

Head and Heart: Renewing Spirituality for Ministry Preparation

Herbert Anderson

Summary

Several questions need to be asked as we continue to explore the connection between spirituality and preparation for and the practice of ministry. Is spirituality communal as well as individual? What metaphors most adequately connote the core of an individual before God? How has the emergence of spirituality as an organizing framework reshaped the work of supervision?

When Robert Fuller reviewed the first 19 volumes of *The Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* (the predecessor to *Reflective Practice*), he concluded that clinical approaches to ministry preparation over the previous two decades had advanced a profound reorientation in American religious life. Here is what he wrote in 2000:

Clinical and counseling approaches to ministry over the past few decades have advanced a profound reorientation in American religious life. They have helped to stimulate an active spirituality while simultaneously distancing themselves from those inherited religious ideas and practices that no longer seem to quicken the lives of contemporary Americans. **Those entrusted with supervising this process have tended to see their role as concerned with the spiritual formation of their students not by cultivating traditional piety but by teaching them to attend inductively to the immediate experience of God's spirit in the midst of their activities (emphasis mine).**¹

According to Fuller, the distinctive contribution of the clinical pastoral education (CPE) process has included an appreciation for the 'laws of spiritual life'—whatever 'quicken the life of the person.' Also, Fuller proposed that spirituality 'from the bottom up' is the special contribution of the clinical approach to ministry, providing a new vocabulary for spiritual interests and concerns that speak to many persons who have permanently lost interest in more authoritarian models of religion.² By following whatever

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is 'quickened' within the individual, the spirituality that is evoked will be unique, incomparable, and unavoidably personal.

Although it may be a bit grandiose to claim responsibility for nurturing what has been called "the spirituality revolution" in the United States, the emphasis on experiential religion in clinical pastoral supervision was certainly liberating for men and women who came from restrictive or dogmatic Christian denominations. It also challenged those whose approach to faith was more cerebral to pay attention to affect, experience, and heart matters. CPE did that for me, but not without a struggle. Charles E. Hall titled his history of the CPE movement *Head and Heart* reflecting the persistent emphasis in pastoral supervision on emotions and lived religion as a corrective to a more traditional emphasis on knowledge of doctrine or heady theology.³ Theological seminaries have continued that integration by developing comprehensive programs in spiritual formation. Women and men preparing today to be religious leaders for tomorrow arrive for clinical or ministerial formation with less head knowledge of their religious traditions, fewer dogmatic restrictions, and lots of heart and passion for justice. The integration of head and heart is still essential, but the starting place is different.

The theme for this volume of *Reflective Practice* is a continuation of this longstanding effort to connect head and heart, theory and practice, theology and spirituality for the sake of more effective ministry. It draws its immediate impetus in part from the growing popularity of spirituality in the United States and the shift to spiritual care as a standard term for the modern expression of the ancient practice of *cura animarum* (soul friend) or *seelsorge* (soul care). The need for a more inclusive term than pastoral care to describe the work of chaplains in the interreligious context in a modern hospital is understandable. In 2001, I wrote in *The Journal of Pastoral Care* that "this change in the adjective modifying care should at least stimulate widespread conversation within the pastoral care movement about the 'theological' anthropology that undergirds ministries of care."⁴ Since then, spiritual has been used to modify other practices of ministry like 'spiritual evangelism' or 'spiritual administration.' What spiritual means in those contexts varies. In an essay that will appear in Volume 34 of *Reflective Practice*, John Kater suggests that "spirituality is not a category of ministerial activity, something to be isolated and examined like any other component of ministry, but rather an underlying dimension of all ministry, reflecting the relationship with God, with oneself, with others and with the creation in and through which ministry takes place." Because spirituality is both a commonly used and a richly diverse

dimension or membrane throughout ministry, it is difficult to mount a collection of essays that does justice to the evolving meanings of spirituality. We hope the readers of this journal will be enriched by the articles around the theme in this volume of *Reflective Practice*.

SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS

In American society, spirituality has become the dominant metaphor for thinking about ultimate concerns and transcending values broadly understood. Spirituality is about making meaning. Spirituality is understood as 'energy that brings meaning to what we do,' 'our capacity for self-transcendence,' 'the lived experience of faith,' or "becoming a person in the fullest sense." When a conversation turns toward religious matters, it is common for someone to simply say 'I'm spiritual but not religious.' The meaning of that phrase will vary but it generally intends to contrast participation in institutional religion that is regarded as constricting with a spiritual disposition that is personal and expanding.

The emergence of popular spirituality can be understood as a continuation of the privatization of religion that began with the Enlightenment. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King have chronicled this evolution from the *privatization and individualization of religion*, through the *psychologization of religion* in the earliest twentieth century advanced particularly by Abraham Maslow, to the present moment of the *commodification of religion* under the rubric of spirituality.⁵ By insisting on separating from the negative connotations of religion in a modern secular context, Carrette and King argue that people who are 'spiritual but not religious' have created a universe of personal meaning for living with the alienation, anxiety, and emptiness of a consumer-driven society. The value of this view is that it locates the emergence of popular spirituality in relation to other social movements in the last century.

In an article examining the implications of this cultural shift for the study of psychology of religion, Kenneth Pargament suggests that the evolving shift away from religion may be understood as another effort at revitalization in response to the conviction that something is missing in modern religious practice. Pietistic movements in the history of the Christian church, for example, were strongly spiritual and sought to correct prevailing church practices. Moreover, Pargament observes that the movement toward spirituality also can be seen as an aspect of a larger secular cultural trend toward deinstitutionalization and the promotion of privatization and individualization. In Western culture, "the scope of the sacred has shrunken as alternate expla-

nations of the universe have taken hold...The loss of faith in other institutions [beyond religion] only exacerbates this trend."⁶ It is ironic, Pargament notes, that spirituality promotes an appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things, while paradoxically running the risk of disconnecting people from their significant worlds. The double meaning in this essay's title is intended to address the reality that spirituality *renews*, but may also need to *be renewed*.

English author Kenneth Leach anticipated this move toward 'spiritual but not religious' in 1977 in his book, *Soul Friend*. He identified three themes that characterized spiritual questing in the West at that time: 1) disenchantment or lack of interest in established religion; 2) a desire for transcendence or deeper ways of experiencing reality; 3) a concern for justice and human fulfillment coupled with disillusionment in political solutions.⁷ Since then, religions of the world have provided ample reasons to reject institutionalized belief and practice. The desire for 'something more' remains, but the locus of transcendence has shifted toward the interior human realm. The 'wholly other' in traditional Christian theology is now often identified as the 'divine within' to be discovered by exploring personal depths. Meeting God in the depth of the soul does not diminish the importance of thinking critically about spiritual content in religious practice or religious content in spiritual practice. Because there is always a public face to privately held convictions, we will need to explore how different, and sometimes competing, concepts of spirituality interact in pluralistic public discourse.

The readership of this journal makes this discussion of spirituality complex. The focus of *Reflective Practice* is primarily about forming and supervising religious leaders for ministry in a variety of contexts. Because most people in ministry work either within, or on behalf of, particular religious institutions, the variant of 'spiritual **and** religious' remains primary. However, hospital chaplaincy, as it has evolved in recent decades, is less connected to institutional religion and more often an extension of the care provided by hospitals and other caretaking institutions, such as retirement homes or hospice. In those settings, spiritual care provides an inclusive framework for responding respectfully to the needs of people from diverse, or no, faith perspectives. Critical reflection on private, personal, or individualized belief that has become the norm for much of today's religious expression and spiritual practice needs to begin with humility, respect, wonder, and with a willingness to be surprised.

SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING SPIRITUALITY

As you read the articles that follow in this volume of *Reflective Practice*, you are invited to have some of the following questions in mind to deepen critical reflection on the implications of spirituality for supervision and formation in and for increasingly diverse patterns of religious/spiritual leadership in contexts yet unknown. These questions are shaped by my experiences in seminary education as a Lutheran practical theologian who is probably more religious than spiritual. There are three:

1. Is spirituality communal as well as individual? Put another way, how does the particularity of spirituality lead us through a deeper awareness of our interiority to community with others?
2. What metaphors most adequately connote the core of an individual before God? Does our spirituality help us acknowledge our spirituality and recognize the reality of finitude and death in the human one?
3. How does spirituality inform the work of formation and supervision?

