with not knowing' and using three brief clinical vignettes, this paper considers the four divine abodes as goals for supervision:- compassion (karuna); loving-kindness (metta); joy in the success of others, (muditta); and equanimity (upekka).*

**Keywords** supervision, Buddhism, Divine abodes, open systems.

The theme 'Supervising God' intrigued me. If you suppose 'God' to mean a single omnipotent Creator, as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this not a concept I have, as a Buddhist. That we do not is strange to monotheists who often imagine we do, really, but are being coy: Buddha, to Buddhists, must be as Christ, to Christians. Not so. Buddha was a Prince who became a wanderer, a mortal and fallible man. Neither wealth nor poverty, indulgence nor ascetic practices brought him peace, until he found 'the Middle Way', a way through the world of suffering. He was clear, always, belief that in him as any kind of god was no part his teaching. We try what he said and learn from experience, as in therapy and supervision, also empirically based practices.

We all live within our day-to-day belief systems (complexes) without noticing them - like 'it's my mother . . . ' or 'the sun will come up tomorrow'. The first is a trivial truth, 'it's everyone's mother . . .' the second is a strong probability, not a fact, as the Scots empiricist philosopher David Hume argued in his Treatise on Human Nature. He cautions, as a Buddhist would, against making moral judgements by moving from 'what is' to 'what it ought to be' basing our interactions on belief rather than experience. Beliefs carry a intrinsic danger, whatever it is that is believed in. The dogma of one 'closed' belief system can be replaced with another categorical, omnipotent, closed system. The aim of counselling / therapy / analysis might be, as Freud quipped, 'to replace hysterical misery with common unhappiness' or as Jung said, 'to individuate' that is to allow what is, the timeless Self, to be. Of course, that depends on what we believe 'Self' means: for Buddhists, it does not mean an immortal soul.

If we start 'believing' things as supervisors, we can do a mischief: whether we're believing a patient or supervisee's story or, worse, believing we, perhaps from our theories and trainings, really know what's going on in two other people's minds - or our own. To imagine this is an omniscient fantasy. Therapy and supervision, like meditation, depend on an ability 'to be with not knowing.' We can describe what *is*, sometimes, we can't say what *ought* to be. But, alas, we can't help doing that; none of us are free of timesaving beliefs,

like 'the sun will rise tomorrow'. We assume: if I assume I know best (a closed system) in an interaction, two people suffer, me and you. Buddhists take suffering as a given, a fact of life, rather than the result of pleasing or displeasing a divinity.

Buddha learnt about 'being with not knowing' during his vigil under the Bodhi tree. Trying to stay with not knowing creates interesting times. If supervision is like meditation practice, then we are not striving to 'do', but to 'be with', and not always successfully. At the end of a good session there may be far fewer pre-conceived ideas about what 'ought to happen for the best', what we are doing right or wrongs. We may start to be with what is, rather than what we *believe* ought be. We don't have to be 'God-like'.

Wondering about 'God' is what Buddha called asking the wrong sort of question. We import and export internal realities in projections (inevitable), and projective identifications (unconscious). How we conceive the nature of the world shapes what we can and cannot import and export. Buddhists (usually, not always), don't import the notion of 'God', and can't export the notion of Self. For us, there is no Self to 'get better' in therapy: Self is a collective noun, an aggregation of five things; body, feelings, mind, consciousness and mental formations; all impermanent. There may be a last thought in one life, which continues as a first thought in another. There is Karma: 'what comes around goes around', actions arising from choice have consequences.

Buddhists come in three main flavours: Theravada, the way of the elders (Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka); Vajrayana, the diamond vehicle (Tibet and Mongolia); and Mahayana, the great vehicle (China, Korea and Japan). Each split, in the same way and for the same reasons as analytic societies, ordinary bickering . . . or 'theoretical difference'; each adapted to the shamanistic practices of the indigenous people. Tibetan ideas blend with the Bon religion; Vajrayana seems to have lots of gods and goddesses, to do magic. In Japan, Zen practice and Shinto, the worship of nature spirits, are happily enjoyed together. Burmese, Thai and Sri Lankan's worship fairies and nature spirits (Deva's).

That tradition, Theravada, which I follow, is interested in 'that which is'; the 'is' of existence, rather than 'oughts' supplied by an all-knowing being. Buddhists do not have commandments; we have recommendations, precepts, ethics, ways to practice. It is pragmatic, existential. And existence has three signs: impermanence, suffering and No-Self: 'all things must pass', 'everything suffers', and 'there is no "eternal me"'. The aim of practice is to experience, in this life, its results. These are called the four Brahma Viharas, the *four divine abodes*. They could be thought of as goals in supervision. Compassion (*karuna*) is the first, then loving-kindness (*metta*), joy in the success of others, (*muditta*), and equanimity (*upekka*). Here are two clinical examples showing what they look like: one is with a Mahayana Buddhist, the other with a Christian. Both practice every day. They bring 'gods' and 'God' to supervision, particularly when they wonder what they *ought* to do.

A young Tibetan humanistic therapist, Stobje, brings his pantheon: for example, Vajrakilaya, the meditation deity, whose weapon is the thunderbolt. He helps Stobje struggle with projective identifications from a borderline patient, Zed, parrying psychic thunderbolts. Vajrakilaya wields a double thunderbolt (a Dorje) in each hand to turn aside the dark - like a Jedi knight's light sabre. Visualising him, hatred bounces off, giving space and time to feel compassion (*karuna*) for the inner rages which created the lightning.

We mixed Tibetan myths with developmental theory. Zed's child-like rages originated in early trauma. But insight does not necessarily create change. Zed knew he hated his violent alcoholic parents, 'mutative transference interpretations' did not do much. Stobje means 'strong' in Tibetan, he is a fine martial artist, likes fights, tends to become a rescuing hero, only to end up feeling a victim or being seen as persecuting. He knew his 'omnipotent hero complex' (his self- description) was caught beautifully on the hook of Zed's projected anger. Reminding Stobje that Vajrakilaya can hold and contain as well as fight used his own 'god' to explore stormy transference dynamics. A conscious visualisation of Vajrakilaya standing between them in a session did two things - he saw through Zed's yells to a little boy inside, being cruelly beaten. Zed saw, this time, his rage had not provoked retaliation. Both felt in joy the success of each other, in surviving a hate-filled moment. Calling this *muditta* made more sense to Stobje than positive connotation, a Western equivalent. He took joy in the hard sessions (negative transference), discovering by experience that it built equanimity, *upekka*.

