

SECTION 2

AROUND THE THEME: SITUATIONS OF DIFFERENCE CHALLENGING FORMATION AND SUPERVISION



If we begin with the assumption that every human encounter is a cross-cultural meeting, then diversity is more than race or ethnicity or gender or religious belief and difference is very particular. Each Other we meet is the occasion for wonder and surprise. And the willingness to be surprised becomes a prelude to honoring each unique person in his or her own unique situation with his or her own specific history. The question that faces us with new urgency is quite simple: *How shall we regard the Other?* It is a question that claims us with some urgency, because human difference is no longer hidden by geographic distance or behind cultural and religious imperialism or unknown cultures.

In order to regard the Other with wonder, we need to suspend judgment. Wonder presumes being in uncertainties without being irritated or needing to establish fact and reason. Receptivity toward the Other demands the capacity to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity and live with not knowing. Wonder also limits arrogance. Excessive arrogance discourages us from approaching both cultures and individuals from a perspective of equal worth. The challenge of the time is to regard diversity as a mystery to be experienced in wonder as well as a problem to be solved with reason.

For many people past 60, those who are counted among Millennials are often a source of mystery—and one way of dealing with mystery is to create a generalized category. Millennials have been described as “an army of worker ants, a subculture with a distinct identity, banding together in Occupy Wall Street-inspired groups and, lately, creating their own blogs, YouTube channels, networking groups and even a magazine that captures life inside the so-called Intern Nation.”¹ This same generation is also “engaging in more open and public discussions about mortality and loss.”² The Internet has made grief more public, and at the same time more casual, as the millennial generation seeks to redefine mourning. These two stories from *The New York Times* in the spring of 2014 illustrate how easy it is to categorize a generation and in the process disregard the uniqueness of each 20-something.

We are grateful that the two essays in this section avoid simplifying the generation regarded as Millennials or making over-generalized assumptions

about the unique perspectives they bring to formation and supervision in ministry. Ball and Legagneur are ACPE supervisors in the Atlanta area, who look beyond age to race and social class to understand the distinctiveness of each student. They write at the end of their engaging essay: "To get beneath the temptation towards stereotyping, we connected with the principles of an intercultural approach by engaging the particulars of each student's story in context, encouraging the expression of differences in perspective, and keeping communication and participation open by affirming the value of each person's perspective and story" (p. 91). Transformative supervision, they believe, arises from a sustained empathic inquiry and connection with a student. Fox, Lindstrom, and Croom write from the perspective field/contextual education about the same generation with some of the same cautions. Using the concrete stories of students in the millennial generation, they encourage us to pay attention to generational differences lest we overlook opportunities to enhance educational practice and interpersonal relationships. We each have our own generational gifts and shadows. The question for formation and supervision is this: How do they intersect with those of other generations? In response to those two essays, Anders Peterson has written a delightful and insightful response as a Millennial.

There are two essays in this section that examine the opportunities and challenges of formation and supervision conducted in Hong Kong by John Kator and Rod Seeger respectively. Kator writes about a class in ministerial formation he has taught in the Episcopal Seminary in Hong Kong for some years. What made this class distinctive was Kater's determination to contextualize this class in order to pay greater attention to differences across generations and among several theological perspectives in the class even though they were all Anglican.

Paying particular attention to the high-energy context of Hong Kong on the practice of ministry challenged the class to consider the risks of prophetic ministry to a culture that had also shaped them. The report by Rodney Seeger on supervising a CPE group he did not select in a cultural setting not his own is rich with the challenges of diversity. The difference that created the most tension in the group was not cultural but religious. Although all five students in the group were Christian, their beliefs were both diverse and firmly held. These differences interfered more than anything else in the program. Seeger found that by "letting go of the outcome" of learning, he was able to be present and supportive in enabling the students to learn what they could.

Marilyn Hope is a retired CPE supervisor from Australia who writes about supervising a group of Chabad and Orthodox Rabbis. Her reflection illustrates that respect for difference goes a long way toward creating a safe environment for learning. Rabbi Klipper's response to the report by Hope is a gentle challenge to expand the limits of theological reflection by using Edward Foley's reflective believing as a way to honor difference.

NOTES

1. Alex Williams, "For Interns, All Work and No Payoff: Millennials Feel Trapped in a Cycle of Internships with Little Pay and No Job Offers," *The New York Times* (February 14, 2014), accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/fashion/millennials-internships.html>.
2. Hannah Seligson, "An Online Generation Redefines Mourning," *The New York Times* (March 21, 2014), accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/fashion/an-online-generation-redefines-mourning.html>.

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