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ARTICLE

Pastoral Supervision for Safe Churches

Geoff Broughton[1]

Email: gbroughton@csu.edu.au

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Abstract

This essay will examine the contribution of pastoral (professional) supervision in enabling and ensuring a safe church. Pastoral supervision is the brave, safe space where clergy (and ministry workers) reflect on their ministry practice in a regular, planned supervision session. The present article emerges from a decade of training pastoral supervisors and consultation across the national Anglican Church during 2019 based on recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It concludes that the properly Christian way for pastoral supervision to change the culture of the Church is christological: a rigorous grounding of its theory and practice in the story of Jesus Christ.

Keywords: pastoral supervision, Royal Commission, clergy, ministry practice, relational, reflective, rightness, Christology, Jesus

Introduction

An unsafe church is a malfunctioning church. The final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded, after careful listening to victims' testimony, considering the responses of Church leaders, with the legal verdict, that many clergy and church workers (termed 'religious leaders' in the reports) were guilty of misconduct and malfeasance.[2] In Australia, unsafe churches have resulted in criminal convictions and lengthy prison sentences, the de-frocking of bishops and clergy, and deeper suspicion about the integrity of mission and ministry among vulnerable people, such as children. The reputation of the Anglican Church is diminishing, the witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is devalued and the morale of faithful Christians and leaders is declining. Contributing factors include the isolation and irreverence that characterize Australia and Australians. Positively, isolation and irreverence can be enjoyed and celebrated, such as the

[1]The Revd Dr Geoff Broughton is Senior Lecturer in Practical Theology at Charles Sturt University; Principal, Pastoral Supervision Australia; and Associate, Institute for Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice, United Kingdom.

[2]The Hon. Justice Peter McClellan AM *et al*., 'Final Report' (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Full report available at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report (accessed 18 December 2017).

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lonely character in Australia's unofficial natural anthem, *Once a Jolly Swagman*. The tragic end of the swagman highlights the darker side of isolation and irreverence (that disregards authority and received wisdom).[3] Individuals not only turn to themselves, but inevitably turn *in* on themselves as captured in Augustine's phrase, *incurvates in se*. Moreover, institutional isolation and irreverence leads to impotence, characterized by spiritual anaemia and systemic anxiety.[4] An impotent church, led by those turned in on themselves, can never be a safe church.

The national Anglican Church in Australia seeks to introduce and implement standards for pastoral supervision, professional development and ministry reviews as key components to make the church safer. Pastoral supervision is the regular, planned, safe space where clergy (or, church workers) bring issues related to their ministry practice to the supervision session with a trained pastoral supervisor.[5] Pastoral supervision is emerging at the intersection of major cross-currents for the Church and related faith-based organizations such as education, social welfare and aged care. Pastoral supervision has three main goals of being a formative, normative and restorative conversation which promotes faithful practice. In this article I will address three primary functions of pastoral supervision as *relational* (a collaborative culture), *reflective* (a critiquing conversation) and *rightness* (a competence/compliance component). The relational aspect sustains and nurtures ministerial well-being and flourishing in light of new and urgent questions about clergy and church worker burnout. The rightness dimension addresses clergy misuse of power (e.g. bullying) and abuse scandals (e.g. the Royal Commission), which have put oversight and accountability in the spotlight.[6] The reflective component is indispensable. Not only did Socrates caution against the unexamined life, but the apostle urged ministry practitioners to 'watch your life and doctrine closely' (1 Tim. 4.16).

This essay will examine the role of pastoral (professional) supervision in enabling and ensuring a safe church. The quest to make churches safe begins with an obvious question: how did churches become unsafe, particularly for children and other vulnerable people called the little ones (*to mikro*, Mt. 18.14) by Jesus?

The Making of an Unsafe Church

How did the Church, founded on Jesus Christ, who said 'let the little children come to me' (Mk 10.14) become guilty of sexual abuse of children? There are many

[3]A.B. Paterson, *The Collected Verse of A B Paterson* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1985), where the jolly swagman dies alone, asserting to the authorities in pursuit, 'you'll never catch me alive'.