My friend Konoyu Nakamura, describes a similar, quite spontaneous visualisation. She was raised in an esoteric Buddhist family, followers of the Shingon sect, introduced to Japan by Kukai in the ninth century. At the '06 Kyoto conference on Buddhism and psychotherapy, she described a vision of Mahavairocana-tatha-gata, inspirer of Shingon, at a crucial point in therapy (2006 pp 337 - 353). At her wit's end, she was frustrated to tears with an obsessional, suicidal and self-harming young male patient playing endless games of 'why don't you - yes but' with himself. She'd given up, when:

' . . . a fantastic vision emerged in my mind: that is there is a real dark space, the universe, in which many galaxies with cool brilliance are slowly moving. Intuitively, I realized the image represented the universe and the *Mahavairocana-tatha-gata* himself who is the Absolute being reigning over the whole universe. I impressively felt his vast and boundless mercy, which contained me and forgave me, a powerless therapist. If this was so, I was sure that my suffering patient must be accepted, contained and relieved in the great mercy and that he could overcome this crisis by himself.' (ibid: p 345 -6)

The youth, for the first time in years, at that moment felt loving-kindness (*metta*) toward himself. She did not tell him her 'vision until long after, when she asked permission to write about him. She understands this as supervision from the Collective Unconscious: a Jungian concept close to the Buddhist

term 'No-Self' . . . there is no 'me', there is 'us': we are multiplicity, existing across and through and in each other (rather like Rastafarians saying 'I and I', instead of 'we'.)

Buddha asked us not to believe, but to experience - to have an open system, rather than a closed one. Here is an example from work with a Christian analyst, Martha, an ex-Nun, with an interest in 'saving the Saved' - 'born again' Evangelicals who come when their closed system world-view collapses: God did not provide, the Healing miracle did not happen, they fell into sin . . . . Buddhists do not have this concept; whatever it may mean, it does not sound like a Brahma-Vihara.

Martha often has to 'supervise God', imagined at His punitively omnipotent worst. She takes herself to task with Irish Catholic guilt, 'I'm not good enough . . . at all, at all.' Recently she worked with David, a married 'born again' black Pastor, who had an affair with Jonathan, a beautiful white lad. David was suicidal, longing to come out but afraid of losing everything. His self-hate was hard for Martha, gay herself. It replayed her trauma of having to choose between her vows and her love. She knows I don't share her religious beliefs, this helped us suspend judgements about David's moral dilemma. I introduced her to 'the three signs of existence', maybe like this:

D: 'David's problem is impermanent, brings suffering, but can it come from being a "damned Soul", as you and he believe, if there is No Self?'

M: 'Oh,' she said, 'so you are after telling me he doesn't have an immortal soul?'

D: 'Well, just suppose he didn't . . .?'

She thought about this for a long time.

M: 'So then, there's no blame here?'

D: 'As there is No Self, how can there be a Self to blame?'

She felt able to disidentify from her patient's world of blame, guilt and abdication of responsibility long enough to think a new thought - 'what does this mean?' Martha gave up being attached to a result. This allowed change.

Buddhists value the collective over the personal unconscious, and open over closed system thinking. As none of us has a Self, we are nothing, then . . . there is nothing to do either, but to be with things as they really are, whatever that may be. David, given space, accepted his sexuality, divorced, lived with his boyfriend and took a job as a bus driver, serving the collective in a new way. She brought stories of how he'd found compassion for himself, and his new flock, London's travelling public. He enjoyed being himself. If I'm not enjoying a piece of supervision, I wonder 'who is it who is not enjoying what?' - understanding the world is impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dhukka*) and I have no Self (*anatta*). The last, *anatta*, needs explaining. It means, 'I am nothing.' This works against being an all-knowing 'God' one's self, sometimes. My own supervisor, a Rabbi, tells a story that shows this far better. He tells it to me when I'm having a fit of 'I'm not good enough . . .'

*A drunken little beggar took shelter in a Synagogue. The Cantor and Rabbi were practising. The Cantor sang 'I am nothing, I am nothing, I am nothing . . .'. It touched the drunk, who raucously joined in 'I am nothing, I am nothing, hic, I am nothing . . .' The Cantor turned to the Rabbi, gave a shrug, and said, 'Huh! So, look who thinks he's nothing!'*

## **Biography**

Nakamura, Konoyu, (2009) (ed: Mathers, D., Miller, M., Ando, O.) *Self and No-Self: continuing the dialogue between Buddhism and Psychotherapy* London: Routledge.

She will co-chair the third Kyoto conference on Buddhism and psychotherapy, to be held at Kukai's monastery, Koya San, near Kyoto in July '12. Details are at:

<http://absentmindzen.org/KYOTO2012CALLFORPROPOSALS.html>.<http://www.koyasan-2012.org/>

**Dr. Dale Mathers,** MRCPsych. Member of the IAAP, BAPPS, Supervisor with Association of Jungian Analysts (AJA).

*Dale is a psychiatrist and a humanistic psychotherapist in private practice in South London. He teaches analytical psychology in the UK and Europe. He directed the Student Counselling Service at the London School of Economics. He is a member of the Buddhist Society and attends the Theravada class at the Buddhist Society, London; conducted by the Nuns and Monks of Amaravati Monastery, Hertfordshire.*

*His book 'An introduction to meaning and purpose in analytical psychology' was published by Routledge in 2001 and he co-organised the second conference on Buddhism and Psychotherapy in Kyoto, 2006*

