The Role of Feelings as Messengers in Supervision and Theological Reflection

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The thesis of this article is that supervision and theological reflection have primarily been done as intellectual exercises. I am offering a method that also values and promotes emotional competence in the art and science of supervision and theological reflection. The theory behind this method focuses on the role of feelings in supervision and theological reflection. It asserts that feelings carry messages that give us information about how to act ethically toward others and ourselves, and that these messages offer us options for sustaining and deepening relationships.

As a white man, growing up in the Western United States, I was taught to value intellect over feelings. Neither of my parents had the benefit of a college education, and they were determined that my brother and I go to college. I was taught to value the intellectual information I was acquiring and the process of thinking. More subtly, I was taught to distrust and devalue emotions, in general, and anger, in particular. Outside the home, these values were reinforced in my Roman Catholic Church experience, parochial education, and seminary training. I was taught to be suspicious of feelings. When I gradually began to revisit these predispositions or biases, I did not have an articulated theory for valuing and integrating the use of my feelings in both personal and professional ways until I was exposed to the theory of Feelings as Messengers (FAM) in multicultural training and education.

The focus on feelings in supervision and theological reflection for clinical pastoral education (CPE) and field education is not new. Authors are aware of the power of feelings to “carry the questions, values, and wisdom embedded in our narratives” and to evoke images. Feelings provide energy to a discussion that may be lacking in more detached intellectual analysis. On the other hand, unacknowledged or unprocessed feelings may “get in the way” in an interaction in a pastoral situation or in a supervision setting. Because the supervisor and the student (as well as the parishioner or client) are emotional beings with a wide range of feelings, the exploration of feelings can become very complicated. What I hope to offer here is a window on the exploration of feelings that has been useful to me in anti-racism and multicultural consulting and training. I learned this approach as a consultant for VISIONS Inc. Most simply put, this approach holds that our feelings are usually a response to a stimulus and that they carry a message that tells us what we need in a particular situation. Thus, in addition to providing energy in an interaction and evoking images, feelings provide information or messages that are useful in deciding how to behave in a given situation. Before speaking about the particular messages that feelings provide, it is helpful to step back and set the context for supervision and theological reflection.

Much of supervision and theological reflection focuses on a specific ministry event or situation. Figure 1 is one way of picturing this.
From this figure, one can notice several lenses through which to view the ministry event. My focus will be on personal level thoughts and feelings as one aspect of supervision and theological reflection.

Another way to understand the place of feelings is to look at the dimensions in which learning takes place. Our interactions and our learning happen in at least three different dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. It follows, then, that for individuals and organizations change happens in these three dimensions as well. Figure 2 shows a way to imagine those dimensions.

Fig. 1—Locating feelings in supervision and theological reflection

Fig. 2—Three dimensions of individual and organizational change (chart used in VISIONS Inc. training sessions)
Individuals take in information from all three dimensions. Some of us learn best through concepts, thinking, reading the directions on how to assemble something. Others learn by doing. These folks don’t bother with the “Read Me” files or instructions. They immediately install new software and begin to play with it to see how it works. For others, a primary way of learning comes through their emotions. Such people sometimes talk about “having a feel for something” or knowing it intuitively.

**Emotional Illiteracy**

On a cultural level, North American society, heavily shaped by dominant white males, favors the cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Value is placed on “right thinking” (orthodoxy) and right action (orthopraxis). Less value, in the U.S. culture, is placed on the affective dimension. It might even be said that some of us are emotionally illiterate. That is, we do not know or value the range of our emotional capabilities. To some degree, there is also a gender stereotyping that takes place. According to this stereotype, men arrive at decisions by thinking, and women make decisions intuitively or by accessing their feelings. During the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, commentators said that Teresa Heinz Kerry should have told more personal (read: affective) stories about her husband. She was not supposed to be so “opinionated.” To which she responded that she wished people would speak about women as also being “smart and well-informed.”

