

Creativity as Prophetic Wellspring*

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Summary

This essay uses the biblical story of Elisha and Elijah to explore the deep belief that creativity is the prophetic wellspring of both a person's spirituality and the pastoral art. Being a pastoral supervisor is a prophetic gift in the sense that it allows people to see what has not been explicable.

One constant feature of my clinical pastoral supervision has been a commitment to elicit the creative tendencies of interns as a way of integrating their ministry with their theology. This focus has arisen for me from the deep belief that creativity is the wellspring of both a person's spirituality and pastoral art. Creativity also informs my approach to pastoral supervision through which prophetic expertise is evoked in students preparing for ministry. I grew up in an evangelical milieu in which a person gifted with prophecy was believed to be a mouthpiece of God similar to Hebrew prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. Not unlike biblical prophets who spoke with authority as if summoned by God, the prophets of my childhood religious experience had received an "unction" they believed to be divinely inspired.

I still think this understanding has validity, though I take it less literally now and believe the prophetic impulse is found in many people and places. For example, the voices of Boenhoffer and Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi could be considered prophetic. Sacred sites can also be said to have a prophetic presence—a sense of authoritative inspiration. I believe the arts,

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in their many forms, can arise from a prophetic or inspired impulse and in turn inspire others. In clinical pastoral education (CPE) and supervision, I believe the traditions and truths passed from supervisors to students can be as authoritatively life giving and divinely inspired—however broadly or narrowly that inspiration is understood.

Passing on prophetic expertise to students through clinical pastoral supervision is not unlike the process of handing over the prophetic mantle from Elijah to Elisha that is described in I and II Kings in the Hebrew scriptures. This story, like most ancient history, is an amalgam of history and legend. Elijah was a wonder-working prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel who defended the worship of Yahweh over that of the Phoenician god Baal, who was worshipped by his nemesis King Ahab and wife Jezebel (ninth century BCE). On Elijah's final day of (earthly) life, Elisha was granted a wish as part of the succession. Elisha desired "a double portion" of Elijah's spirit, which was granted on the condition that Elisha was present as Elijah was taken up (in a fiery chariot) by Yahweh. Part of Elijah's role, and his successor's, was to preside over and teach in the "college of the prophets" which existed on the margins of that society as a moral and spiritual check and balance.

This story seems to function as an allegory concerning the passing on of prophetic expertise from senior prophet, to developing disciple, to students. In the discussion that follows, I will suggest that this allegory is also transferable to contemporary understandings of clinical pastoral training regarding its aim of passing on both pastoral and supervisory expertise—which many believe contains a prophetic component. Moreover, the prophetic image fits that of many clinical pastoral supervisors, who see themselves as fringe dwellers, at odds with their respective church hierarchies.

EARLY PERSONAL PROPHETIC INFLUENCES

During my childhood, my mother often used the phrase "school of the prophets" in reference to the gift of prophecy and the passing on of prophetic expertise. She and others—including my younger self—regularly exercised this gift in our small evangelical sect founded by my maternal grandfather. We understood prophecy to be a literal channeling of the voice of God, and often used the term "unction" to mean that we felt moved to speak as the mouthpiece of the invisible God. The sect grew out of the Apostolic Church in Australia, which in turn had its roots in the Welsh Revival. Our

group, like countless others, contained some genuine insight, mingled with a defensive, and limiting, fundamentalism. I can now acknowledge that a large part of my maturation has come about through wrestling with its precepts and parables. In particular, I regard its emphasis on spiritual gifts as a necessary experiential process that is perennially valid.

I have recently become aware that my attraction to the prophetic image also began with my mother. She would often refer to the *school of the prophets*, a relatively accurate paraphrase of the *college of the prophets* that occurs just in 2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22. Both passages recount the same story. During the reign of relatively righteous King Josiah, a copy of the lost Law of Moses is found in the temple during the collection of taxes. The reading of this causes King Josiah to rend his garments and command that a prophet of Yahweh be consulted to reveal Israel's true fallen status. Oddly, the only prophet to be found is a woman, Huldah, a descendent by marriage of the keeper of the king's wardrobe. Both references describe Huldah dwelling in the "college," and the latter makes plain she was consulted as a prominent member of that college. Huldah seems a perfect role model for counter-culture religion, because her status seems to depend on her innate ability and training alone, subverting social and gender biases.

