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CPE, Supervision and Me

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Abstract:
This paper addresses questions of discernment about the decision to commit to further units of CPE with the possibility of becoming a supervisor. Internal and external exploration is used in a holistic 'head and heart' approach. The values and history of the CPE movement are considered, along with priorities of supervision in dealing with multi-cultural and gender related issues. Supervisory styles and the response of supervisees are described. Inspiration is drawn from the vision of two founders, Anton Boisen and Helen Flanders Dunbar. The significance of theological reflection in fostering a theology of experience is considered within the context of a call to exploring, communicating and sharing meaning. Reservations about the focus on goals, objectives and skills are mentioned in the light of a transformative, creative and Spirit-led emphasis

The Question of Call

'I will instruct you and direct you in the way that you should go:
I will fasten my eye upon you and give you counsel.'
Be not like horse or mule, that have no understanding:
whose forward course must be curbed with bit and bridle. Psalm 32:9,10

This inner urge, this outer nudge called "call"
is hard to quantify or demonstrate,
and having once said "yes", that's far from all.
At times I do resist or remonstrate,
pressed out and cut like pasta on a board,
or wound around with tangled skeins of thread
supposed to mark the way to this heart's hoard
within the labyrinth of paths my feet might tread.
"Just call, I'll follow," I naively said,
but he sets out on ways obscure and dark,
and sometimes I am blundering with dread,
not trusting in my craft to find its mark.
Is there some goal that coincides with his,
skills or objectives guiding me through this?

I have been asked to consider whether I am called to supervision within CPE. The question for me is whether further commitment to CPE with a view to mutual discernment about my potential as a supervisor will inspire and support the central core of my calling, and also enable me to be present in a supportive and inspirational capacity for others in ministry. I would define the central core of my calling as exploring, communicating and sharing in meaning, which in the latter part of my life has come to be Christocentric in focus. From childhood, I have performed and written with a sense of responding to a calling. As performer and poet, I give voice to something beyond me, sharing a connection that mutually enlarges my sight and hopefully that of others: in that, there is a prophetic dimension. Late in life, that vocation has come to be channelled into ministry, as hospital chaplain and now Anglican parish priest. I no longer feel whole in my vocation unless I lead worship, celebrate the Eucharist, preach and relate to people pastorally. I also need to write and perform and share with others at depth if I am to keep my inspiration and energies alive. The experience of ordination training and ministry has also convinced me of the need for companioning and mutual discernment on the way, if we are to survive, heal and grow as ministers. For my ongoing commitment to CPE to be viable, in the midst of the demands on me as parish priest and my need to be creative, I look for transformative energy and mutuality in my involvement, a sharing and enlivening of meaning and purpose. I also need to receive and give a holistic perspective that engages both heart and head. I need to decide whether the values of the organization are consistent with my core values, if I am to offer something authentic to others.

External and internal dimensions of discernment

I approach this discernment about transformative energy, mutuality, holistic perspectives and values in CPE from two directions, external and internal, head and heart. That double focus seems to me particularly appropriate to the processes and history of CPE, with its balancing and interweaving of elements (Hall, 1992). The external focus and head-based thinking in this essay are directed into analysing themes in a few key primary and secondary sources on CPE in order to discern the vision and roots, the guiding values, and philosophical and theological foundations of the movement. The internal, heart related focus has begun with a delineation of my central calling and queries as to how

involvement with CPE and supervision might relate to the outworking of my particular vocation, but it also involves awareness of my values, aspirations and feelings.

Analysis and Synthesis: the polarities, the gestalt, and the interpretive lens

Before beginning an apparent separation of head and heart elements in order to examine them at depth, it's important to indicate that they are in fact interwoven and inter-reacting, and awareness of the whole is as important as analysis of elements. Any apparently objective approach is based on subjective choices and perceptions of the experimenter or analyst, either conscious or unconscious, and the paradigm of understanding of the time, culture and social group. In this case, I make no apology that the lens through which I look, and the preoccupations on which I choose material, are skewed by my need to discern how my calling might be followed with authenticity. I am looking for what is consistent or inconsistent with my values and theology, with my understanding of my gifts and overall purpose and the direction in which I see that unfolding. For me, meaningful life and ministry involve the cooperation of head and heart in ways that are centred on Christ's example, shaped by individual creative transformation and shared with others in enlivening relationship.