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# God on the Couch

Guy Hall

## **Abstract**

*There are many limits that have to be faced when dealing with religion and psychoanalysis. Some are due to the origins of Holy Scriptures, the nature of religious experience and the psychoanalytic models of the mind that analysts use. Not all of the beliefs held by religious leaders and believers, however unscientific, are either illusions, or signs of insanity. To outsiders, religious teachings can appear odd, even exaggerated in their claims, but that does mean that all those who hold such views are psychotic, paranoid, narcissistic, or indulge in obsessive acts, although some are and do. However many atheists and agnostics hold beliefs that equally appear delusional and act in a way that may be questionable without needing any psychological intervention, because they are judged to be able to function adequately within their social environment. This article addresses some of these issues and considers how they might arise in supervision.*

**Key words**      God, couch, religion, psychoanalysis, supervision, rabbi, bible.

The idea of putting *God on the couch* may by turn appear to be both amusing and shocking. Taken literally, it could for some psychotherapists be the ultimate omnipotent phantasy. The God that is revealed in the Pentateuch of the Hebrew Bible is anthropomorphic and not so transcendent as to be devoid of strong feelings. This is a God who is able to demonstrate within a few verses, a transition from guilt, anger and disappointment to a need to act out, followed by a desire for some kind of reparation.<sup>2</sup> Such statements reflect the projections and other unconscious processes in the minds of the writers of biblical books.

*And God saw that the wickedness of humanity was great upon the earth, And that every imaginable thought within it's heart was constantly only of evil. And the Lord regretted greatly that he had ever made humanity on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy humanity that I have created from the face of the earth; both humanity, and animals, and the creeping thing, and the birds of the air; for I greatly regret that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. (Genesis 6:5-8)*

The rabbis of the Talmud considered each and every human being to have been created literally with the physical image of God within them and that this

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<sup>2</sup> A more problematic example is Ezekiel 20.25ff in which God appears to confess to making bad laws and being a child abuser.

presence pertains also to all the aspects of the psyche. From this perspective, having God on the couch is an idea that all colleagues will already have experienced, although perhaps not always recognized.

Religion is an important factor in the lives of many people and a significant influence in the stories that appear daily in the media. I suspect that for the majority of supervisors and supervisees, their religious education, if any, came to an end as teenagers. A consequently it can be difficult to call upon a more developed theological knowledge, one that also crosses different traditions, in order to fully appreciate the meaning and context that religion has in the lives of people who consult them, or to be able to distinguish between what is genuine and what is not.

As rabbis become therapists, the Jewish community has become bereft of a superego, in the form of religious leaders willing to articulate what it should and can do. Politicians and opinion-formers have largely replaced the clergy as secular society's super-ego. The clergy have lost power, but not authority, perhaps aware that too great a superego leads to problems and justifiable ridicule.

Many sociologists see in religion, an envelope for a host of fundamental and endlessly proliferating meaning systems that enable human beings to live and that, "we may therefore regard the social processes that lead to the formation of a self as fundamentally religious."<sup>3</sup> Religions are concerned amongst other things, with differentiating the sacred from the profane, as an expression and recognition of the Divine. For many people this gives rise to ambivalent feelings towards sacred objects, of fascination, revulsion, attraction and terror. These emotions are also present in those cultural activities that have a religious quality to them such as, but not limited to, rock concerts and football matches. They often make use of a heightened language, or rely on heightened, shared, group emotional experiences. Such experiences are special and set apart from other intensive feelings. The experience of the sacred is at the core of any peak religious experience and is marked by the qualities of being transitory, fascinating, tremendous and mysterious. Freud considered such experiences to be unitary and oceanic and their origins to be that of the child in the womb, essentially selfish and narcissistic. These are different from conversion experiences, or those of self-surrender in which the ego is put aside sometimes spontaneously, or through quiet discipline.

While working in the NHS and in my private work, I have supervised colleagues who have felt out of their depth when working with religious people.<sup>4</sup> One particular group that I have worked with are those who have, or

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<sup>3</sup> Luckman T, (1967), *The Invisible Religion*, Macmillan, New York.

about to train as clergy and thus be professionally religious and who have been asked to be assessed, or treated by their religious organization. In these situations, there are ethical and boundary issues that need to be clarified, communicated and agreed by all concerned. People who wish to become clergy of whatever denomination often have childhoods in which they were very isolated, with parents, particularly fathers being absent, or emotionally distant. In some cases where the father is a high achiever, or where father is seen as being a failure, then joining the clergy can be the expression of triumph over a father and the acting out of Oedipal issues. Such individuals often have an introverted personality, but a compensating rich phantasy life. Many have difficulty in making significant and long-term emotional bonds with others. A sense of connection with a reliable, however loving or angry divine father is better than having none at all. In many societies there is a culturally approved space for non-conformist pastors, monks, nuns and hermits to develop a private and often idiosyncratic expression of faith within an organized religion that gives them their self-esteem and a revered place within their communities.

Colleagues working with clergy frequently describe in supervision, feeling overwhelmed because some religious professionals have the capacity to dazzle and bewilder. Reports of visions, voices and miracles that would otherwise be considered as hallucinations, or indications of schizophrenia, cause therapists to hesitate simply because they take place within a religious context. In part this reflects the paucity of classical descriptions of what happens in the human mind and in part, they are stunned by the zeal of some religious leaders. In supervision they recognize in the transference a feeling that something may not be quite right, without being able to articulate what that might be. It is like being seduced, or watching a magical trick, in which one is simultaneously aware that there is no such thing as magic, but equally unable to identify how the trick might be done. The troubling unanswered question is, could it indeed be supernatural? It is the reverse of patients falling in love with

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*There is a category of people who have suffered because of their religious identity, or beliefs, victims of genocide, war crimes and the Holocaust. This is specialist work and beyond the frame of this article. I would simply draw attention to Claude Lanzmann who spent 11 years working on his film "Shoah." He frequently said that it wasn't his intention to provide an explanation for the Holocaust as in the deepest philosophical sense it was meaningless. Any use of human language, logic, thought and knowledge were doomed to failure. He said that there was something profoundly obscene in the desire to understand the Holocaust and that the desire to try and do so, constituted a refusal to acknowledge the reality of the event. His refusal to understand was a fundamental precondition to this work. Lanzmann knew that audiences would leave feeling upset, bewildered, confused and that they had not understood the film, but this was precisely what he intended.*



their therapist and the adulation that some religious leaders seek and desire, however humble they may profess themselves to be, can be so corrupting as to lead to sexual and physical abuse. Megalomania, mood swings and thought disorders are not above investigation, or challenge simply because they occur in an official, deemed to be carrying out God's work.