[4]This idea is developed later in the article but emerges from the family systems approach to the causes and cures for anxiety in church and ministry contexts, for example: J. Brown and L. Errington (eds.), *Bowen Family Systems Theory in Christian Ministry: Grappling with Theory and its Application through a Biblical Lens* (Sydney: The Family Systems Practice & Institute, 2019).

[5]J. Leach and M. Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2015), pp. 1-5 who differentiate the term 'professional' from 'pastoral' supervision to 'presuppose the spiritual or religious orientation of the supervisor . . . belief systems and faith commitments of those who come for supervision'. I will adopt this differentiation while admitting that it often functions as a distinction without a difference.

[6]McClellan AM *et al*., 'Final Report'. See the section below, 'Recommendations: Criteria and Compliance for a Safer Church'.

troubling answers to this question, ranging across the very different contexts of the worldwide Anglican communion. For Anglicans in Australia, several friends and colleagues offer some critical insights in addressing these questions.[7]

Isolation

During the COVID pandemic that gripped the globe throughout 2020, the word 'isolation' has developed potent and personal connotations. The word is now recognizable in its shortened form: 'iso'. Until 2020, isolation was a choice for the privileged: a remote holiday destination, a quiet corner of the house or a voluntary period 'off the grid'. The less privileged always knew, of course, that isolation is not always a choice. The imprisoned, those living with disabilities or mental health, the aged and lonely and those living in regional and remote locations have long known the debilitating effects of too much isolation. Throughout 2020, those accustomed to freedom of movement were restricted to their homes, those blessed with good health saw infection lurking beneath every physical encounter, those with a robust and energetic spirit experienced a new and surprising fragility and lethargy, and those living in crowded cities felt the loneliness of deserted streets and shopping centres in their bones. For many across the globe, the word isolation became intimately associated with a new qualifier: *mandatory* isolation. As the medical community has warned throughout 2020, while accepting the public health needs of isolation, it is unsafe for a range of people: those living with family and domestic violence and those living with mental health issues are clear examples.

The story of isolation – its promises and pitfalls – is writ large in the Australian psyche. Here I identity three aspects of isolation – sometimes sought, but mostly mandated – that have made the church unsafe: vast distances, vocational dilemmas and virtual developments. First, the vast distances of Australia – from the rest of the world and across the continent – leaves a more sinister legacy: out of sight, out of mind. Second, the vocational dilemmas, decision-making and directions of clergy and church workers over their lifetimes is *ad hoc* and arbitrary. Third, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are the virtual developments which significantly erode – or eradicate – well-being in ministry.

Vast Distances

Australia is only beginning to break its silence on the atrocities committed during settlement: Aboriginal dispossession and the frontier wars (including hundreds of documented massacres of Aboriginal men, women and children).[8] The violence of powerful men perpetrated on vulnerable children, followed by silence and cover-up,

[7]See, further, 'Remembering our Future: The Response of Australian Churches to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse', *St Marks Review* 245.3 (2018), particularly G. Blake, 'The Anglican Church of Australia under the Spotlight of the Royal Commission: Its Systemic Failure to Protect Children and a Catalyst for its Transformation', pp. 6-24; and H. Blake, 'Finding Voice: What it Means to "Be the Church" after the Royal Commission', pp. 38-55.

[8]B. Pascoe, *Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with your Country* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), pp. 51-60 and H. Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2006), pp. 1-12.

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is a deep stain in the Australian soul, almost as old as settlement itself. Again, there are Anglican atrocities that must be faced. Too many Aboriginal missions were complicit with government policies of separating families (the stolen generations) and assimilation.[9] We must not delude ourselves with reassurances that these were isolated incidents. Systemic abuse has been an integral – if invisible – thread woven through Australian and Anglican occupation.

Vocational Dilemmas

Insecurity and self-doubt are the harshest critics for a growing proportion of ministry workers. Insecurity is an ugly monster that rears its head in even the most confident-looking pastor. Many cope by plunging into more ministry activities. Others less fortunate find themselves battling depression and isolation. Either is a terrible bondage. Although many begin their life of ministry with a true sense of calling or vocation, far too few end their life of ministry with a deep sense of 'well done, good and faithful servant' (Mt. 25.21, 23). The dilemmas of vocational ministry are many. Under-acknowledged and unattended they can lead to anxiety and stress, mental health issues and/or burn out. Well-being in ministry, energized by a true sense of vocation, grounded in an identity as a child of God, valued in and for who the minister is and not what career they carve out and what they do with our lives, makes church workers safer to themselves and others. For most in ministry, however, the opportunities to have good conversation about their vocation is few and far between: the second form of isolation.