Themes and Values in the History of CPE: separation and integration

I choose to start my external exploration with the head and heart interaction in the history of CPE as described by Hall (1992). Hall's book records how head or heart tended to predominate in different influential figures and in different branches of early CPE groups in the United States. Hall describes the split that emerged between the New England based group, later to become the Institute of Pastoral Care, whose approach was psychologically conservative and empirical, and the New York based group, the Council for Clinical Training whose leadership had a view of the human person based on depth psychology, and a holistic, symbolic understanding of how religious and psychological factors interacted. As these two strands of CPE later moved towards unity, the process required respect and cooperation of head and heart related practices and values. Hall (1992, p. 117) writes:

> With one group stressing the conceptual approach and one group stressing the experiential approach, the CPE movement discovered that the head and heart are both of primary importance in pastoral care.

Part Three of Hall's book entitled "Emerging Consensus" (1992, pp. 115-152) is devoted to the give and take required for this reintegration of the two seminal groups along with Lutheran and Baptist groups into the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education.

Later this process of integration was enriched as the organization strengthened its professional standards and expanded the diversity of its membership. The head element was prominent as standards and accreditation were made uniform and as the movement gained wide acceptance in seminaries (both Catholic and Protestant) and theological schools. The heart element was strengthened as more women and people of African American and other ethnic backgrounds joined and as the movement became even more ecumenical and international. I strongly value unity which respects the richness of different views and backgrounds, and inclusiveness which consciously fosters the respect and support of diversity. These themes seem crucial to the development of CPE, and an important responsibility of supervision. Hall (1992, p. 183) summarizes a supervisory goal that emerged with the increased integration of women into CPE:

> For women and men in ministry, learning to appreciate the pastoral competence of each other, the ways in which each complements the other, and the ways in which both men and women can make use of what have been called feminine and masculine principles, is a goal that has been partially achieved in ACPE.

Hall (1992, p. 178) describes how supervisors Richard Donnenworth, Goergann Hilbert, and Barbara Sheehan in a CPE program in Cincinnati, Ohio 'developed a training model "for the purpose of consciousness raising, evaluating, and influencing the attitude and dynamics involved in gender identity".' There were three sessions, the first imagining being of the opposite gender, the second encouraging 'theological reflection on gender related stereotyping', and the third examining 'Professional Collegiality and Sexuality.' (Hall 1992, p. 178) I am encouraged by this creative supervisory approach to transformation of attitudes and increase of empathy across gender lines. To be able to facilitate such transformation and empathy seems to me a worthy aspiration of supervision, of particular importance to me as a woman in ministry, aware of other women who still experience discrimination in this field.

Hall (1992) also describes a task force to form a network of racial/ethnic minorities in CPE, his experience as ACPE executive director in attending a task force meeting, and the trust shown which enabled him to gain insight into Black culture. Hall (1992, p. 187) writes: 'It seemed to me that they were free to live from the inside out. Their experiences in the Black Church and in CPE were heartfelt.' He concludes (Hall, 1992, p. 187): 'In a unique way, this group had an integration of feeling and experience with concepts and organizational strategy.' I value such integration, and it seems to me that CPE at its best encourages this, and good supervisors promote it, to the betterment of the ministry and the maturity of group members.

Head and Heart in CPE in Different Cultures

International developments in CPE show intriguing interactions of head and heart in different cultures, but often cultural stereotypes show themselves to be only partially applicable. Hall's recording of the words of others is often illuminating, like key responses in a verbatim. For instance, the chaplain of the Royal Edinburgh hospital, Murray Leishman gives this wise and humorous discernment about what's going on in a group of Scottish representatives meeting with the American expert, (Leishman, cited in Hall 1992, p. 197):

> "This man from the United States, where we think CPE is focused on the experiential and the emotional, sounds like an intellectual. We, who are seen in the United States as intellectual in our approach, sound like experts in the experiential and the emotional aspects of education. Perhaps we are trying to impress each other."