The Association for Supervised Pastoral Education in Australia (ASPEA) Standards description of supervisory training as an "apprenticeship" suggests to me that clinical pastoral supervision, in both pastoral and supervisory training, is implicitly a *school of the prophets*. This metaphor for ministry lurked in my subconscious for many years until it was highlighted at a recent conference of supervisors. In the words of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, images or metaphors which are "especially valuable" to us are "highlighted" as the brain generates an "emotional state that accompanies the image in a parallel track."¹ Yes. In the following section I will explore the story of Elijah and Elisha and suggest parallels for the contemporary practice of pastoral supervision.

ELIJAH AND ELISHA AND THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

He said to them, 'What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these words?' They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist. 'And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite. —2 Kings 1:7–8, NRSV

Called to anoint a new king, and his own prophetic successor (1 Kings 19:16), Elijah finds Elisha ploughing with a yoke of oxen, and throws his mantle

over Elisha's shoulders, symbolically passing on Elijah's prophetic ministry and commissioning Elisha simultaneously (1 Kings 19:19-21). It was an unusual candidate interview, but Elisha was chosen and became a disciple of Elijah and 'entered supervision' as part of the *school of prophets*. The story of Elijah and Elisha may be understood as an allegorical expression of the way supervision works and how spiritual and pastoral wisdom is handed over from one generation to the next in prophetic CPE. I intend to illustrate that the original allegory, probably concerning the passing on of prophetic expertise, may apply to CPE supervision, both in pastoral and supervisory training, and that utilising its "prophetic" framework could be valuable for reaffirming the spiritually focused nature of these roles.

1. *The sons of the prophets* repeatedly advise Elisha that his master Elijah will be taken away that day by God. Elisha answers peevishly, *Yes I know; be silent!* as if trying to discern the famous "still small voice" his master heard earlier at Horeb (2 Kings 2:5).

Supervisory application: Elisha begins to discern his supervisory identity amidst the clamour of group process. Especially nearing the end of CPE training units, we have to undergo the sometimes painful experience of severing from educator/mentors like Elijah who have led us through a life changing process in order to hear our own voice within.

2. "Then Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan. But Elisha said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on together" (2 Kings 2:6). Elisha seems to have heard his own voice, for he defies Elijah's advice not to follow him to the Jordan.

Supervisory application: Elisha develops self-agency in supervision training. Of necessity we must develop some assertiveness in naming and claiming our own educational needs and supervisory style in training units.

3. When they reached the Jordan River bank, Elijah rolls up his mantle and with it "wrapped together" strikes the surface and the waters divide as they did for Moses and Joshua and they crossed over on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8).

Supervisory application: The wrapped or "condensed experience" of senior supervisor Elijah demonstrated theory transformed into action. Senior, educating supervisors model transforming supervisory practice. Later, Elisha successfully practices what he had learned from observing Elijah in action.

4. Elijah and Elisha, master and apprentice, walk through the river. On the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you" (2 Kings 2:9).

Supervisory application: The increased collegiality between Elijah and Elisha makes it possible for Elijah to explore what he might give Elisha before they

part. In supervision, with increased awareness of a student's growing maturity, there is an awareness that each needs to rediscover the source of his faith. As educating supervisor and supervisee, we need to journey back into our own stories to gain understanding of our spiritual wellsprings, so that our training and ministry does not become stagnant, but nourishes effectively.

5. In response to Elijah's query 'what may I do for you before I am taken from you?' Elisha asks to be given "a double share of your spirit" (2 Kings 2: 9).

Supervisory application: Student intern/resident Elisha's need to assert his identity may be essential for developing his own circle of authority, but it can seem like naked ambition. Elijah accepted it as valid, but only if Elisha stayed with him and recognised the source of his spirit, as Yahweh takes him up, inducts him. Sometimes what appears to be overconfident hubris can later be revealed as visionary/prophetic recognition of future CPE or ministry requirements.

6. Moments later Elisha cries "Father, father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen" as Elijah is taken up by Yahweh in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11).

Supervisory application: Elisha's cry is ambiguous; is it the cry of grief at the loss of his mentor or the recognition of source of true spiritual authority. Many of us have similar experience as our supervisory relationships conclude even though we may be taken away by chariots. It is grief coupled with the recognition as we reflect on the process; sometimes the elements of the journey—supervisor, group, developing identity—can be fused in our memory as a vehicle or self-object, a nourishing source from which we can continue to draw.