Virtual Developments

Two quotes, spanning the thirty years since I entered theological college, capture the promise and the peril of virtual developments in ministry. In 1985, Jacque Ellul insisted that 'the spoken word ... ushers us into another dimension: relationship with other living beings, with persons'.[10] By 2015, Sherry Turkle was sounding a dire warning, that 'we live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection.'[11] The impact of virtual development (particularly in a year of enforced lockdowns) – with church and ministry exclusively conducted on digital

[9]R.D. Wilson, 'Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families', Report for Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (April, 1997), available from http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/report/index.html (accessed 3 January 2011).

[10]Jacques Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 12. A consistent theme in his many books such as *The Technological Society* (1954), and *The Technological System* (l980), and in scores of articles, is Ellul bearing witness to the central role played by technology (*la technique*) in modern society. *La technique* is the attempt to rationalize and to make efficient all the workings of human society.

[11]Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), introduces her latest research by stating that 'I've been studying the psychology of online connectivity for more than 30 years. For the past five, I've had a special focus: What has happened to face-to-face conversation in a world where so many people say they would rather text than talk? I've looked at families, friendships and romance. I've studied schools, universities and workplaces.'

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platforms – needs to be assessed. Some are asking how to be more present and limit distractions.[12] Others are noticing that being online is killing our ability to think creatively.[13] Research documents that the increased time spent on Instagram, Facebook, Tik-Tok and other social media platforms is linked to poorer sleep in teens, a growing concern for many parents.[14] And spiritual and theological reflection on the paradox of virtual ministry is just beginning.[15]

The cumulative impacts of these forms of isolation – vast distances, vocational dilemmas and virtual developments contributes to individuals whose ministry life is turned in on itself – *incurvates in se*, and institutionally to ecclesial and evangelistic impotence. Before addressing the malfunctions of spiritual anaemia and systemic anxiety, making the church unsafe, three additional factors are briefly noted under the rubric of Aussie irreverence.

Irreverence

The irreverent attitude and actions of Australians are (in)famous. Is it a cause for concern or celebration? Most Australians celebrate their love of the vernacular, lack of formality and a life of volunteerism. I remember being told what most offended other Anglicans – even more than theological differences – was the reputation Sydney Anglicans had for a lack of civility, courtesy and good manners. At the time, having been raised and nurtured in that iconoclastic culture, I was genuinely unsure if this was a compliment or a criticism. The ghost of bushranger Ned Kelly is alive in the Australian – and Australian Anglican – soul. Despite his escapades and evasion of the police, Ned's over-confidence in his thick skin (in the form of a tin helmet) ultimately led to his own demise and death. Australians have not fully reckoned with an irreverent and iconoclastic mythology that makes people – and institutions – unsafe for others. How does isolation, combined with irreverence lead to institutional impotence?

The Malfunctions of an Unsafe Church

In the previous section I suggested physical isolation and cultural irreverence have also shaped the Australian Church – isolation, which renders violence and abuse out of sight and out of mind; and irreverence, which disregards authority and received wisdom. The Church was impotent in making churches safe. Enough Australian

[12]Jeremy Drumm and Stuart Johnson, 'Deloitte Global Mobile Consumer Survey', 2016, http://landing.deloitee.com.au/rs/761-IBL-328/images/tmt-mobile-consumer-2016-final-report-101116.pdf (accessed 19 April 2018).

[13]Derek Beres, 'Being Busy Is Killing our Ability to Think Creatively', https://bigthink.com/21st-century-spirituality/creativity-and-distraction (accessed 10 November 2019).

[14]'Heavy Social Media Use Linked to Poor Sleep', *BBC News*, 23 October 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/health-50140111 (accessed 23 October 2019). See also Kara Powell, Art Bamford and Brad M. Griffin, *Every Parent's Guide to Navigating our Digital World* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Youth Institute, 2018).