Indeed the grandiosity implied in doing *God's work* can give rise to vanity, pride and assertiveness. Since biblical times, many religious leaders who have started new religious movements had previously experienced in their youth a time of serious illness, or profound psychological disturbance. As a result of this they feel they have a new religious insight, or teaching, often felt to be one that has been revealed uniquely to them and which gives them a special authority. The apparent confidence of such religious leaders can make them appear daunting and formidable, but their charisma often hides bereavement, or major loss linked to their childhood illness. They often show a strong desire to dominate and be in control of others. Their followers in submitting to the convictions of such a leader have important psychological needs met, such as avoiding difficult decisions, or taking responsibility for themselves.

Other issues that come up in supervision when working with religious professionals and this is by no means a complete list are to do with paranoia and narcissism. Religious leaders may well feel they are being persecuted and there may be some objective evidence for this. Established religions do not easily tolerate schisms. Of course being subject to such real, or imagined attacks, suggests in the mind of the patient that what he has must be of some considerable importance. Such personalities have often experienced arrested emotional childhood development, in which although they may have been the centre of attention, they were powerless to control their world. In their minds, good and evil become sharply separated and they have a desire for omnipotence and usually a marked inability to deal with frustrations, leading to outbursts, temper tantrums and behavior more popularly associated with an Opera Diva. Unsurprisingly, they become more like the gods they worship, or more accurately, the gods they worship become more like them.

A therapist should be cautious before assuming that any expression of religion in the people they see must be considered as the manifest symptom of a latent neurosis. There are people who seek the help of a therapist while trying to resolve a religious dilemma that can usually be expressed as one issue. (This is in contrast to people who manifest problems in religious terms, while their latent issues are not religious.) That root issue is that an individual comes to feel over time, that while they wish to remain religious, their particular official expression of religion is in some powerful way, greatly deficient. Such deficiency is often the result of a perceived conflict between their religion's ideals when confronted by modernity. The recognition of this inadequacy leads to a desire to find a new understanding that satisfactorily answers what is deemed to be missing, or even a basic fault. Such a process can entail great uncertainty and personal suffering. It may involve physical rejection by families and abandonment by those previously considered to be friends. Few religious

organizations will support those who leave them for a new spiritual home, but tend to judge and condemn those who go. In such circumstances, a therapist is sought who can give consistent support and be an empathetic guide during this process, one who can help an individual deal with the consequences of change inherent in discovering a new religious orientation and giving up a false self. This may involve the therapist becoming temporarily a surrogate authority figure. Although the direction of travel is usually from a conservative expression of religion to a more liberal one, this is not always the case. However, the more conservative forms of religion tend to be less sympathetic to psychotherapy and often see it as a threat.

For both religion and psychotherapy, the past has an important role. Much of religious ritual links a chain of belief to key quasi-historical moments. Both religious groups and individuals see themselves as part of this chain and repeating at a symbolic level these events to consciously share and pass on a particular religious identity, values and culture. Contemporary secular societies find this harder to do; hence the recent attacks on multiculturalism and in the UK attempts in some quarters to make nostalgia for past military battles the motifs that define British identity. Organized religion is a society centered on memory and tradition, while secular society emphasizes memory and change, with the values and culture that applies to each. When in analysis, younger religious people and new groups seek out change, but with age memory and wanting to feel more settled becomes prominent. Collective ritualized religious memories are always subject to an evolving contemporary exegesis. This allows for the integration of significant experiences in the present to be contained in a mythic past. Collective memories regulate and become the reference point for individual memories and an awareness of how these two sets of memories integrate will help when seeing people with issues related to religion. Such an understanding may well already exist within a religious tradition, for example: It is said that as Rabbi Zusya lay dying he said, "In the world to come, God will not ask me, *Why were you not more like Abraham, Moses or Solomon?* Instead, he will ask me, *Why were you not more like Zusya?*"

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[contents](#)

# Serving God in a Supervisory Capacity

Beaumont Stevenson

*“The world is filled with people ready and eager to serve God in a SUPERVISORY capacity.”*

*“All things go in pairs, by opposites, and he has made nothing defective; The one consolidates the excellence of the other, who could ever be satiated with gazing at his glory?” (Ecclesiasticus 42: 24-26)*

## **Abstract**

*This paper uses the medium of story-telling to explore difficult elements in the supervision of religious issues such as:- How to identify and explore the spiritual dimension as it appears in the therapeutic encounter. How a supervisor and/or therapist who may not be traditionally religious, might address this. How the dynamics of spirituality, - which exist in the same way as within psychotherapy – can be identified and worked with. How we as supervisors might avoid impeding the spiritual dimension (by not getting in its way), whilst at the same time identifying the destructive parts, (which may be getting in the way).*

**Keywords** paradox, spiritual dimension, supervision, religious prejudice, transformation best/worst

The quotations above highlight how people can use God for their own ends. This paper considers how to recognise and handle the genuine spiritual elements when they do appear in the work.

There has always been a difficulty in dealing with the spiritual and the religious in therapy, perhaps doubly difficult in the supervisory role. It creates all sorts of binds; how does one respect one's religious opinions, while still reserving the right to point out inconsistencies? This contradiction is difficult to handle, but perhaps the difficulty is in the counter transference in that not only the constructive and the destructive exist together, but also good and evil. The question is whether this is seen as a contradiction, which cannot be solved, or a paradox, which should be endorsed.