Hall (1992, p. 197) comments: 'He was exactly on target, of course, and his interpretation helped focus our discussion.' This is an example of the kind of facilitating and gently challenging discernment that is possible in the trusting and aware atmosphere of a well supervised CPE group.

Cultural stereotypes, like gender stereotypes, need to be questioned, and yet sometimes supervision that opens up the complementary style of approach to the dominant cultural norm is liberating for those who experience it. Hall (1992, p. 200) gives the following example:

> Although in each of the Dutch CPE programs there was a high degree of intellectual learning, the most meaningful aspect for most of the students was the opportunity to get in touch with their own feelings and to learn how their own feelings affected their pastoral relationships. One priest said, "I discovered that I would stay in my castle, saying the door is open, if you want to come in, I am here. But I discovered that when people came in, I wasn't there, that is, I was only there physically but in no other way. This awareness of when I am offering myself and when I am not is very important."

So in addition to a cultural bias towards intellectual learning, Dutch CPE programs encouraged the complementary dimension of transformative awareness that comes from the heart. By so doing, students became more present for those to whom they related pastorally.

Supervisory Styles and Student Responses

In the process of such meaningful integration, Hall (1992, p. 199) describes three different supervisory styles and the student responses to those styles in different groups. A non-directive style was judged as sometimes helpful, sometimes not; a challenging style could help students to come out of themselves and express themselves, but was sometimes overwhelming; whereas a style that was affirmative and encouraging of expression seemed to have no negative impact. Although these three supervisory styles reported by Hall were from Dutch groups, I have observed or have been told about similar approaches and similar reactions in the local context. I have heard angry and rejecting responses to overwhelmingly challenging styles, to the extent that I went into CPE first with some fears of that possibility. I have had one painful personal experience of a challenge which arose as much from woundedness in the (non-CPE) supervisor's story as from my own situation. I have had very positive experiences of styles which affirm identity and encourage expression. If I were to supervise others, I would aspire to the latter.

Boisen and Dunbar – the Insights of Two Early Leaders of CPE

My values are consistent with the heart side of CPE, and the holistic psychological, spiritual, philosophical and theological approach of two early leaders of the CPE movement, Anton Theophilus Boisen and Helen Flanders Dunbar. Just as after Vatican II, Catholic monastics were encouraged to revisit the charism of their founders, I would like to explore some of the key concerns that inspired Boisen and Dunbar.

Boisen's story and his struggle with mental illness were tied into his vision of what became CPE. In particular, he saw a transformative process and religious purpose in his recurring episodes of what was diagnosed as schizophrenia, but may have been bipolar affective disorder. (North and Clements, 1981). It was as he reflected on the meaning of the first such episode that Boisen 'found a new purpose in life and formed a new understanding of mental illness.' (Asquith, 1992, p. 6). Boisen wrote in a letter on February 14, 1921:

> 'I feel that many forms of insanity are religious rather than medical problems and that they cannot be successfully treated until they are so recognized. The problem seems to me of great importance not only because of the large number who are now suffering from mental ailments but also because of its religious and psychological and philosophical aspects. (Boisen, 1921 cited in Asquith, 1992, p. 6)

It was out of this conviction that Boisen's emphasis on the first-hand study of human experience arose (Asquith, 1992). In 1925, as chaplain at Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, he recruited four students into a program of clinical training which he supervised. He described the vision behind this program:

> We hope that we may have awakened in the student an interest in the personal experience of individuals and that we may have acquainted him with methods of observation and generalization which will lead him on into life-long devotion to patient, accurate, reverent exploration in all its range of that inner world with which religion is concerned. We hope that it may lead to a new insight into the issues of life and death, which may be at stake in the lives of even the apparently commonplace, which will pervade and determine the minister's religious message and give to it increasingly the authority of truth and power to inspire confidence. And we hope that he may gain constantly in that insight and wisdom which shall make him for the man in distress a safe counsellor and guide. (Boisen, 1930, in Asquith, 1992, p. 30-31)