Is spirituality communal as well as individual?

When fragmentation, alienation, and disconnection dominate the human landscape as they do, it is not surprising that the language of spirit has become a vehicle for expressing the human longing for connectedness and community. However, because the emphasis on spirituality tends in this culture to replicate individualism, metaphors of spirit or spirituality often promise more unity and community than they are able to deliver. There is no doubt about a longing for connectedness among modern people, but it is uncertain whether we know how to achieve community or whether we are able to modify our private, personalized living enough to effect a communal way of being in the world. For many people, deep interior exploration is the path to community and the common good. For others, however, the individual focus of spirituality risks being subsumed under American 'individualism.' The practice of spiritual care that is not rooted in communities of belief and practice may unwittingly reinforce any available vision of privatism. In their evocative paper on "Mapping a Field: Why and How to Study Spirituality," Courtney Bender and Omar McRoberts make this declaration that is worthy of consideration:

To put it bluntly, the study of 'spirituality' and its various settings, from psychology to hospital therapy...is less one of religious organizations conceptualizing spirituality in the process of extending their authority into secular settings than one of secular settings drawing from and cultivating spiritual language for their own purposes.⁸

The starting place matters. In his book *Will and Spirit*, Gerald May suggested that spirit has “a quality of connecting us with each other, with the world around us, and with the mysterious Source of all.”⁹ Similarly, Kenneth Leach insisted long ago that a spirituality that is transformative must be centered in a hope that cannot “be escapist or individualistic, for it is a hope for human society and for the common life.”¹⁰ Similarly, traditional Christian spirituality insisted on locating individual spirituality within a wider relational context of church or world. The relational character of being human, previously concluded through experience only, is now being confirmed by brain studies that show human beings are hardwired to connect. The split combination of ‘good’ spirituality with ‘bad’ religion may unintentionally increase the chasm that separates private, personal spiritual beliefs **and** public religious beliefs and practices that presume a commitment to the common good.

What metaphors most adequately connote the core of an individual before God?

There is general agreement that the human being is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual unity: there is less agreement regarding the metaphor that most clearly captures that unity in its wholeness. Infused with psychological insights and definitions, self, person, and psyche have been useful metaphors for the work of pastoral care. In a collection of essays on theological anthropology entitled *The Treasure of Earthen Vessels*, the authors explored several options in search of an adequate metaphor to capture the relation between soul, the human spirit, and the Divine Spirit. In a chapter entitled “The Recovery of Soul,” I proposed that because soul is from the earth and from God, it is the most effective metaphor for thinking paradoxically about being human.¹¹ Although all I recognize that metaphors are limited and carry ancient meanings, I still believe that soul, more than spirit, deepens the human experience of being a unique and whole creature, simultaneously at one with God and with all creation.

Thomas Moore begins his book on *Care of the Soul* by arguing that it takes a comprehensive vision “to know that a piece of the sky and a chunk of the earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being and if we are going to care for the soul, we will have to know the sky and the earth as well as human behavior.”¹² The human soul is filled with the stuff of human life in all its messiness and at the same time the soul longs for God. Care of soul is constantly bridging these two realities; the human story of struggle and joy and the mystery that is God. Because the human being is a unity, in Hebrew scripture references to soul, liver, kidney, or spirit may refer to whole individual. Souls yearn and flesh cries out. The literal translation of Proverbs

23:16, for example, is that “my kidneys will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.” This same paradoxical unity of the human soul is at the center of Ernest Becker’s determined effort in *The Denial of Death* to link living and dying.¹³ Human beings are not defined by their ‘creatureliness,’ but it is one dimension of being human. The emphasis in spirituality on ‘higher’ volitional and affective dimensions of being human may unwittingly overlook the creaturely connection and, with it, the key paradox of our being finite souls. It might be said that the human soul is sustained by being both spiritual **and** religious.

How has the emergence of spirituality as an organizing framework reshaped the work of supervision?