Imagine getting in a taxi in a city you know well, during the rush hour. Clearly, you do not want to get stuck in a traffic jam and have to pay for waiting; therefore you give instructions to the driver from the back seat. “I want you to go to this address, but go via Oak Street to Beech, then right at the alley and go back to Willow Street where you can cut over Elm, which is where we are going.” So, who is driving? The difficulty here is that you are driving but the cab driver is doing the steering. Think about it, most probably, the cab driver might know an even faster route, but is inhibited because the “passenger knows best” and has free will. Compare this with a prayer; “Oh God, please let the current course of treatment work for dear Aunt Maud..... in your mercy, give relief to my people, and

in your great mercy and wisdom a slightly more than modest win on this week's lottery would be most helpful as the finances don't quite cover the cost of the new house I'm anxious to buy...wait a minute. Oh yes, thy will be done." AMEN. God has many such supervisors giving him specific instructions from the back seat, but it can get more aggressive.

Scripture is paradoxical in that it always presents both sides of the equation. For every "hold on and don't let go of your faith," there is an equal "let go and trust God to do better than we can desire or pray for." If the supervising God act extends into supervising other people, all one has to do is to find a particular bit of scripture, which supports your current point of view (studiously ignoring those that don't). Then, you can bash your opponents over the head, imprison dissenters because "Both God and I feel that you are wrong and should do things my way." What a powerful and seemingly useful club, which is difficult to fight because if people disagree, they are disagreeing with God or at best not allowing me to practise my religion.

Nice game if you can get away with it. Most people can't criticise your bigotry (including your poor therapist) because they would be attacking not only your religious freedom, but your working partnership with God as his supervisor. As my own therapist said to me once, "Beau, your defences are indeed so elegant, it seems a shame to break them down!" (I gave my therapist a 10 out of 10 score for that interpretation, even at the time), but how might the bind be handled by therapist and supervisor? There is no bind, once it is realised (as the quotation above suggests) that spiritual truths are paradoxical. That is that two totally contradictory statements in the spiritual realm are simultaneously true. It is not an either/or but a both/and approach to truth. It is right to be suspicious if a religious view is presented as either/or. Examples: "Do you wish to save your life? Then lose it" "If you would be rich, give away all your possessions and follow me."

Seeing with a paradoxical eye means reserving judgement until the happening plays itself out. The short cut is that if you re-frame an essentially negative happening using a metaphor, symbol or story, it reveals the fact that the worst thing, which has happened is in reality the best/worst. Best/worst is to be taken as one word. The Titanic went down killing many people. However, because it went down, practically every country of the world (who ordinarily cannot agree on anything) got together universal sea safety regulations, which have saved thousands if not millions of lives. Was the sinking of the Titanic possibly the best/worst thing which ever happened at sea?

If we are to try to avoid an either/or way of seeing and evaluating life, what is the alternative? A useful example is the process used at airports to enable pilots to land safely. They are called VASI lights, and they are placed at the end of the runway on each side. The planes come in at 3 degrees and they are angled up at 3 degrees. If pilot sees two WHITE lights, either the pilot will over-fly the runway or land too far down to stop. If the pilot sees two RED lights, they will land short of the runway (at Heathrow on the M25, which is not considered good

practice.) At the right angle—3 degrees the pilot should see WHITE over RED simultaneously. In scripture, Jesus gives the RED and WHITE simultaneously, particularly in the Beatitudes as an evaluative guide: Blessed (Happy) are you who mourn (red light) because you will find Comfort (literally strength). (WHITE LIGHT). In Christianity, trauma and conflict are elevated from worst to best/worst, and so also is taboo. Jesus gives an accurate description of the dynamic of the way Christianity works by saying “the stone, which the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.” Everything beautiful and uplifting in the practice of the Church is the white light, which comes from the red light of taboo. “God so loved the world that he gave his only son to die for us.” (white light) Don’t try this at home; we do not honour the parents of Baby P for doing the same thing as child abuse.(Red light). We eat Christ’s body and blood; this is the most central Christian act in most Churches. Taken too literally it is Hannibal Lector.

If choosing someone of the same gender whom you love as a member of your family is Civil Partnership or Gay Marriage, Jesus’ very last act on the cross was just this in making John (the disciple whom he loved) a chosen member of his family. “Son here is your Mother; Mother here is your son.” The man he loved is now a member of the Royal House of David. This fulfils the Hebrew Scriptures where Jonathan (Crown Prince of Israel and son of Saul;) made a covenant before God for a partnership with David,(whom “he loved more than women”) . In this act, they not only became chosen family, but the agreement was that David would succeed to the throne in place of Jonathan. Jesus, son of David, repays that debt of honour by making John the man he loves as his next of kin. Mary, Jesus’ mother, goes to live with John, “from that very hour”; instead of with Jesus’ younger brother James, who was his legal next of kin. Therefore, if some in the Church throw stones at those who practise gay partnerships, by rights the first stone should be thrown at Jesus himself on the Cross.

### **How is the spiritual dimension accessed?**

Essentially, if we re-look at trauma through a symbol or a metaphor, it elevates it to a different dimension, which reveals the best/worst rather than just the worst. The spiritual and the metaphorical is essentially a transcendent level. Viktor Frankl talks about these different levels in his writings. There are different levels of explanation. For instance in the story of Romeo and Juliet, if you looked on a scientific or biological level, the story is about hormones. Looking at the same story or a psychological level, the story of Romeo and Juliet is an example of teenage identity formation by rebelling against parent’s wishes. On a spiritual level, it is the story of the reconciliation of two warring families by two innocent deaths. Which level is true; all of them. Access to each level is by language. On the biological you use scientific language; the psychological level uses patterns of appropriate or in appropriate or learned behaviour or humanist language, and on the spiritual level use metaphor, symbol or story. Wrong use of language locks you out of that level.