7. After Elijah is 'taken up', Elisha rends his own clothes in two and permanently adopts Elijah's mantle, crying out "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" He strikes the water with the mantle, and the waters of the Jordan part as they did for Elijah.

Supervisory application: Elisha must stand as a supervisor in his own right, and humbly acknowledges that he can't do it in his own strength but requires the same source his supervisor operated from. Whatever our spiritual source we need to find the equivalent within ourselves to experience the emergence of supervisory/prophetic identity.

I hope these reflections on the Elijah/Elisha story invite your own creativity in thinking about how the contemporary supervisory process works in pastoral supervision.

In the next section I explore a curious event in the story when Elisha heals the stagnant and bitter 'spring of the waters' for the sons of the prophets. This allegory is at the heart of my paper and directly concerns my theme: *creativity as prophetic wellspring*. I believe that a CPE student's spirituality is often inextricably threaded with their creativity, though this is often as not

unrecognised by them. I will provide a case study and reflection on my own art practice to reinforce this proposal.

THE SOURCE OF PASTORAL IDENTITY

The situation of this city is pleasant...but the water is bitter and the ground barren.
—2 Kings 2:19

When Elisha crosses back into the Promised Land and is greeted by fifty sons of the prophets who have watched the whole transference of powers and now bow to Elisha as their new prophetic supervisor, the story connects even more explicitly to my own supervisory practice. Members of the *school of prophets* recognise Elisha's authority, but they still hanker after their previous supervisor and offer to search for the body of Elijah; "please let them [us] go and seek your master (Elijah); it may be that the spirit of the Lord has caught him up and thrown him down on some mountain or into some valley" (2 Kings 2:16). It is a common temptation to look for them when religious certainties leave us. Eventually this is revealed as a cloak for their dissatisfaction. Although the Promised Land of their fathers is supposed to be green and pleasant, it is in fact barren because the trickle of water is bitter (2 Kings 2:19). In their search for the body of their previous mentoring prophet, the sons exhibit little faith and perhaps burnt-out scepticism. Perhaps the text is suggesting that these immature interns still classify experience in terms of mountains and valleys; unlike Elisha they haven't experienced God in the levelling wilderness. Elisha now sees through it enough to realise that it is useless to reason and so wisely allows them to go and find the answers in their own experience.

Inheriting the Promised Land from parents and tradition, these 'sons' haven't found *the power and warmth of it* (to quote a Jewish/Buddhist intern in my first supervisory unit). Elisha tells them to bring him a new vessel and some salt. These intern prophets have to become new vessels; their religious preconceptions and ways of thinking have caused their 'waters' to dry up and become stagnant. Elisha, reframing their experience, requests *their* salt, the salt each brings to the table individually, to cleanse the living waters. Elisha then takes the vessel and salt to *the spring of the waters*, the very source. He has been to the wilderness, he has journeyed back into his own story, in his prophetic training, and so knows how to stay in touch with his source of vitality, to keep the water he offers fresh and alive. He casts their salt in and the polluted spring becomes sweet, suitable for drinking, and so the Promised Land is potentially fertile again.

In the next section I propose some ways in which this prophetic allegory is transferable to contemporary experience of clinical pastoral supervision. People sometimes find that their spiritual resources are inadequate for hospital ministry, even that their wellsprings are stagnant, bitter, and unrefreshing, or even actually harmful to patients. As supervisors, part of our role is to reveal ways to replenish our student's wellsprings or to divine where their actual wellsprings may be located. It is my conviction that our pastoral and supervisory wellsprings are located near our creative sources. I will explore this in light of the educational history and methodology of CPE.

CLINICAL PROPHETIC EDUCATION

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. —Mark 9:49-50

The metaphor of the “growing edge,” commonly used in CPE, was coined by Anton Boisen's collaborator Richard Cabot. This is a biological metaphor, concerning the growth of human tissue, which has a “jagged and irregular growing edge that is the only place from which tissue can advance or grow.”² Cabot advised supervisors to “go to the student's growing edge” to determine their ministerial deficits, and to encourage their ministerial ability.³ As historian Charles Hall points out, these growing edges often have to do with “the student's interests, curiosities and experiences.”⁴ My own experience (both as student and supervisor in clinical pastoral supervision) affirms that these “interests, curiosities and experiences” usually have to do with creativity, and are often considered by students to be inferior, “jagged and irregular,” compared to the pristine tenets of their theological traditions. These growing edges therefore require recognition and nurturing by supervisors.