Boisen's vision for the fruits of CPE was large, including a desire to understand the meaning and purpose of mental illness in personal and religious development:

> the laws and forces therein involved which shall reinterpret and revitalize the enduring elements in the religion of their fathers and lead onward toward the realization of the new and better types of personality and the new and better social order.' (Boisen, 1930, in Asquith, 1992, p. 31)

So Boisen's vision for CPE was committed to transformation in a bold and hopeful way.

Boisen saw amongst patients in the mental health hospital religious experiences which tended to be discounted, but which in fact paralleled the experiences of the great figures of the faith. He saw hope for human beings in the making of faith connections during experiences of crisis and suffering. Boisen's articles on "Inspiration in the Light of Psychopathology" (Boisen, 1960, in Asquith, 1992, pp. 113-122) and "Ideas of Prophetic Mission" (Boisen, 1961, in Asquith, 1992, pp. 123-128) are thought provoking, particularly in the context of my experiences of call and of creative inspiration. Boisen (1960, in Asquith, 1992, p. 121) writes:

> In the case of the artist, and especially of the scientist, the new insight will pertain to something which can be more or less readily verified by others and fitted into the structure of organized and tested experience. In the case of the mystic the new insight is likely to be intimately personal and have to do with his own role in life. It is therefore not so readily subject to verification and it involves tremendous affective reactions.

Boisen notes the irony of the suspicion towards special calls that Dr. Carl Christiansen, a psychiatric consultant to a Methodist seminary expressed, seeing them as signs of weak egos and mental illness. Boisen comments:

> Some of us can remember the time when dramatic conversion experiences and special calls to the ministry were highly esteemed among our Methodist brethren. This view is of special interest to me as one who must plead guilty to just such a call. (Boisen, 1961, in Asquith, 1992, p. 123).

Later, he indicates how he would respond to a candidate to ministry who laid claim to a special call. All the points he makes are wise, but one in particular I think describes a valuable and transformative attitude to supervision: 'I would consider his potentialities rather than his past record, his tomorrows rather than his yesterdays, what he is striving to become rather than what he now is.' (Boisen, 1961, in Asquith, 1992, p. 128)

Amongst the first four students that Boisen recruited for the first Clinical Pastoral Education group was a woman called Helen Flanders Dunbar (Hall, 1992). She spent a month in that 1925 program doing research, returned to CPE in 1927, and then became one of the influential leaders of the New York group for more than a decade. Something of the wide ranging brilliance of this woman is suggested by her academic pursuits in the year 1927. In addition to her CPE involvement, with the assistance of two secretaries she completed a doctoral dissertation in philosophy in April 1927, graduated magna cum laude from the theological school in May and completed her first year of medical school the following month.

> Even before her formal training in psychiatry, she travelled in Europe to conduct research on religion as the unifying power in personal life and its relationship to healing and development. (Hall, 1992, p. 16)

Such a focus has strong appeal to me, along with Dunbar's belief in 'the interconnectedness and interrelationship of body, mind and spirit.' (Hall, 1992, p. 17)

> Dunbar's emphasis on the interrelatedness of intellect and emotions, as well as her holistic approach to understanding the meaning of life, helped shape the Clinical Pastoral Education Movement. She also influenced the focus on methods of pastoral care. Her basic approach was to set the patient's mind at ease through techniques available to the clergyperson, and to help the patient get into condition to think for himself or herself. A recurring theme throughout Dunbar's writings is that few patients need to be given advice about what to do once they are emotionally free to think about their problems. Over and over she stated that her goal was to free the patient emotionally, to render him emotionally free to think and act. (Hall, 1992, pp. 17,18)

Such an approach seems very consistent with what shapes my commitment to CPE and to pastoral care, but as a poet I am also intrigued by the place Dunbar gave symbolism as 'the bond between theologians and psychiatrists' (Hall, 1992, p. 17). Apart from the resonances I feel with her ideas, I find myself as a woman inspired by the leadership role this woman played in the CPE movement in the 1920's and 30's. As an Anglican priest, I am intensely aware that woman were not accepted as priests here in Australia until the 1990's and some denominations still do not accept women as ordained clergy, and yet here was this amazingly talented woman in leadership in CPE at its very inception, shaping and integrating its head and heart aspects.