Similarly, Peter Reason from the University of Bath uses, **Inquiry through storytelling**, to help deepen communication within a group or organisation. It consists of someone in the group telling a happening. The group is instructed not

to interpret or to analyse, but to respond either with telling another story, drawing a picture or a symbol or composing a poem. It has the effect of deepening the meaning of whatever story has been told. I will give an example of a story I told, so you can see what happened to a quite ordinary story by revealing what transcendent qualities lay within the story without our realising it. The personal story I told was this:

*When I was around 13 my father asked my older brother and I if we would like to go deep water fishing in the Great Lakes in Michigan. We excitedly said we would, and he said it would involve getting up at 4 AM (without complaining!) and doing some challenging things. We said we were ready to be grown up in just that way. The day came and we got up and got on a fishing boat equipped with deep sea fishing poles. We went out far from the shore into the rough waves. We fished late into the morning with the sun beating down on us without success. We were disappointed because we had heard that there were huge Sturgeon and Pike in the lake. Suddenly my line bent double. Everyone gathered round, and my brother looked especially jealous, which was no bad thing, as he excelled in most things. Both my father and the skipper agreed that I probably had hooked one of the big ones—quite possibly a Sturgeon. “It’s too big for me to hold” I shouted and asked my father to take the fishing pole. My father replied that it was either mine to bring in or to lose, but that he would hold me as I held the pole. After much struggle, the skipper noticed that something was not quite right. Eventually it transpired that I had in fact, wrapped the fishing line around the propeller. In a story, embarrassed silence we returned back to base. Myself, I felt not too bad, as I deep down didn’t want to kill a fish and be responsible for its death.*

Anyway, that was my story. After a silence, this was the story that another member of the group responded to mine retelling it as a saga:

*Once upon a time, a boy was taken out by the elders of his tribe to perform a task, which would mean that he was truly a man. They went out on a lake in which huge monsters dwelt in the deep and anyone who caught them not only would be a great warrior but well honoured by the tribe. All day they fished for this elusive prize. Then there was a bite and a mighty wrestling with the catch. Then it transpired that the boy had in fact caught the boat. Going back from the journey, everyone was disappointed except the boy. You see, the boy had caught something very important, he had discovered what he was to do for the rest of his life. That was to be a guide for people to cast into the deep to catch the biggest prize of all, which was to catch their own true deeper Self.*

Murray Cox in his book ‘Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor’, writes that ordinarily it is difficult to get the patients at Broadmoor to talk about their actions. However, when the Royal Shakespeare Company came and performed, many could not stop talking. One said, “You have told my story” and talked profusely to one of the actors. There was something about seeing their own actions, elevated to universal proportions in the plays of Shakespeare, which allowed them to glimpse the greater and more universal impact what they had done on another dimension.

## **The role of supervision: finding the point of paradox**

Let's look at the practical aspects of supervision; how does it work?

I would like to describe a particular turning point, which we can look for when assisting someone toward healing by elevating conflict to the spiritual dimension through metaphor or a dramatic change in approach. I call this the point of paradox, which has several characteristics.

1. It happens most when something is very highly charged in some way.
2. A certain amount of surprise or the unexpected is desirable
3. It employs something symbolic, metaphorical, or the very personal and has the effect of marrying together opposites, so that the best/worst is seen operating simultaneously in the spiritual dimension.
4. The result is often a change of attitude or transformation in those who witness or perform it.
5. Perhaps it is most important to be able to find the point of paradox within ourselves. Where God is being sought, He is probably hidden behind something troubling us – a point of paradox - rather than within the feel-good factor.

Examples of points of paradox include when St. Francis kissed a leper and when Princess Diana, as a member of the Royal family, picked up and hugged a child with AIDS. Both are immortal because they are universally and collectively remembered as changing or reversing attitudes.

Let me give two examples from my own supervision. The assistant chaplain came for supervision and said that something disturbing had happened during the Eucharist. Someone had interrupted right at the moment of the consecration with an inappropriate joke. I asked what happened. He said that ordinarily during the intercessions that people were asked who they wanted to pray for. He thought he would change it, and ask them instead that day not to pray individually, but to have a discussion and ALL AGREE on one thing they all would like to pray for. After discussion, they came to an agreement. "We want someone to make us laugh; it's so depressing being in a psychiatric hospital." He replied that unfortunately, his major skills did not include much of a sense of humour, but that Beau might be able to help them sometime in the future. He then went on to celebrate the Eucharist. Just at the consecration, someone said loudly: "Hey, did you know that scientists have just discovered that diarrhoea is inherited?" "No, really?" asked several people. "Yes, it runs in your jeans." Of course everyone exploded into laughter, including the priest. "What was happening?" the priest asked. I replied that it was a holy moment indeed. Their corporate prayers were answered right at the moment of consecration; it was indeed funny and everyone laughed so Christ had come to earth in two ways for them that day, one was in answering their collective prayer so quickly.

In another, I was supervising group therapy. One woman in the group aggressively kept threatening to kill herself. "Maybe they will appreciate me after I'm gone," she said bitterly. She had been speaking for some time and during her speaking, a member of the group got up and raced out of the room, slamming the door loudly. The woman who was speaking became very angry indeed at that

point. In exploring this, I suggested that something important had happened. Just as she was threatening suicide, someone “suicided” her and the group. By leaving their collective group world suddenly, without explanation, she left the speaking woman (and others possibly as well) with anger at not knowing why the person left, and feeling judged that they possibly hadn’t done enough to meet the departing person’s needs. In effect she had left the group (their life together in the world they collectively inhabited) and “done a suicide” on the group. This could therefore be explored, particularly with the woman of what it felt to be “suddenly left behind without explanation with all the anger.” When the other group member came back the next week, the two “suicides” might have (with a little prompting) a discussion of what they were doing to others and what was the healing they both might be looking for?

Another example potentially would be if during the time of the troubles in Ireland, the mediator might say “You wouldn’t be fighting each other if you didn’t love Ireland so much; what is it which each of you love and would wish to preserve?” (Trying to find the point of paradox; the agreement behind the hatred.) With theological students in Cambridge, we often design a role-play together about a conflict. At its most intense point, we stop the action and I ask the participants to turn around in their chairs to the people on the outside. They then explore together in mutual supervision, possible POINTS OF PARADOX which each of them might try experimentally, then they turn around and continue the role play. On one occasion the loudest and most vocal antagonist said “I would like to apologise to the group for not listening. I am aware that I have been shouting and pushing forward my point of view. I am going to be quiet now and listen so I can fully understand what the rest of you are feeling and saying. Immediately there was a sea change in the atmosphere, some of the participants even became tearful.