This question has two foci. The first is about developing new patterns for the work of supervision itself. How is the supervisory relationship enriched by new awareness of the spiritual depths of caregiving? What new communication patterns need to emerge in order that a supervisor and supervisee might speak together usefully and meaningfully from differing perspectives and spiritualities? What postmodern collaborative style of engagement will bridge between the worlds of distinguishable generations in order for supervision and formation to be effective? A simple variation of the three questions devised by Kluckholm and Murray may provide a way for connecting individuals with unique spiritualities: a) all human beings are spiritual; b) each individual’s spirituality is like some other’s spirituality; and c) everyone’s spirituality is like no other spirituality. The least conflicted way is to look for common spiritualities and shared values that will provide the framework for common conversation. A more difficult and, perhaps, necessary way to proceed in the present context—and one that is diverse in every possible way—is to learn how to honor the spirituality of another **and** to articulate one’s own spirituality in an equally respectful way. In order for that to be possible, I believe that we need to foster a **new spirituality for future religious leaders**. That is the second dimension of this question. What would a new spirituality for religious leaders look like? Although these questions are shaped by my own Christian perspective, I believe they have relevance for forming religious leaders in other traditions.

Within some religious traditions, the spirituality of believers may be quite specific and prescribed; for others, it may be personal and unique to each individual. For people who are ‘spiritual but not religious,’ the content of spirituality will be as unique as fingerprints. But for religious professionals of any persuasion, there may be an articulated or unspoken vision for leaders

in order: a) to help individuals discern for themselves a calling to religious leadership; and, b) to provide a signpost for evaluation in formation and supervision. Each Christian denomination, for example, asks specific questions during the ordination of their candidates for ministry that reflect the beliefs and values of their tradition of ministerial leadership. When a faith community interviews a prospective leader, they want to know about the individual's character, as well as what she or he believes and is able to do. They want to know whether their future leaders are *durable souls for demanding times*. I offer the following eight questions, not as the last word, but as one way of identifying a **spirituality for religious leadership** for this particular time:

1. **How much can I take in?** There are a number of ways to ask this question that make it particularly relevant for our time. How can I hear of the different and sometimes conflicting voices of the world? How much of the world's pain can I hear? Can I wait in the darkness until it is clear? How many of the differences between women and men can I take in? What is required for ministry in a pluralistic context is a receptivity to wonder and the ability to hold simultaneously knowing and not-knowing. This question introduces the *receptive mode of knowing*. "Receptivity or sensibility," Urban Holmes once wrote, "is the ability to devour the whole experience, with all its contradictions, and to make a new whole meaning without leaving anything out."¹³ Ministry in a receptive mode fosters wisdom and hospitality is the manifestation, or the public act, of this capacity to receive.
2. **How much can I give away without expecting return?** This question touches on many ministry issues. While reciprocity in the practice of ministry still occurs and new patterns of collaboration can be restorative, declining membership and diminishing resources means that more and more must be done by fewer and fewer people with reduced resources. Generosity and tireless self-giving, without needing anything coming back, is a necessary characteristic for ministry today. Whatever his or her spirituality, the minister needs to have a durable, differentiated self. This is a crucial issue for formation and supervision, because it needs to be determined whether a potential religious leader's soul is too undifferentiated to lead, too wounded to heal, or too impoverished to be generous. We have our life as a gift—it is not ours to keep, possess, or hold on to. The rhythm of life is receiving and expending. At the center of my understanding of Christian spirituality is the conviction that the only way to keep the self is to give it away. Ironically, living in a time when there is less coming back to ministers is a gift for discipleship. There is no temptation to enter ministry for the wrong reasons. Generosity is an essential spiritual requirement for modern ministry.
3. **How much humility can I endure?** Humility is a mark of a minister who aims to be a partner and neighbor with people of other persuasions. True humility is more like self-forgetfulness than self-modesty. In Volume 32 of *Reflective*

Practice, Lisa Fullam wrote a compelling essay on *humility and magnanimity* that connects humility with generosity. Humility depends on contextualized self-understanding cultivated through the practice of other-centeredness. "It is humility, with its characteristic act of looking outside ourselves that invites us to recognize, value, and seek to acquire virtues that we might otherwise ignore."¹⁵ It is that same spirit of humility that invites us to acknowledge and receive the gifts that others have to give. Two essays that follow in this Volume consider pilgrimage as one of those experiences that takes us out our safe habitats in order to learn new languages and have endeavors that will challenge us to see people and places and religious practices in a new way. Without humility, we are not likely to welcome new possibilities. Ministry in an increasingly secular time when all the props that gave prestige and power to a privileged few are gone requires substantial ego strength, lest humility lead to surplus powerlessness, diminished self-esteem, and intolerable vulnerability. Humility should never be confused with mediocrity.

