

**William R. DeLong, ed., *Courageous Conversations: The Teaching and Learning of Pastoral Supervision* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010), 306 pp.**

Purchase this book if you wish to keep abreast of the current practice and future directions of pastoral supervision. Throughout the sixteen chapters, continual attention is given to an effort to relate the “why” of theory to the “what” of clinical practice. While an attempt is made to relate to the disciplines of field education, spiritual direction, and clinical pastoral education, of the fourteen authors (including the editor, DeLong), I believe twelve are Association for Clinical Pastoral Education supervisors, one is listed as faculty in pastoral care and counseling, and one is a diplomat in American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC).

DeLong underscores the timeliness of this book by declaring, “Today there are a myriad of books about pastoral care and counseling and there are numerous books which approach supervision from the perspective of training psychotherapists. There are an equally large number of books on adult education and group process. Yet, there are few books that speak to the specialized practice and profession of pastoral supervision, which I partly see as the integration of each of these areas. This book is an attempt to “fill that gap” (p. xii). The challenge in assembling a work of this nature (with fourteen authors in sixteen chapters) consists of how to balance diversity with unity of theme while avoiding repetition. Overall, I believe the authors accomplished their goal, and the finished product might be described as something of a rich buffet on pastoral supervision.

While it is not possible to speak to all sixteen chapters, a few samplings will give a sense of the nurturing fare in store for the reader. Mark Hart begins with a fascinating analogy for pastoral supervision, derived from his carpenter father, which consisted of four key lessons: (1) “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right” or passion for the work, (2) “We’ll figure out a way to make it work” or improvisation in the face of impasse, (3) “That’s okay, just get another board” or grace in the face of failure, and (4) “You can do that” or confidence in the learner (p. 2). In the third chapter, Carrie Doehring provides a helpful delineation of pastoral supervision from a field education perspective.

In chapter five (“Teología de conjunto: Not Just for Latinas/os Anymore,” p. 58ff), Francis Rivers Meza, gives a marvelous little exposition on relating liberation theology to pastoral supervision. I especially appreciated her quote from María Pilar Aquino, “The theological significance of daily life as source and locus of U.S. Latino/a theology is grounded in the fact that it is here where the real life of real people unfolds and where God’s revelation occurs. We have no other place but *lo cotidiano* [the everyday] to welcome the living Word of God or to respond to it in faith” (p. 60). The words reminded me of the moment of grace CPE students experience when they are relieved of the burden of feeling they must bring God to the patient, as they discover that it is in the interaction with the patient that God is revealed to both of them.

M. C. Ward, in chapter eight, "Power and the Supervisory Relationship" (p. 97ff) gave me the best resource I have found to date to assign to supervisory education students (SEs) as required reading. The issue of "power" invariably emerges for every supervisory trainee. Ward's writing is clear and to the point, as she produces effective clinical examples of relating theory to clinical practice. Upon completing this article, I associated its "freshness" with the possibility of her being the most recently certified supervisor of all the ACPE supervisor authors. It would be interesting to know.

In terms of "Looking Toward the Future of Pastoral Supervision," I would refer you to the chapter (p. 119 ff) written by Teresa Snorton. What better source than the executive director of ACPE? She identifies three necessary concepts for maintaining the relevancy of pastoral supervision in "tomorrow's world: transformational/adult learning as a central educational theory, cultural bridging as a central component of personality theory, and liberation as a central theological construct within the supervisory alliance" (p. 122).

The perennial topic of the role of sexuality in supervision, which has undergone so many permutations since the founding of CPE in the 1920s is given a nice contemporary update by Gordon Hilsman. His excellent clinical examples truly enrich his exposition of the contemporary scene in supervision.

Judith Ragsdale addresses the history of pastoral supervision in her chapter (p. 225ff), "CPE Supervision: Part and Present." While she demonstrates a good use of sources, written and oral, I was surprised her bibliography did not include Allison Stokes' sterling *Ministry After Freud*.

Hopefully, these vignettes will provide a flavor of the many engaging resources to be found in *Courageous Conversations*. Several of the authors provided extensive and helpful bibliographies for further reading. The one prevailing theme for me that wove through many of the chapters had to do with the concept of mutual vulnerability in pastoral supervision, which led me to reflect on how much the times have changed since I was certified in 1971. The certification rubric for that era might well be described as "stick it" or "up yours."

This was a tricky book for me to review, as I assumed from the title, *Courageous Conversations*, that there would be compelling clinical examples and explications of tough conversations: for example, dealing with strong confrontations, expelling a student (or students) from a program, engaging non-motivated student, taking a prophetic stand on a hospital ethical issue, and so forth. So much for assuming. There were several excellent and helpful clinical examples related to theory, but, except for a couple of instances by Gordon Hilsman, I would hardly describe them as "courageous." In essence, the subtitle, "The Teaching and Learning of Pastoral Supervision," more accurately conveys the strength and substance of this book.

The most significant flaw in the book for me was the fact that all the

authors were Christian. At this stage of pastoral supervision, how could such a book be written without at least one Jewish or Buddhist author—and, hopefully, not too far down the road a Muslim author as well? Another factor, less a law than an irony or distraction, has to do with the theme of postmodernism. In his preface, DeLong states, “One theme that is explicitly and implicitly dealt with is postmodern perspectives in supervision” (p. xii). Well, each author proved to be a true believer, and every chapter has at least one reference to being “postmodern.” As this was mandated as a presumed frame of reference, it would seem reasonable that, at the outset, an agreed-upon definition of postmodern(ism) would have been provided, especially as it has become such a buzzword (like “paradigm shift”). What is “postmodern?” When did it begin? With World War I (the war to end all wars)? With Picasso (as some artists insist)? With Einstein, Wittgenstein, and logical positivism or existentialism? The work of Freud and Jung? With Boisen and Cabot (as they are frequently referenced by the authors in the book)? Or by all the above? In fairness to DeLong, he does, in the final pages of the book, cite an earlier article in which he addresses “further understanding of the postmodern perspective” (p. 268). Perhaps this article should have been republished in this book, as at least one of the others chapters were.

In keeping with the *Reflective Practice* disclosure policy, I have already ordered copies of this book for my SESs with the intention of having us read and discuss one chapter a week as a part of our supervisory sessions. Who knows, this may become the new secret weapon for making it through the certification process.

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