FAM invites us all to be more emotionally literate. It invites us to be affectively competent. The theory further proposes that feelings carry messages about what we need to do to take care of ourselves and to be fully present to ourselves and others in any situation (pastoral event and reflection upon that event). The theology that underlies affective competence asserts that feelings are a significant dimension of our beings as God created us and point to the expression of feelings throughout the Scriptures, including the attribution of feelings to God as a way of legitimizing and valuing feelings.

It is important to note here that the use of FAM by an unscrupulous or unskilled supervisor might be dangerous. An unscrupulous supervisor probably would not articulate or follow the guidelines given below. Thus directors of programs should teach FAM theory and the guidelines to students, as well as to supervisors, so that students are empowered to use the theory and are better able to protect themselves against possible misuse or abuse of the theory. I suspect that an unscrupulous supervisor would have ample opportunities to take advantage of a student using other means. The possibility of the misuse of the theory by devious people should not prevent its beneficial use by properly trained, well-intentioned people. Because of the power inherent in their relationships, supervisors, mentors, and trainers should avail themselves of on-going supervision in order to examine their own thinking and feelings in interactions with those whom they supervise.

FAM talks about six primary feeling families: Mad, Sad, Scared, Peaceful, Powerful, and Joyful. There are many cognate feelings within each family. For example, the Mad family includes rage, anger, irritation, and annoyance. The Powerful family includes capable,
competent, and resourceful. (Note that “powerful” does not mean power over or dominance of others.) There is a spectrum for each group.

Generally speaking, for adults, each feeling is a response to a stimulus. Something happens and a feeling arises, which we may or may not attend to. Unlike some theories that stress that feelings “just are,” FAM emphasizes that feelings carry important messages that give us useful information about what we need in a particular situation. When we are in touch with our feelings, when we attend to them, we receive information about a suggested response or behavior. Figure 3 details the six primary feelings or feeling families, along with the common stimulus, message, and suggested response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEELING</th>
<th>STIMULUS</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
<th>NEED or RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POWERFUL</td>
<td>Accomplishment or anticipated success</td>
<td>I am competent</td>
<td>Keep on keeping on!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOYFUL</td>
<td>Inner gratitude, awe, wonder</td>
<td>I am excited, happy</td>
<td>Keep on keeping on!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEACEFUL</td>
<td>Deep awareness of connectedness</td>
<td>I am centered</td>
<td>Keep on keeping on!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAD*</td>
<td>Real or perceived violation</td>
<td>I have been violated</td>
<td>Re-establish boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>Real or anticipated loss</td>
<td>I am experiencing or anticipating loss</td>
<td>Find space and support to grieve and let go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCARED</td>
<td>Real or perceived danger</td>
<td>I am in danger</td>
<td>Arrange for support and protection</td>
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</tbody>
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Fig. 3—Feelings as messengers

*The feeling of anger will be dealt with again at the end of the paper. In this chart, the emphasis is on being clear about re-establishing boundaries and getting safe. This is especially true when the stimulus is from someone with whom I have little or no relationship or one who has or is perceived to have significantly more power than I have. In so far as one is able to re-negotiate boundaries within a relationship, anger can be seen as highly relational with the possibility of ultimately bringing one closer to the person with whom one is angry.

Emotional literacy suggests that I am aware of what feeling(s) I am experiencing at any given moment. It means that I am paying attention to the message that the feeling is sending me so that I can choose whether or not and how to respond.

Substitution of Feelings

One difficulty many of us face is that we were raised to value only certain feelings. We were taught that only certain feelings are legitimate to express. Sometimes this message was implicitly “caught” rather than explicitly taught. In any case, we may substitute one feeling for another, usually without being aware that we are doing that. Such substitution is generally an adaptive behavior that is self-protective when it is learned. That is, in the context in which I first began to substitute “more acceptable” feelings, it probably was not safe or sanctioned to express the natural feeling. The substitution becomes a problem when I unconsciously replace the
natural feelings with a substitute when I am no longer in a context that “requires” me to substitute my feelings.