A final example: once at a Eucharist in the psychiatric hospital, I was distributing the sacrament along the communion rail. As I got to a particular woman, she screamed “I am not worthy” and collapsed sobbing over the altar rail, just as I approached her. We were all stunned. Quick as a flash, the woman next to her reached into her pocket and removed something, which she offered to her, saying: “In that case have a polo mint, my dear.” I said that she was free to receive the sacrament or the polo mint, whichever she felt was right for her. “I’ll have to think about it,” she said. She thought, and we waited; we waited and she thought. “I think I’ll stick with the polo mint,” she said. As she took the mint, I gave her a blessing and went on. Next week she was back. As I started down the rail, she leaned over past everyone else, stuck her thumb in the air and said: “Worthy this week, Father!” The congregation cheered. At the end of the service, I offered some collective “supervision.” I said: “Sometimes miracles happen, but because they are so small, we often miss them. When we are poorly, we can sometimes only have broth. Last week, our friend was feeling poorly, and she could only receive the broth of the polo mint from a fellow patient. In doing so, she was able to receive the full meal this week. I would like to publically thank my fellow priest who gave the sacramental polo mint last week, which enabled



her to receive the full meal of the sacrament this week. Can you now think how you too may have been a priest to another sufferer yourself this past week, and so have you seen any small miracles yourself as a result?" Many nodded in recognition.

If the use of symbol and metaphor and re-telling the clients' life as a saga is included in supervision, then perhaps whatever is universal within the ordinary might come to light in a healing and transforming way. This might happen regardless of the belief or non-belief of either the therapist or the supervisor. Worth a try?

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His particular interest is in the incorporation of spirituality into therapy and looking at ways of enhancing the mental health and recapturing vision in Institutions, which are overcome with stress.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook.  
Jane Leach and Michael Paterson  
SCM, 2010 £18.99 Paperback

*Reviewed by Bruce Kinsey*

It seemed appropriate in an edition considering the work of the divine that this new book be reviewed. It is both connected and not connected to the work of BAPPS, and I hope it is of relevance to some, but I fear might raise the hackles of others. I found it a book that managed to do both for me. The book is intended 'to be useful for chaplains, ministers, spiritual directors and pastoral counsellors who supervise the work of others, and to anyone seeking supervision for their own ministry. It provides an approach to supervision which begins in prayer and Scripture yet is open to insights from other supervision disciplines.' It is these last few words that sparked my interest because it reflects on how the insights and ideas of supervision as we in BAPPS might understand them are being used and developed for use in other spheres. It also feels at times that these insights are being abused and watered down in the service of other agendas. I was intrigued as I read, studied and enjoyed this book how sometimes I found myself cheering at what it was trying to achieve and at other times I found myself saying 'yes.. but' or 'yes.. also.

Talking with some other professional colleagues I spoke to several therapists who had found themselves being called in to comment, help and sometimes advise on cases where some well meaning person has 'got out of their depth' and felt they needed another perspective. This raises interesting and difficult professional issues and boundaries. I first experienced this 'calling in' on the broader skills of a supervisor when I was asked to help a student-led and student-run helpline, and also for a HIV/AIDS phone line. Although my immediate response was to say 'no' my own supervisor encouraged me to be more open ['less stuck up and pompous' I think was the wording!] and consider what I could do to help in a broader societal setting where the training and purity code I had developed were not so easily comprehensible.

In 2009 the [British] Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators [APSE] was launched and this book is in many ways the *vade mecum* of that organisation. Over the past few years, in common with other areas of public life there has been a recognised need and desire to build within faith communities structures for support and accountability as well as to encourage life-long learning. Some of this comes from the best intension, but sometimes it has been driven by high profile stories of abuse, or inappropriate behaviour by clergy [and others]. In a desire for best practice, the Association has been founded to raise standards and developed a more reflective practice. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that one of the appendices to the book concerns the APSE code of conduct and a complaints

procedure, and includes a five yearly review and re-accreditation process. This book is particularly timely therefore as faith communities increase their profile within our government's 'big society' agenda.

Naturally enough the book attends clearly to a definition of 'pastoral supervision' early on suggesting that it 'is a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way. Such an arrangement allows each person to explore their responses, review their aims, and develop their strategies and skills. Pastoral supervision is practised for the sake of the supervisee, providing a space in which their wellbeing, growth and development are taken seriously, and for the sake of those among who the supervisee works, providing a realistic point of accountability within the body of Christ for their work'. [p1]. In this way, and in their use of Biblical Scripture, it is clear and unapologetic in its Christian stance and to some that will be a clear turn off, but for others it will be an opening up into a new territory where often it is often feared 'there be dragons'. This capacity to chart 'this new land' may be a reflection of the double authorship of the book, with one author being a psychotherapist and both being experienced ministers of religion, working in theological education as well as pastorally.

The drive of the book's argument concerns developing a reflective pastoral practice or 'attending' as they call it, to help develop thoughtful and helpful work with people. This is a new and emerging ground for clerical ministry, and this stands as a first attempt to respond to a much needed gap in the profession. This book has therefore much to commend it, along with its intension to increase protection of people who are often particularly vulnerable and have turned to God or the Church because there they place their hope.

The book acknowledges its background in the more secular field of Supervision; indeed it is commended by Robin Shohet, well known for his writings to many of us. It draws well on relevant literature, and is a very practical handbook with useful exercises and points for reflection. The writers manage to 'translate' many of the ideas and insights of supervision into a theological framework and often the fit is good and creative, with playful and helpful ideas and challenges for our work. Their summaries of the ideas of writers in the field, the glossary and various appendices are useful and accurate and show the strength and knowledge that undergird this book.

From my own early days as a priest, I was surprised at the lack of supervision for my work, and asking for help or advice was seen as a weakness. I was also taken aback by the demands, needs and desires of a congregation. With straight and honest [and often uncomfortable] anecdotes and insight, this book is trying to address that potentially omnipotent culture, and encourages a community to consider its work, its limitations and calling.