[15]Sebastian Smee, 'Net Loss: The Inner Life in the Digital Age', *Quarterly Essay* 22 (2018), pp. 1-55. See also Michael Jensen, 'Through a Glass Darkly Social Media and the Paradox of Virtual Intimacy', *ABC Religion & Ethics*, 6 November 2014, https://www.abc.net.au/religion/through-a-glass-darkly-social-media-and-the-paradox-of-virtual-i/10098862 (accessed 21 January 2020).

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Anglicans, it appears, conceded isolated and irreverent clergy broad leeway in their practice. An impotent Church is an unsafe Church, what Martyn Percy has termed, 'institutional narcolepsy'.[16] An impotent Church is an unsafe Church, because Percy provocatively argues that they became 'the best Petri dishes for developing and growing cultures of abuse'.[17] Additional factors can be named: spiritual anaemia and systemic anxiety. These are profoundly theological issues that professional supervision alone can only partially rectify. The twenty-first century has witnessed (and mostly welcomed!) a greater scrutiny and sanction of those with power. The misuse and abuse of power is becoming more transparent: from movements such as #metoo to the ancient biblical warning, 'the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God' (1 Pet. 4.17). The final chapter of 1 Peter finishes with a series of instructions and admonitions regarding the responsibility of pastoral leaders and ministry workers that begin specifically with congregational leadership but end with exhortation for the whole household of God. The theological connection between pastor leaders and the wider group is easily missed. Yet according to Michael Paterson, 'group supervision is more theologically sound than individual supervision'.[18] Christological convictions and corporate commitments underpin the kind of pastoral supervision that is equipped to reform spiritual anaemia and systemic anxiety.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse

The horrendous accounts of child sexual abuse within the Church, heard as victims' testimony during the Royal Commission, unmasked the unsafe church. While significant changes had already been made to current practices of child safety – the worst cases were mostly historical – many Anglicans were horrified to discover the errors of past inaction and the extent of priestly cover-up. I do not need to rehearse those shameful details here.[19]

For decades those working in the clinical professions had been studying the factors that precipitate crises in ministry.[20] Some factors include long-standing ministry pressures such as expectations of the role (particularly the lack of clarity of the minister's role); changes due to contemporary society; and faith-related crises such as spiritual burnout, a breakdown in spiritual discipline, spiritual neglect, poor development of spiritual practices, a personal crisis of faith, and even a loss of faith. Three factors deserving attention were, however, routinely neglected. First, the misuse of power demonstrated by more reports of abuse and bullying. Ministers experiencing interpersonal difficulties were not adequately supported nor supervised, often resulting in misconduct, sexual impropriety, abuse and bullying by clergy. Second, a widespread lack of self-awareness in clergy produced a lack of confidence in some, a lack of self-care in others, contributing to the rise in mental health

[16]M. Percy, 'Risk, Responsibility, and Redemption: Remembering our Future', *St Marks Review* 245.3 (2018), pp. 99-114 (103).

[17]Percy, 'Risk Responsibility, and Redemption', p. 111.

[18]Michael Paterson, Pastoral Supervision Conference, Adelaide, 11 February 2020.

[19]V. Miller, 'Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15): An Analysis of the Findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse', *St Marks Review* 245.3 (2018), pp. 72-98.

[20]B. Fallon, S. Rice, and J. Wright Howie, 'Factors that Precipitate and Mitigate Crises in Ministry', *Pastoral Psychology*, 1.62 (2013), pp. 27-40.

issues among clergy. Insufficient and ineffective strategies existed for managing stress, overwork, burnout and regular exposure to the burdens of others. Third, calls for professional development and support through professional and pastoral supervision were ignored. Two key factors that precipitate crisis in ministry were the lack of caring support from others, specifically the lack of appropriate supervision.[21] The church had become unsafe, not only for the vulnerable, but for many clergy and church workers. In this context, the sense of isolation experienced by many clergy and church workers – what it means to be out of sight and out of mind (even in the midst of a large city or multi-staff ministry team) – revealed its darker side. Too many bishops and other senior leaders knew (or suspected) what was happening in their midst but were impotent. What, then, is the way out of the miasma?[22] The recommendations of the Royal Commission, summarized in the next section, were based on an emerging recognition of the role for pastoral supervision.[23]

Making Churches Safe through Pastoral Supervision

One of the key recommendations to the Anglican Church is in Book 16.5:

> The Anglican Church of Australia should develop and each diocese should implement mandatory national standards to ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry (bishops, clergy, religious and lay personnel):
>
> a. undertake mandatory, regular professional development, compulsory components being professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety
> b. undertake mandatory professional/pastoral supervision
> c. undergo regular performance appraisals.[24]

[21]Fallon *et al.*, 'Factors that Precipitate', pp. 37-38.