In my family of origin, it was okay to be sad or scared. It was not okay for me to be angry. My father was the only one who had the right to get angry. This meant when I experienced a violation of boundaries, I could cry or seek support and comfort. I could not express anger that someone had come into my space or crossed an emotional boundary. It meant I had to substitute from the “acceptable” feelings in my family. Thus, at the precise time I needed space or distance, I was giving the message (through an expression of sadness or being scared) that I wanted someone to come closer to comfort or protect me.

Another example of substitution happens if little boys are taught not to cry when they experience a loss. If anger is acceptable, the boy (later, the man) may substitute anger, thereby giving off the message stay away, when what he may really need is to grieve and have support for that. His anger pushes others away precisely when he may want them to draw nearer. The substitution of a “more acceptable” or “more familiar” feeling for the natural one deprives him of getting what he needs, and gives off a signal to others that is confusing or misleading and not congruent with what is taking place.

Emotional literacy may be thought of as a discipline that requires practice. It is a form of self-focus that may feel artificial until one has practiced it for a while. Practicing self-focus about my feelings means slowing down an interaction and taking the time to ask myself what I am actually feeling and what I need before reacting to someone else’s comment. Getting in touch with my most genuine feeling, and its attendant message, may give me more options in a situation and lead to a different quality of interaction. For many white people, and for white men in particular, this sense of artificiality is the result, in part, of cultural conditioning. Until relatively recently, it has been countercultural for white men to notice, talk about, and act upon most feelings, with the exception of anger. Even now, thinking is valued over feeling in most public or work settings. While men are increasingly encouraged to express their feelings in intimate relationships or “home” settings, the same is not as true in the business environment. Ministry settings seem to straddle the line between familial and business codes of behavior.

**Guidelines for Interactions**

Before moving to the application of FAM in supervision and theological reflection, it is important to mention some guidelines. While these guidelines are important for all interactions, intellectual and emotional, it is particularly important to articulate them in settings where the expression of feelings and the messages they convey have been inhibited or undervalued. Furthermore, these guidelines are necessary in order to better safeguard those who have less power in the setting. Finally, these guidelines may prevent confusion between therapy and supervision. The use of feelings suggested here is meant to be for mutual learning. The guidelines should always be explicitly stated and agreed to by all parties. Should meetings get particularly tense or the relationship become static or frayed, an explicit return to the guidelines can be most useful. They should definitely be restated if third party intervention is required.
Guidelines for Recognizing, Understanding, and Valuing Difference

Guidelines for interactions within a group greatly affect both our relationships and what we can accomplish (products or goals). Guidelines facilitate deep learning by creating certain boundaries and a certain amount of safety. The guidelines suggested below are also meant to engender a certain amount of mutuality, even as the focus of the learning will most often focus on the student’s agenda. While the guidelines seem deceptively simple, I would suggest that nearly every conflict or abuse that I have experienced between individuals or within groups has stemmed from a violation of one of these guidelines. Expressed positively, I find that, when I am living these guidelines fully I am acting creatively and compassionately, learning new ways of being and doing.

These guidelines may require a change of mindset or a change of heart (or a metanoia) for some people. Employing the guidelines for some people requires what Ronald Heifetz refers to as an adaptive change. The guidelines are also interactive; they speak to one another.

Try On. The “Try on” guideline invites us to be creative, to open ourselves to new learning. It invites us to suspend judgment for a moment and look at something from a different perspective. Try on new ideas. Try on new processes. Try on new relationships. “Try on” does not mean that I have to accept the ideas I am being asked to try on. It does mean I am willing to consider or re-consider something from a viewpoint that I have not considered, or perhaps have considered and rejected. This guideline is very important if we want to investigate about our racial, cultural, ethnic, theological, liturgical, or philosophical differences. It allows for differences that arise because of age, gender, sexual identity, status or power (student/teacher; clergy/laity; employer/employee), nationality, and so forth.