Whilst acknowledging and including ideas of boundaries, trust, confidentiality, and support the writers go on to say what makes their understanding of *Pastoral Supervision* different from 'Supervision' as we would normally use the term. For

them it is working 'within a framework of spiritual/theological understanding in dialogue with the supervisee's world view and work.' Emphasis is placed on the minister's life and discipleship, and therefore issues to do with their spiritual and personal life are also brought to attention. This reminded me of the tension we often feel over what belongs to therapy and that which belongs to supervision. Certainly giving clergy space to explore their own needs and how that might impact on their ministry is important, and I have often found myself working with clerics who carry a distinct whiff of burning martyr. The authors write well about the restorative function of supervision, and their acknowledgement of the loneliness and isolation of much pastoral work is significant. They also write on how ministry can be improved by both the support and use of supervision and by developing good managerial and administrative qualities. In this way it is clear the direction the authors are travelling towards is a more professional and careful clergy. Here I think this book's honest integrity will bring much that is good, and this book deserves a place in most pastorally minded clerics home. It would also be useful to lend to any minister who was considering using supervision to help guide their ministry.

There remains a tension over what is distinct with pastoral supervision, and after struggling with this review, I took the opportunity to speak with one of the authors to try and find some clear water. In response, I was informed that for this organization the emphasis on what makes supervision 'pastoral' is encapsulated in their definition which can be found in the appendix of the book and on-line at [www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk](http://www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk). In a nutshell, what makes it 'pastoral' is the dialogue that is invited between the personal spirituality/faith/ or worldview of the pastoral practitioner (the supervisee) and the ministry or work context. Central to this is Rowan's question (in chapter one) 'Are you attending to your vision?' which I was told was 'an excellent summary of what happens in pastoral supervision ie one attends to one's own vision AND the vision of the agency within which one works for the wellbeing of the relevant client group'. I'm not sure that gave me the clarity I was seeking, but nonetheless I do think this book has much to commend it.

There is need for another volume to follow this one which pulls the ideas into more depth and rockier waters, but this calming of the storm will help and encourage many to continue their journey further.

***Bruce Kinsey** used to be employed by the Church but left that to work in education which he combines with a private practice in Cambridge.*

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# Contributions to future Journals

## **Summer 2011 Supervising Retirement and Other Endings.**

Lead editor Anne Power

Copy deadline 30<sup>th</sup> April (*neg. if necessary*)

Many of us will have had the experience of supervising a colleague who is facing the prospect of retiring and going through the significant practical and emotional challenges which this poses. Inevitably we will face this task of supervising retirement without having any personal experience – our own retirement will sit somewhere in our unconscious as something which must be faced one day. We thought it would be particularly helpful to share experiences in this field which is very under-represented in the literature

We are also hoping to include one or more papers on other types of endings, be these for re-location, pregnancy or ill health which is perhaps the most frequent and complicated cause of ending and one where the supervisor's role may be particularly stretched. If you could write about supervising retirement or other endings please contact [anne.power@gmail.com](mailto:anne.power@gmail.com).

## **Autumn 2011 Sexuality in Supervision.**

Lead editors Chris Driver & Eleanor Creed-Miles

Copy deadline 17<sup>th</sup> October

Supervision and the therapeutic relationship, as in any relationship, can evoke powerful affects and especially those around sexuality, the erotic, heterosexual and LGBT dynamics. How we consider and understand these issues is often a delicate and sensitive dynamic and yet vital in ensuring that these factors are held within a safe framework, understood and given meaning. If you have experience in supervising in this area and would be willing to write an article please contact [chris@driver4.prestel.co.uk](mailto:chris@driver4.prestel.co.uk) or [eleanorcreed-miles@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:eleanorcreed-miles@tiscali.co.uk)

## **Spring 2012 Working with Adolescents and Young People.**

Lead editor Bruce Kinsey

Copy deadline 26<sup>th</sup> February

As therapists working with young people there are often remarkable dynamics of energy, change and challenge; these can so often be lost in the encounter in supervision. If you supervise those who work with young people, students and adolescents what have you noticed that is different, distinct or special about this work? How do you handle the 'if this was my child I would want her to be told' which is hard enough as a therapist, but you feel the supervisor is being too indulgent or too tough? How do we pass the Goldilocks test of it neither being too hot or too cold but just right? If you have experience in supervising in this area and would be willing to write an article please contact Bruce Kinsey [brk1@cam.ac.uk](mailto:brk1@cam.ac.uk)

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## Articles for 'Supervision Review' General Guidance

Summer 2011 **Supervising Retirement and other endings**

Lead Editor Anne Power

Copy deadline April 30<sup>th</sup>  
(negotiable)

Autumn 2011 **Sexuality in Supervision**

Lead Editors Chris Driver & Eleanor Creed-Miles

Copy deadline Oct 17<sup>th</sup>

Spring 2012 **Working with Adolescents and Young People.**

Lead Editor Bruce Kinsey

Copy deadline Feb 26<sup>th</sup>

**Theme:** Articles need to address the theme from the perspective of psycho-dynamic / psychoanalytic / analytical psychology and focus upon supervision (vignettes may be from the perspective of supervisor or supervisee).

**Copy Deadline:** This allows time for editing / checking queries prior to the committee meeting and 'Supervision Review' going to print. NB. If you would like feedback on a late draft please let the lead editor know beforehand and agree an earlier deadline to allow sufficient time for this process.

**Article length:** Articles are usually 2,000 words (approx), although where appropriate and by negotiation we can offer flexibility with this wordage up to 3,000 (approx). 'Nuggets' i.e. more informal / shorter pieces are also welcome.

**Format:** For articles please include the following:-

- **Title of article and name of author**
- **Abstract** – a one paragraph summary
- **Six key words** - The key words are for use by the internet search engines for the e-journal
- **Main text**
- **Bibliography**
- **Biography** - a few sentences of personal biography.

**E-Journal:** Please note that any published article will also be included in the e-journal on the BAPPS web site.

**Copyright:** If you wish to include / use any of your material previously published in a book / journal please ensure that you liaise with your publisher to obtain permission.

**Lead Editor:** This rotates between Chris Driver, Annie Power, Lynda Norton and Bruce Kinsey. The role of the lead editor is to provide support and constructive feedback during the process of writing & submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have an idea for an article and would like to sound someone out or if you have any other queries.

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