A Theology of Experience and The Transformative Potential of CPE

One of the shaping principles of CPE is the fostering of a theology of experience. For me, theological reflection in combination with insightful observation of what Boisen calls 'the living human document' (Asquith, 1992, p. 1) is crucial to the development of authentic and wise ministry. Boisen was looking towards a theological education with a 'new authority, grounded not in tradition but in experience.' (Boisen, 1926, in Asquith, 1992, p. 23). Although he came from a heavily academic background, Boisen seems a bit dismissive of book learning, wanting to shift attention from 'books to the raw material of life'. (Boisen, 1926 in Asquith, 1992, p. 23) However, in my experience, academic learning can be transformative too, if it is brought into connection with our personal quest for faith and meaning. That is the sort of connection I am seeking in this essay. Keeping that connection alive, searching and honest is one of the greatest gifts that CPE offers. It seems unfortunate that often the theological reflection component of a verbatim ends up being minimal, something of an afterthought, with a quick search for some related scripture reference. Regina Coll S.J. (1992, p. 93) has an insightful paragraph about the purpose of supervision and the place of theological reflection in achieving that purpose:

> Supervision that aims only at producing more efficient ministers or more successful ministry is relatively easy. It demands some effort and may succeed in its aims. But it does not help to develop the kind of ministers the Church and the world so desperately need. Supervision which takes theological reflection seriously (but not soberly) is about opening both participants to change, it is about deepening the questions, not about finding the answers. It involves listening to the wisdom of the saints and sinners in our past and to the wisdom of the saints and sinners in our present. Listening, not just for the purpose of hearing but in order that we may return, like the Samaritan woman at the well to the ministry renewed, transformed even. Pastoral action is a constitutive part of theological reflection. This is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge but knowledge for transformation of the self and of the world. Theological reflection, like pastoral theology, is concerned with humanity's partnership with God in renewing the face of the earth.

I want to foster ways of seeing and knowing that can truly be called wisdom. Let me reflect on some of the different ways of seeing and knowing in poetry, often for me one of the most fruitful forms of theological and spiritual reflection:

Some knowing seems a game of goals and rules
where black and white contend to win or lose,
while some is dry as wood chips on the garden,
where shredded splinters of what once was living
are heaped in hopes of minimizing weeds.
If left exposed, the barrier breaks down,
and splintery edges soften, soak up rain
until surprising seeds can germinate.

Some seeds require a knowing like a fire
that spreads from lightning in a scourging wind
to sear the undergrowth and stampede life.
Then when the moisture falls from clouds and tears
up spring rare species dormant there for years,
attracting birds and creatures that had fled.

Some knowing creeps from shadowed hiding place,
aware of change that moderates the threat
that made it wary of remembered pain.
Where sharing, not competing, brings most gain,
an ecosystem grows diverse and strong,
secure in give and take of gift and need,
the mutual interaction of a group
where wholeness and the whole are nurtured well.

What kind of knowing grows within such groups
where pain is shared and purpose clarified,
where others' sight can sense what makes us whole,
and spark a vision that unfolds to call,
where blind spots are exposed to scrutiny,
gentle yet probing so our eyes can heal
and open on a world more bold and round
more challenging than any path we dreamed,
and yet a place that we can see is home.