Trying on a new perspective or method may be a cumulative process. Some ideas or ways of acting are an “acquired taste.” Two things are important to remember. First, if you don’t try on anything new, you are stuck with the same old ideas and methods, and your learning will be limited. Second, even if you try something new on, you always have the option of going back to what you knew and believed beforehand.

It’s Okay to Disagree. It’s Not Okay to Shame, Blame, or Attack Self or Others. If supervision and theological reflection is not meant to be an imposition of one right way of thinking, feeling, or acting, then we must encourage differences and disagreement. In fact, it may be that in noticing and valuing significant differences in theology or practice that the greatest learning will take place. At the same time, it is very important that we do not shame, blame, or attack one another or ourselves in the process of disagreeing—either verbally or non-verbally. Significant shaming can occur by rolling one’s eyes at another’s comments or repeatedly ignoring someone. Self attacks or self shaming behavior can take the form of “This may be a silly question ...” or “You probably won’t agree, but ...”

Practice Self-focus. This guideline has two parts. The first has to do with “I” statements—that is, speaking in the first person singular about what one thinks or believes or feels. Here the point is to avoid generalizations, such as: “People think ...” or “Everyone believes ...” Such generalizations limit learning. In addition, when someone tries to convince me of a general theory of life, the universe, and everything, even if it is mostly true, I don’t stay
tuned in for very long. Hearing about another person’s life story or response is more appealing and awakens my empathy. I do much better listening to an individual’s personal experience. On significant issues, I don’t expect everyone to be of one mind. What I am most interested in is listening more deeply to why a person believes what she believes. When that person speaks from a place of self-focus, I am interested and stay tuned. I can even lay aside some of my defenses and arguments to listen to someone who is speaking about her own personal experience, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings. For a tactical standpoint, self-focus—speaking “my particular truth”—makes sense if I want to be listened to.

Yet self-focus has another dimension that is often overlooked. It is the key to understanding feelings as messengers. Here, self-focus means listening to oneself and the information from within that is often overlooked. When I am truly self-focused, I am paying attention to the feelings that I am experiencing while someone else is speaking. I am hearing their words and meanings, and I am monitoring my own inner processes. I am aware of what is being said and what is not being said (what is left out of the conversation) is having an impact on me emotionally. I may not even know why or what it is that is causing my feelings. Self-focus means allowing myself to take in the data of my own feeling state in the moment. It is being aware that these are my feelings. Something the other person said or did may have been a stimulus, and these feelings are mine. This sort of self-focus requires practiced discipline. I often “listen with my answer running.” Self-focus involves the discipline of noticing my feelings and asking myself what they may be telling me, before reacting to the content of what the other person has been saying (or not saying).

**Practice “Both/And” Thinking.** “Both/and” thinking is also a discipline, and it is part of a mind set. Generally speaking, Western thinking is “either/or,” “right or wrong,” “good or bad,” “win or lose.” Underlying either/or thinking is an attitude, unusually unconscious and unarticulated, that I am superior to the person with a differing position or that the other person is inferior. We may not even notice how deeply either/or thinking is engrained in our way of living because it is part of our worldview. We are like fish swimming in the water and not noticing the water around us. Not all worldviews approach life in the same way. To the extent that I enjoy or am accustomed to either/or thinking, I can try on both/and thinking. My own experience is that both/and thinking may feel artificial at first, and I may even feel I am giving up the strength and security of my some deeply engrained beliefs. The both/and worldview assumes that there are a number of opinions and beliefs that can co-exist without canceling one another out. It applies to complex interactions and robust situations. It is also a practical way of practicing valuing the difference inherent in another’s point of view. Concretely, it often means substituting the word “and” for the words “but” or “however” in a sentence. This substitution is even more important when stating your opinion after someone has stated an opinion with which you disagree. Your “and” will let the other person know that they have been heard and respected, and what you are saying does not cancel out what they have said. Stating strong differences with both/and language prevents both supervisor and student from slipping into defensive postures or predetermined solutions. It acknowledges the

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complexity of a situation and invites both parties to investigate why it is that they see the situation differently.