[22]A. Cameron, 'Out of the Miasma: A Way to Children's Safety', *St Marks Review* 245.3 (2018), pp. 25-37.

[23]K. Pohly, *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016). The first edition (2001) was an updated version of K. Pohly, *Pastoral Supervision: Inquiries into Pastoral Care* (Houston: The Institute of Religion, 1997).

[24]McClellan AM *et al.*, 'Final Report: Volume 16, Religious Institutions Book 1 (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017), pp. 72-82, 556-757.

A summary of these three recommendations to all religious institutions in Australia is: *16.45 (The Professional Supervision Recommendation)*: consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry; *16.43 (The Professional Development Recommendation)*: each religious institution should ensure that candidates for religious ministry undertake minimum training on child safety and related matters, including training that: (a) equips candidates with an understanding of the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards, (b) educates candidates on: (i) professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety, (ii) policies regarding appropriate responses to allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse, and how to implement these policies, (iii) how to work with children, including childhood development, and (iv) identifying and understanding the nature, indicators and impacts of child sexual abuse; and *16.44 The Oversight/ Appraisal Recommendation*: consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, are subject to effective management and oversight and undertake annual performance appraisals.

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Pastoral supervision, christologically grounded, provides three functions: the relational function through its collaborative culture; the reflective function through critiquing conversations; and the rightness function through its compliance frameworks.

The Safe Ministry Commission, on behalf of the General Synod, implemented a phased approach throughout 2019 for developing the mandatory national standards for Professional Development, Professional/Pastoral Supervision and Performance Appraisals. I was seconded to the General Synod office to undertake this work and here I will focus on pastoral (professional) supervision, while noting that the three strands should be nested together. The consultation canvassed six broad groups: the national consultation with Anglican bishops; other large gatherings of senior clergy and parish clergy; individual consultations with Anglican bishops and diocesan representatives; individual consultations with other denominational leaders and representatives; individual consultations with experienced supervisors, mentors and coaches; and individual consultations with clergy with experience of regulated supervision. The responses to the Royal Commission in Australia have focused attention on changing culture and not merely mandatory compliance. How far have we come?

In March 2019, more than two years after the final recommendations were made, a survey of 21 diocesan bishops found the extent of pastoral (professional) supervision is greater than anticipated, yet remaining inconsistent across the national church. The result from those dioceses with greater resources and those who implemented earlier tend to mask the reality for many rural and remote dioceses that had little or no existing supervision. A phased introduction of minimum standards became a practical necessity that encourages those dioceses well underway to continue and those only beginning to prioritize its implementation. A second question regarding what was learned during implementation resulted in (a) two, common themes of adequate resourcing – 'the issue of supply of supervisors and the cost of supervision is significant' and (b) anticipated resistance – 'importance of accountability with respect to engaging in supervision and reporting on this. Clarity of the expected boundaries. Having good orientation and engagement with our team of supervisors.'[25] These comments capture the recurring theme from the entire consultation regarding resources for implementation: both diocesan and individual capacity constraints were consistently raised as the primary barriers.

The widespread support for minimum standards was perhaps the most surprising and encouraging aspect of all the consultations. There was not a single *in principle* objection to pastoral supervision becoming a national standard. A potential impediment to consistent national standards is that some dioceses have already adopted mandatory supervision (e.g. Perth, Newcastle), while the larger (metropolitan dioceses such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane) are close to adopting, or strengthening, local standards. At the time of writing, minimum national standards have not been adopted by the General Synod. The draft standards suggest, however, that accredited supervision can be delivered by a person who: (i) provides

[25]G. Broughton, 'First Report to the Safe Ministry Commission of the General Synod: Implementation of Royal Commission Recommendations', 2 May 2019.