William DeLong describes four stages of working with these growing edges: 1) Interpretation, 2) Scanning, 3) Propositional Construal, and 4) Reflection. Together these form the launch pad for a fifth stage he calls *imaginative insight*.⁵ DeLong asserts that the first four stages, which comprise the unsettling dimension of CPE, are crucial because when ministry students “begin to encounter the depths of pain and suffering” they may find they are out of their depth and begin a process of reflection on their “own meaning perspective.”⁶ This reflective process may then lead to *imaginative insight*, which DeLong explains as a “sudden and “usually unexpected new way

of looking at the situation," perhaps even a "consolidation of several previously unrelated propositional construals."⁷

In describing a similar process, Allison Whitby suggests the phrase "trusting the process," commonly heard in CPE units, may cause unsettling anxiety to recede enough to allow "a spirit of curiosity and excitement at what may be uncovered."⁸ This uncovering can happen, she suggests, as students "open themselves to engagement with wisdom and theological reflection on their experiences." If this uncovering does not occur, Whitby warns, the student may "reach their learning ceiling" and their ministry will be a "shallow or shadow version of pastoral care." But if it does occur, then a creative pastoral identity may begin to form, as students learn to express, in Austin Guiles words, their "own religious art."⁹

Charles Hall's "interests, curiosities and experiences," DeLong's "imaginative insight," Whitby's "spirit of curiosity and excitement" and Guile's dynamic "religious art" are all of a piece. Arguably, each is closely aligned with the prophetic impulse or impetus. I would also argue that the prophetic impulse or impetus is closely aligned with creativity—we all make things or ideas—because both seek to make explicable the workings of the spirit in our world. Both illuminate the present in ways which may provide insight into our future, and understanding of the past. The ability to do so can make us and our communities "the salt of the earth," which is congruent, I believe, with the way Jesus uses the phrase. If this prophetic/creative ability—our 'salt'—is missing, then our ministry of pastoral care or supervision can dry up, become 'shallow' and stagnant. Hence the need for a new "school of the prophets" like in old Israel, so that each neophyte prophet, via good supervision, has his or her prophetic gifts refined and learns how to stay in touch with their authoritative and creative centre. Jesus, too, selected neophyte prophets to learn their discipline from him, although his school was more like a moveable feast.

SUPERVISION AND ART

When I am not working as a chaplain or pastoral supervisor, I am an artist. For me, painting is a way to access those deep wellsprings that sustain my work. During the time I was completing my supervisory training, I completed a painting that on the surface seemed to be a simple picture of a bird-bath—but on further reflection it pointed me back to the story of Elisha and the bitter waters. The bird bath was a symbol of the source of living waters. If this spring is bitter then faith becomes lifeless and the waters need heal-

ing. The means to heal the spring are a person's salt, their inherent creativity that gives flavour to all their pastoral care. So the water of life that flows through them (from whatever tradition/spring they belong) will be "living" and life giving. In pastoral supervision, I seek for the intern's creative tendencies.

The story of Mark illustrates the importance of creativity in pastoral practice and how it helps with my supervision. During our time of supervision together, I discovered what he referred to as his "sort of" poems. This discovery of creativity in Mark's experience became the means to approach and nurture his growing edge, to 'salt' the spring of his ministry. Mark believed he was called to prophetic ministry, but his actual ministry in parish and hospital was shallow and his understanding of scripture and God's dynamic presence sometimes stagnant. I often felt bored in individual supervision, trudging through Mark's clichés.

A sincere and likeable man, who had experienced a late life epiphany and 'conversion' to evangelical Christianity and consequent formation for parish ministry, Mark was hamstrung in hospital ministry by his constricted theological identity. His initially cautious admission in individual supervision to writing these "poem-plays" (thus described later by a peer) and later admission to the group of a lost dream of performing (acting), led to his emergence from masks of ministerial competence (evangelical prophet persona) into some integration and growth in authenticity in ministry. My serious regard of these poems and recognition of Mark's gift as God-given was akin to casting his salt in the waters and purifying his ministry. The effect of this strategy is ongoing, but as a mileage marker, a poem Mark wrote for the final evaluation of his first unit (my fourth as acting pastoral supervisor) is in my view convincing evidence. This poem was titled *The Six Travellers* (referring to each intern in the group) and the middle three line stanza is autobiographical:

*The last traveller was M,
An enigma who fronted as a clown
to mask his long lost sorrow.*

This stanza is the shortest in the poem and describes Mark's growth unto authenticity in the course of the unit. Mark's movement in his ministerial capability is also implied in the rest of the poem: it does not resort to religious clichés—indeed the poem is devoid of explicit religious terminology—but steadfastly views each group peer as an individual with unique empathic

gifts. His recognition of other's abilities and deliberate avoidance of labels that either relegate or include (in his words "Christian-ese") reveals a significant theological and emotional advance. He describes the two supervisors as sages who, with *encouragement and exhortation, combined with a little devil's advocacy*, kept the six travellers on track and, significantly, away from the *lure of complacency*. Mark's evangelical prophet persona had masked an enigma with a real and more valuable prophetic gift, inextricably linked with his creative tendencies.

CONCLUSION

Glen Asquith has suggested that this transformational process, as with Mark's movement, is the "genius of Clinical Pastoral Education" and may be "the reason why Boisen placed secondary importance on skill and practice and primary importance on identity, knowledge, and understanding."¹⁰ However, as supervisor Yuko Uesugi observes, in order to "stimulate self awareness," especially regarding "internal conflicts," and from thence encourage the emergence of this knowledge, understanding, and identity, she needs to exercise the "art part" of her own facilities.¹¹ I resonate with this. Moreover, I realise that as a supervisor I need to maintain my own creativity in order to effectively recognise saltiness in others and encourage its spring-purifying potential. Writing this essay is part of that and part of developing my supervisory talent. In the process of preparing these review materials I discovered my supervisory work is in fact closely aligned with my pastoral/art program, where I seek to "mobilise a creative self" in participants.¹² I believe this is a prophetic gift in the sense that it allows people to see what has not been hidden or explicable. It heartens me to claim this and in so doing reclaim my past: the evangelical group and Bible I was so passionately involved with my passion for painting—to the detriment of anything sensible—and realise it all consecrated me to be a clinical pastoral supervisor. I feel at home in the company of prophets and sons and daughters of prophets from whatever spiritual tradition they arise.

NOTES

1. Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 174–175.
2. Charles E. Hall, *Head and Heart: The Story of the Clinical Education Movement* (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications 1992), 7.

3. Richard C. Cabot and Russell Dicks, *The Art of Ministering to the Sick* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 15.
4. Hall, *Head and Heart*, 7.
5. William R. DeLong, ed., "A Theological Anthropology for Transformational Education," in *Courageous Conversations: The Teaching and Learning of Pastoral Supervision* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), 53.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Allison Whitby, *Dove, Owl and Eagle: Three Metaphors for a Wisdom Model of Pastoral Supervision in Clinical Pastoral Supervision* (unpublished MA Pastoral Supervision thesis, Sydney College of Divinity, 2009). Whitby is the director of CPE centres at Austin Health and Heidelberg Repatriation Hospitals in Melbourne.
9. Austin Phillip Guiles, "Our Objectives in Psychology and Clinical Training," *Andover Newton Bulletin* (February 1954): 10. See also Charles E. Hall, *Head and Heart: The Story of the Clinical Education Movement* (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1992), 27.
10. Glenn H. Asquith, "Encountering Living Human Documents: Boisen and Clinical Pastoral Education," in *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader*, Glenn H. Asquith, Jr., ed. (Decatur, GA: Journal of Pastoral Care publications 1992), 231.
11. Yuko Uesugi, "Supervision in Clinical Pastoral Education," in *The Soul of Supervision: Integrating Practice and Theory*, Margaret Benefiel and Geraldine Holton, eds. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2010), 84.
12. Dean Kilian and Gertie Pretorius, "Art as an Expression of a Disordered and Healing Self," *Inscape: International Journal of Art Therapy* 14, no. 2 (2009): 50. Art therapists Kilian and Pretorius suggest "mobilising a creative self" (as one of the most important elements of Kohut's 'healthy narcissism') can stabilise and restore identity and, thus, congruence. One way to mobilise this creative self the authors suggest, is to respect the art practice as equal to selfobject in the triangular relationship along with the idealised or twinned therapist: "Art starts to take on the form of a selfobject for patients and...both the art and the therapist become selfobjects within the room. The implication of this is that the patient is given an experience to work with multiple selfobjects in the room and, therefore, with multiple experiences of symbolisation, internalization, and relationships that exist within a complex matrix."