**Be Aware of Intent and Impact.** Intent has to do with my intention or motive in doing or saying something. Impact has to do with the impact, effect, or consequence my speech or action has on another person or persons. It sometimes happens that I make comments that I do not intend to be racist, sexist, or heterosexist, and another person is deeply impacted by my comment. The person who feels offended may then accuse me of inappropriate behavior and may even say that they feel the remark was racist, sexist, and so forth. The conversation quickly escalates and both of us become defensive.

Perhaps I notice that the student has become very quiet in response to a comment I have made or becomes quite defensive. In such a case, rather than denying the impact on the student by saying that I did not intend to treat her as inferior, I can acknowledge the impact and even apologize for the impact of the comment. It might be easier then to examine the content of what was being said and what truth there might be in the comment. Here curiosity rather than judgment is the key. One way to do this is to ask: “Is there any grain of truth in what I have said?”

On the other hand, as a supervisor, I may feel offended; perhaps a student’s comment about how I conducted a meeting feels like an accusation of clericalism. One way of slowing things down is to use self-focus—to notice what my feeling is (for example, mad, sad, or scared) and to articulate the impact upon me. The student may or may not have intended the comment as an offense or accusation. I can model an openness to learning by naming my feeling(s) and being open to examining the content of what was said.

**Confidentiality.** Confidentiality is important in one-to-one interactions, in learning groups, and in organizations. It has to do with boundaries and safety. On a more personal level, I may choose to take certain risks by exposing my assumptions or personal theology in supervision because I have a sense that what I am saying will not be made public. Most simply put, this means that both the supervisor and the student agree not to tell one another’s personal stories.

A difficulty arises in that the supervisor and student write evaluations that do become public documents. It is important that these documents speak the truth in love, both for the continued learning of all involved and so that decisions can be made about the appropriateness of the student serving in a professional capacity. As a protection for all parties, supervisor and student should formally discuss the type of material that will and will not appear in evaluations, and both should sign all documents.

**Applications of FAM Theory**

On the primary level—that is, for the student in the pastoral situation—applying FAM theory means asking oneself:

- What am I feeling in this situation?
- Is this my natural feeling or a learned substitute?
• What is the message for me in this feeling? What is this feeling telling me I need?
• How do I choose to respond?

These questions can also be asked about a parishioner, patient, or client in a pastoral care situation. A fair amount of skill is required to do this, especially because most of us (caregivers and receivers) have learned various substitution patterns. Note that applying FAM is more than simply asking the person what they are feeling and “staying with the person on an emotional level” as distinguished from “staying in one’s head.” In FAM, there is a belief that a person’s feelings give a message about what is needed, even if he cannot always acquire what is needed in the immediate situation. And, certainly, there is a better chance of receiving what one needs if one knows what that is. Even knowing this theory, the first priority for the student in CPE or field education is to focus on being emotionally literate about her own feelings, in order not to project her feelings onto others, and to know what she needs in a particular situation. For instance, if a student is scared and knows that she can get support or protection, she is less likely to project her fear upon a parishioner or patient. If the student is sad, he can identify the loss and begin or continue to grieve. In either case, the student’s pastoral ministry will likely be more effective, and the student will be practicing good self-care. This, in itself, can be a model for the parishioner or patient.

Returning to the supervisory situation, both the supervisor and the student have the opportunity of becoming more emotionally competent through self-focus and practicing FAM. In this case, it is best if both the student and supervisor explicitly review the theory. Here the supervisor practices self-care and avoids projection by noticing her own feelings and the messages associated with those feelings. Those feelings can then be brought to a supervisors’ case-study group for reflection, or, if appropriate, they may be the material for counseling or therapy. When supervising, the principal focus should be on the student’s presentation of a specific ministry event. FAM allows the supervisor to both empathize with the student’s feeling and to ask about the stimulus, message, needs, and possible responses associated with the feeling. The feeling, here, may refer to a “reported feeling” that occurred during the pastoral situation, or a feeling that is occurring during the actual supervision session. Frequently, there are parallels between the ministry situation and the supervisory session.