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a formal, written agreement (contract, covenant) for supervision; (ii) is approved by the bishop (or delegate) to provide pastoral supervision in the diocese; (iii) undertakes regular supervision; (iv) for a minimum of six hours (individual) or twelve hours (peer/group).[26] Discerning the criteria for these standards, in order to comply with the recommendation of the Royal Commission, was only the first step to a safe Church.

Misconceptions about pastoral supervision were commonplace. Professional supervision is properly understood as the supervision of professionals and does not infantilize clergy and ministry workers. Only those with knowledge of the clinical and social work practice of professional supervision readily understood the purpose and practice of pastoral supervision.[27] Often the question concerned the differences (and similarities) between pastoral supervision and other one-to-one activities that clergy and ministry workers access, such as coaching, mentoring and spiritual direction. Some, with a background in line management (normative) or spiritual direction (formative) understood one key function of pastoral supervision but not its broad scope. Others, with a background in mentoring and coaching better appreciated the scope of pastoral supervision (e.g. supporting and educating) but often lacked the necessary structure (e.g. many mentors are not supervised for their work with those being mentored). Education about, and equipping for, pastoral supervision remains the unfinished business of the culture change required to enable and ensure faithful and safe practice by clergy and church workers. Developing deeper theological roots for the theory and practice of pastoral supervision is sketched in the final section.

A Christology for Pastoral Supervision

The emerging theory and practice of pastoral supervision is indebted to Scottish scholar-priest Michael Paterson who has been the main pioneer in the United Kingdom.[28] Paterson lays out clearly how he sees pastoral supervision differing from supervision as it is used in other professions.[29] Paterson highlights the focus as being on vision and the vocation to which God has called the supervisee.[30] He does not set out to reinvent supervision but instead to look at how the practices of supervision can be used to serve the aim of attending to the Christian call in the supervisee's life.[31] One of the great strengths of Paterson's pioneering work is the broad range

[26]*Minimum Standards for Professional Development:* Professional development is accrued through a points system across three spheres of activity: (i) self-directed reading, reflecting and study; (ii) course enrolment, conference attendance and formal studies; (iii) peer engagement and equipping. *Minimum Standards for Ministry Reviews:* Ministry reviews are conducted on a three year cycle: (i) self-reflective review; (ii) informal, peer-based review; (iii) formal diocesan (parish, Church body) review.

[27]See further, S. Karvinen-Niinikoski, Liz Beddoe, Gillian Ruch and Ming-Sum Tsui, 'Professional Supervision and Professional Autonomy' in B. Blom, L. Evertsson and M. Perlinski (eds.), *Social and Caring Professions in European Welfare States* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017), pp. 53-66.

[28]See also M. Paterson and J. Rowe (eds.), *Enriching Ministry: Pastoral Supervision in Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2015).

[29]Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision*, p. 7.

[30]Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision*, p. 13.

[31]Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision*, p. 16.

of different approaches to supervision, abundantly clear that supervision is not simply about thinking. Good supervision, in the tradition of wise oversight, pays attention to what is not said as much as what is said, and understands the place of the story being told in supervision within the framework of the Christian story.[32] This, in fact, is the goal of pastoral supervision, that to help supervisees examine the story out of which they live so that they may minister more profoundly the good news of Jesus Christ.[33] Three functions of pastoral supervision can now be identifed for safe churches: relational, reflecting and rightness. The relational function, theologically understood as encompassing all relationships (with God, self and others), mitigates against isolation and *incurvates in se*. The reflecting function, as theological reflection, must challenge and critique the minister's irreverence, which rejects godly authority and the wisdom of the cross. Thirdly – and crucially – rightness is both relational and cruciform.

The relational function is christologically grounded in the remembering Jesus, understood through Emil Brunner's Christ as mediator. For Brunner, the divine encounter is always an encounter with truth, just as encountering the truth is a moment of transcendence and grace. All true encounters, therefore true relationships, are understood by Brunner as being in Christ. Brunner's words, first penned for a world in crisis, bear repeating for our world in crisis:

> Jesus Christ is the sole place one can see God, and because we see God there, we also see ourselves anew ... Who God is, and who we are, is revealed to us in Jesus Christ by God Himself.[34]

The reflecting function is christologically shaped by the revealing Jesus. While the practices of critical reflection are well attested in the supervision literature, the locus of critique for Luther's Christ was the cross, the test of everything. Reflection – in light of the cross – converts clergy and ministry workers from pride, vanity and autonomy to humility, sober judgment and trust in God's hidden work.