Responding to the Spirit's leading and some reservations on present practice

My involvement with CPE and my experience of positive supervision there has been crucial to the positive evolving of my own story, the story of a poet and performer becoming a priest. It is the transformative potential in CPE which I would seek to foster if I were involved in supervision. This potential is often not a matter of what we think we should learn and do, but of a response to the serendipity of the Spirit's leading. As the Quakers say, "Way opens," rather than we make way. I have some reservations about the achievement oriented focus of skills, objectives and goals. This seems to me to foster the management approach to ministry which is too much based on human effort and priorities, and not sufficiently open to the unexpected flow of the Spirit, and to the intuitive responses of discernment and wisdom, which are more a product of grace than of goals. Just as we put our own agendas aside in order to be present to the other in a pastoral relationship, so we need to be open and responsive in our relationship to the Spirit, and that is far more risky than setting our own agenda. Coll (1992, p. 92) says:

> The supervisor and supervisee are not alone in the process. They recognize that the Spirit is always present and waiting for an invitation to join the conversation. And that may be the precise reason we are hesitant about the process. We know what listening to the Spirit has gotten other people into.

Pursuing self-chosen skills, objectives and goals became a valued approach to adult education, and it may be life-giving if the student concerned is engaged at the level of being and becoming. However, all too often in my theological education the pursuit of skills, objectives and goals became an artificial exercise in which we had to be seen to be jumping through hoops, even if we were allowed to choose the hoops. By contrast to focusing our efforts on goals, objectives and skills, and judging our success at achieving them, I would like to encourage others, as I have been encouraged, to aspire and envision, to allow insights to emerge from relating to others and connecting with meaning, and to recognize and develop gifts and potential.

Personal Conclusions

I am continuing CPE after two basic units ten years apart. Both those experiences of CPE were transformative for me, the first one leading me into a sense of calling to the Anglican priesthood, the second aiding my recovery from near-burnout, and re-affirming my calling as priest, poet, and performer. Both encounters with CPE have fostered what I regard as the heart of this calling, the sharing and communicating of meaning from a Christocentric and imaginative perspective. The opportunity and encouragement CPE provides to listen with awareness and discernment, to write perceptively and to reflect theologically are life-giving to me. The supervision I have been offered in CPE has been affirming and illuminating, a gift at crucial times in my development. I would like to give to others such a gift.

Given my experience and the insights others have helped me to discern, I believe I have something to contribute to the growth of life and ministry for others. However, my priorities are more prophetic than managerial, more concerned with transforming than conforming. Like Boisen, my creativity, my struggle and my preoccupations do not sit entirely comfortably with political processes or institutional maintenance. I walk hand in hand with many dimensions of CPE as it has been envisioned over the years, but question the present emphasis on achievement of goals, objectives and skills. Although I come from a liberal theological background, I don't share Boisen's humanistic understanding of God, as 'the symbol of that which is supreme in the individual and social system of loyalties' (Boisen 1941, in Asquith, 1992 p. 51). God for me is the mystery beyond us who breaks into our lives to transform and heal. Inspiration and revelation are works of the Spirit, therefore theology and the arts walk hand in hand. Like Dunbar, I think depth psychology with a strong symbolic component sits very close to religion, and the two can interact in synergy. Insight has more weight with me than empirical evidence, vision and imagination more to be valued than statistics. However, I do believe fervently that relating sensitively to others, observing that interaction, reflecting theologically, and sharing discernment in a group and in an individual supervisory relationship are vital to any authentic and respectful ministry, and a potential catalyst to the continuing unfolding of my vocation. I see my involvement with CPE as a support and catalyst to my calling and identity, and I believe I can offer a supportive and catalytic presence to others, in whatever capacity emerges.

Summary
In my calling as priest, poet and performer, the exploring, sharing and communicating of meaning is central. In order to discern how commitment to CPE fits with that calling I have shown the parallels between the values that have shaped CPE and my own values, particularly a holistic head and heart approach, a sensitivity to cultural and gender related issues, the affirmation of identity, the encouragement of expression and the facilitation of transformation. I have found inspiration in the vision of two pioneers of the movement Anton Boisen and Helen Flanders Dunbar. I have indicated some emphases that I have reservations about, particularly the management related focus on goals, objectives and skills, and I have endorsed a transformational and Spirit-led approach which I would hope to foster if I was involved in supervision.

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