In addition, the supervisor and student can inquire whether there is a substitution of feelings taking place. This allows the student to examine unconscious patterns or habits and to make decisions about new behaviors.

**Scripture and Feelings**

An important aspect of theological reflection is the use of Scripture to explore the ministry event. Here the goal is not to find a solution to a pastoral problem or execute some other form of proof-texting. Rather the student and supervisor try to recall passages of Scripture, generally stories, that may open up the ministerial event in rich and profound ways. The Scripture may support or challenge one’s behavior in the situation, or merely offer alternatives not previously thought of. The ability to refer to an analogous story from Scripture
allows us as members of a modern community of faith to be in conversation with a treasured historical community of faith. The underlying theological belief is that the same God who spoke to our ancestors may have something to say to us who listen to a particular Scripture story that has meaning to us in the present.

For example, we might explore the story of Jesus and the money changers in the temple in terms of the violation that Jesus experienced, his anger, and his attempt to re-establish boundaries. Similarly, one might delve into the story of Mary and Martha and ask about the violation Martha experienced that led her to complain, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?” Notice that such an inquiry does not assume that the perceived violation is either intended or grievous. In fact, one can even inquire whether Mary is substituting anger for sadness. Perhaps she is really sad that she has not “chosen the better part.” The passage from the sixth chapter of Acts about the neglected Greek widows also suggests a violation. Or one might look at Jesus’ sadness at the death of Lazarus or his prediction of Peter’s denial. Similarly, a particular pastoral situation might evoke the story of Ruth and Naomi and an inquiry into what loss has occurred and what possible responses to the sadness might be available. The stories of Jesus in the garden (“Let this cup pass from me” and “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?”) and of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth may speak to fear (scared) and support. The story of Job offers a wide range of encounters with deep emotions.

One of my favorite stories is the one about Bartimaeus. Here the apostles project their fear onto Bartimaeus, saying, “Take heart,” — in effect, asking him to not be afraid. Is there a less scared person in the Scriptures than Bartimaeus? After all, he is shouting, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” This story may be an example of the feeling of being powerful. The woman who engages Jesus at the well also exemplifies the feeling of being powerful. The father of the prodigal son is joyful. Stories of Jesus, his mother, and Paul contain examples of being peaceful even in stressful situations. The point is not to have a list of passages to apply to the ministerial situation under consideration. Instead, supervisor and student allow themselves to freely associate and then examine the biblical passages that occur to them using what they know about feelings as messengers as one way of breaking open the ministerial situation. In the end, the discussion returns to the ministerial situation, and one can ask: “What might God be saying to me in this situation if I attend to my feelings and the messages they contain?”

**Feelings and Relationship**

Finally it is important to acknowledge the role of feelings in relationships. Feelings, including anger, are modes of connection. This is powerfully conveyed by Beverly Wildung Harrison in her article, “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers.” Harrison writes:

> Anger is not the opposite of love. It is better understood as a feeling-signal that all is not well in our relation to other persons or groups or to the world around us. Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring. To put
the point another way: anger is—and it always is—a sign of some resistance in ourselves to the moral quality of the social relations in which we are immersed. Extreme and intense anger signals a deep reaction to the action upon us or toward others to whom we are related. ... Such anger is a signal that change is called for, that transformation in relation is required. 

Harrison goes on to discuss what happens when anger is denied. She explains the substitution of boredom or moralistic self-righteousness for anger, which destroys relationship:

We need to recognize that where the evasion of feeling is widespread, anger does not go away or disappear. Rather, in interpersonal life it masks itself as boredom, ennui, low energy, or it expresses itself in passive-aggressive activity or in moralistic self-righteousness and blaming. Anger denied subverts community. Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. The important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relation, atrophies and dies.