The rightness function is framed by the restoring Jesus. Beyond the rightness of compliance, is McClendon's vision of convictions: the way of faith and faithfulness. Convictions are different and better than values and principles, competence and compliance, because, as McClendon understood, when you discover your convictions, you discover yourself. Here – in the true story of Jesus – is where true rightness is firmly located (as our stories embraced by God's story). McClendon insists on the present demands of the restoring Jesus:

> Our question is not past but present: Is the Risen One who confronts us here and now, today, in the common life of the church – is this one true God, true man, one risen Jesus Christ? For it is this present Christ with whom we must come to terms; it is in him that we must seek our answers.[35]

[32]Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision*, pp. 145-46, 167.
[33]Leach and Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision*, p. 92.
[34]Emil Brunner, *Our Faith* (trans. John W. Rilling; New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 59.
[35]J. W. McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology Vol. 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) p. 239.

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Leading theological ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas, might grumpily insist that 'safe' is not a theological category. He has a point. The christological focus of the Anglican ordinal reflects the view that the Church is largely understood in christological terms and so too are the manifold ministries of Christ – both lay and ordained. There is very limited extent to which pastoral supervision has been understood in christological terms. Friend, colleague and pastoral supervisor Bishop Stephen Pickard has noted a worrying trend in the Anglican communion where the management or therapeutic paradigm of the episcopate too easily eclipses a theological and scholarly expertise in the office and functions of the overseer.[36] A Scripture-formed ministry of oversight calls people 'to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ ... to the truth as it is in Jesus' (Eph. 4.13b, 21) – the faithful practice which lies at the heart of the overseers' vocation. The overseer is always an exemplar of the life of following Jesus.

A practical Christology provides the emerging theory and practice of pastoral supervision grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christ event – revealing, remembering and restoring – provides the theological basis necessary for the relational, reflective and rightness functions at the heart of good supervision practice.

Conclusion

The God of biblical revelation has a character. Divine action flows from that character. God is love and light. This is the story of both Old and New Testament, centred on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[37] Safe clergy and ministry workers will not be achieved merely through synods, their commissions nor through processes of compliance. The properly Christian way to change culture is through a rigorous grounding of pastoral supervision in the story of Jesus Christ. The faithful practice of clergy and church workers is secured and shaped by an identity in Christ, not the isolation of not out of sight, out of mind. The light and love of God-in-Christ redeems the isolation and irreverence of individual *incurvates in se* and the Church's institutional impotence. A practical Christology for pastoral supervision, animating the three functions identified in this article – relation, reflection and rightness – critiques, then transcends, the isolation and irreverence of both individual clergy and the institutional Church. The relational function restores *right* relationships *in* Christ, the properly Christian way to understand all relationships (with God, self and others). The best safeguard against isolation is when the minister's life is anchored in the Christian community. What mitigates against *incurvates in se*? Only by abiding in Christ and faithfulness to His call. The reflection function – bathed in the light of Luther's cross – critiques and coverts the pride and autonomy of the minister's irreverence, which rejects godly authority and the wisdom of the cross. Institutional irreverence must also be critiqued in the light of the cross. Too often ecclesial irreverence is merely an expression of theological pre-commitments or tribal alliances. Thirdly – and crucially – rightness is relational and cruciform. The impotence of a Church that could not protect vulnerable people

[36]S. Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 169-80.
[37]G. Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), p. 52.

is not made safe through strengthened policies and procedures alone. The safe church, a refuge and sanctuary for all people, is grounded in the God who is both Rock and Redeemer. The rightness of the safe church, therefore, is ensured with confession and faithfulness, not compliance and fault-finding. Pastoral supervision enables the Church and its ministers to be more relational, reflective and right. That is safe for everyone. And a safe church – with safe ministers and safe ministries – is ideally placed to reclaim its true role as the bride of Christ. As the bride of Christ, the safe Church promotes flourishing lives.

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