4. **What can I imagine?** The reinvigoration of imagination is a necessary dimension for ministry when the old patterns no longer work. We need to anticipate and embrace new forms of human flourishing for the sake of our common future. Imagination is often linked to prudence to insure that the action is fitting to a situation. In that sense, imagination is a present, as well as a future, reality. The ability to make connections between people and their passions or to envision new combinations from old realities generates hope. In order to imagine something new in life or in ministry, we need to suspend disbelief and set aside fear and practice courage. It takes imagination to help someone retell their narrative in new and more constructive ways. As a Christian, I believe that the courage to be surprised is a prelude to imagination and an appreciation of the unpredictable presence of the Holy Spirit. Imagination is necessary for the future of religious leadership in order to envision the interconnectedness of faith communities in ways not previously known. We need to nurture this kind of seeing so we can see more—and so we can dream dreams beyond what we see—and so we can be open to the creative and mysterious work of God in the world.
5. **How much ambiguity can I embrace?** I mean by ambiguity the ability to understand in more than one way. In one sense, this may be the most crucial aspect of a *spirituality for religious leadership* in this time of radical change and diminishing absolutes. Because of the complexity that comes with an increasingly pluralistic society, because honoring difference makes life less simple, and because greater awareness of the difference of any 'other,' we need women and men in positions of leadership with a high tolerance for ambiguity. People who tolerate ambiguity are more likely to respect difference, celebrate diversity, live questions that have no simple answers, and be willing to discover that most truth in life and faith is paradoxical. When a thing is ambiguous, there is more than one interpretation or explanation.

Ambiguity is rooted in the social character of all reality. Humankind exists always and only in a relational web. There is a world that I fashion or construct, but there is also a world that you create with which I must contend and over which I have no control. As a result, ambiguity is not just about uncertainty—it is about the inevitability of ‘two-ness’ in human life, and the consequent possibility of alternative meanings. Absolute certitude in matters of spirituality and morality is dangerous business. It not only makes for loudness; it makes for brutality. Anybody who equates his or her own program or vision of truth with the reality of God can be brutally shrill toward opponents. For ministry in this time and into an uncertain future, we will need to nurture men and women who can hold two things to be true, who are psychologically able to live with paradox and ever-increasing complexity, and who can stand firmly yet flexibly enough in their own traditions to appreciate ambiguity.

- 6. Do I have courage enough to be as one and to be as-a part?** We have learned from Edwin Friedman’s *Generation to Generation* how important a differentiated self is for effective religious leadership. Differentiation means remaining an “I” in the midst of “we.” Friedman rightly insists that self-definition is more critical than expertise for pastoral work.¹⁶ Genuine courage to be one’s self is a necessary virtue for the soul of ministry because of the multiplicity of demands, or competing expectations, of the modern congregation. At the same time, one might argue that being a connected leader is as important as being differentiated. How connections or bonds are established and maintained between leader and religious community will make it possible to do the work of ministry separately and together. Leaders are differentiated lovers.¹⁷

This connection between being ‘as one’ and ‘as part’ becomes critically important when formation and supervision are translated onto a global stage. The egocentric world view that dominates in the West is eclipsed by a sociocentric view in most of the cultures of the world in which ‘we-ness’ and a communal sense of self sustain the common good. When human development and spiritual formation occurs in a sociocentric context, the challenge is to have the courage to remain a distinct self in the midst of powerful shaping communities. Soul is communal and soul is particular. It is a single one and it is always a part of something more. Keeping the paradox of communal autonomy alive is both more difficult and more necessary for future religious leaders.

- 7. How much awareness of vulnerability can we endure?** The question is about awareness of, not the fact of, vulnerability. Part of being human is to be vulnerable. By that I mean simply that we are susceptible to being wounded. We are of course never more vulnerable than at birth. Eventually we learn some self-protective skills but we never outgrow vulnerability. The danger is that in developing those self-protective devices or defensive maneuvers,

we isolate ourselves from the world. One of the reasons for exhaustion and demoralization, or even misconduct in the practice of pastoral ministry, is the inability to acknowledge vulnerability and find appropriate respite from it. Ordinary human vulnerability is intensified by living in societies that are becoming more diverse and more porous at the same time.

The kind of compassion that makes for good ministers also makes them susceptible to being wounded. Therefore, the goal cannot be ‘invulnerability.’ Rather we need to live with the awareness of our vulnerability without being overwhelmed by it. It is part of the soul of ministry. The minister’s soul is regularly endangered by temptations of power and pretense. We are tempted to pretense whenever we fear exposure or when we regard the ordinary posture of faith as resting-in-neediness as too dependent. Being a soul is living with nakedness before God. For that reason, the enemy of soul is deception. As people of faith, we are free to live without pretense because we believe that the human soul is ultimately hidden in God whose graciousness touches everything with mercy—even the minister’s soul.

- 8. How hospitable can I be?** Everything I have said so far about the *soul of ministry* and the complexity of human life before God—about the virtues of *soul* that invite us to embrace vulnerability and ambiguity, taste humility, and imagine what is possible—find their expression in the practice of hospitality. Hospitality is about welcoming the stranger as someone with gifts to give. When we offer hospitality to the stranger, we welcome someone new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our lives, who has the potential to expand or disrupt our world and deepen or disrupt our faith. Hospitality is about breaking down barriers that separate us. In a word, hospitality is receptivity writ large. As our communities and families become more diverse, hospitality is more than a religious ideal—it is a human necessity and essential for survival in a pluralistic world.

When hospitality is deep and wide enough, it dismantles our tendencies to reduce the other to a commodity to be used and dispensed with. There is also a reversal of visions and roles. What we thought was private becomes public and the guest is the host. The stranger-guest is not only welcomed, but moves to the center as the host is relegated to the margins. Understood that way, hospitality then becomes an experience of crossing boundaries for the sake of more inclusive bonds and communities of faith. In the essays that follow, there are several proposals for new ways of doing supervision that resemble hospitality. When this kind of hospitality is practiced, when we welcome the stranger into our communities of formation and supervision, we give up control for the sake of a common space in which gifts are freely exchanged. We discover the *durable soul for ministry* when we set aside our needs, allow ourselves to be empty for service and love toward others, and make room enough for the gifts of others. Such a posture of hospitality is close to what authenticity looks like in ministry.

CONCLUSION

In the Editorial to Volume 18 of *The Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* published in 1997, I suggested four principles regarding the relationship between spirituality and supervision from my own Christian perspective. I reproduce these principles at the conclusion of this essay as a way of lifting some important issues that remain for consideration.¹⁸

1. *Spirituality and theology are distinct but connected.* "Theology provides us with critical tools for reflecting on the experience of God in daily life and spirituality, living in the presence of God, provides theology with its soul. Each needs the other but they are not the same."
2. *Spirituality is an ecclesial reality.* "Supervision for the practice of ministry is essential in order to prepare women and men for ministry who are able to foster the kinds of communities that will, in turn, enable unique spiritualities to grow."
3. *Spirituality and justice are reciprocally related.* "Because our spirituality is always embodied in creation and culture, there is reciprocity between how we live on the earth and how we live toward God." Spirituality is not limited to the domain of the human.
4. *Spirituality is an unattainable goal.* "The work of ministry is like a song not scored for breathing."

Although these principles were written more than 15 years ago and from a decidedly Christian faith perspective, I believe the underlying themes are still timely and universal. Spiritual practices need critical reflection to endure. Even religious leaders whose primary work is caring for individuals are sustained by and accountable to communities of meaning and purpose. Being spiritual is not an end in itself, but a way of being empowered to serve the world and creation. The title of this essay is the last word: renewing spirituality is both a necessary process and an unattainable goal.

NOTES

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