Summary

North American culture often teaches us that thoughts and feelings are dichotomous. The theory of Feelings as Messengers allows one to think about feelings, to attend to the energy present when one’s feelings are engaged and acknowledged. It also invites inquiry into the message implicit in the experienced feelings that gives data about what is needed and what possible responses might be helpful. As applied to others, it goes beyond responding empathetically and moves toward understanding patterns of behavior and new options once those patterns are seen. The theory posits a close connection among the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning and living. It offers a way to become more emotionally competent in exercising self-care and pastoral ministry. Finally, it is more than a technology for pastoral and theological reflection. Embedded in the messages of feelings is the possibility of sustaining and deepening relationships. The messages tell us what we need to know to respond ethically toward others and ourselves.

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This article was published in the Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry, Vol. 25, 2005, pp. 26-43.

1 Evelyn Whitehead and James Whitehead, Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry (New York: Seabury, 1980), 83; George I. Hunter, Supervision and Education-Formation in Ministry (Cambridge, 1982), 89; Doran McCarty, Supervising Theological Students (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1992),
VISIONS is an acronym for Vigorous Interventions In Ongoing Natural Settings. This organization has been conducting anti-racism and multicultural training and consulting for twenty years both in the United States and internationally. More information is available at <www.visions-inc.com>

Killen and deBeer acknowledge that feelings “are our embodied affective and intelligent responses to reality as we encounter it” (Art of Theological Reflection, 27) and that a “feeling response to a situation is potent with meaning, even when we are not able immediately to state it.” The VISIONS model of FAM goes a step further in ascribing specific content to the messages contained in feeling groups and the response that is suggested. For Killen and deBeer, feelings are primarily an intermediary step toward images on the road to insight.

There are four levels of analysis, intervention, and change. The personal level focuses on an individual’s thoughts, feelings, personal values, and beliefs. The interpersonal level looks at conscious and unconscious behaviors. Here it is often important to acknowledge the difference between our intention and the impact the behavior has on others. The institutional or systemic level looks at organizational laws, customs, practices, and procedures (formal and informal). The cultural level focuses on what is handed from one generation to another and particularly on what is judged to be “good, true, and beautiful” and who gets to decide that.

One might also note that many cultures, including Middle Eastern cultures, do not separate intellect and emotions in the way most Western cultures do.

Anger as the legitimate white male emotion is reserved for white men. Here anger is about power (not relationship). That’s why a white boy isn’t yet allowed to feel or express it. When he becomes a man, it will become his right—and of course his trap—since it may be the only emotion he is allowed to express. This dynamic is part of a “both/and” regarding anger. The relational dynamic is treated at the end of the paper.

Self-focus generally refers to speaking in the first person singular when making statements of insight or belief. It is a way of avoiding generalizations such as “people think” or “as everyone knows.”

Supervisors have the power to evaluate a student’s performance, possibly affecting their grade or ordination status. They also have the power to determine what activities a student may participate in and how frequently.

Safety means different things to different people and varies with the context.

14 Underlying this guideline is a theological belief that God created and values diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, and so forth. The guideline merely points to the ethical imperative to recognize, understand, and celebrate what is part of the created or natural order.

15 As a trainer or consultant, I find that when I am genuinely curious about another person’s reasoning, I am more likely to avoid the trap of triggering defensiveness. So I sometimes ask how a person came to think or believe the way they do. If I can elicit a story from a self-focused point of view, I generally learn a great deal about the person, and they, too, often learn why it is that they think what they do and may then see options for thinking or behaving differently.

16 This is where mutuality enters the guidelines, in contrast to domination by the person with more positional power.

17 Neils Bohr said: “The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.” See also David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 52, for a comparison of both/and and either/or conflict.

18 It helps enormously if the culture of the organization is changing because all the parties have been introduced to the guidelines. It is hard to implement both/and thinking, if one party insists on maintaining an attitude of superiority and the “right to be right” with attendant shame and blame and win/lose.

19 Often racism, sexism, and other forms of personal level prejudice are outside my conscious awareness and unintended. Underlying these tense interactions, there is an unconscious attitude of power or privilege, an unconscious learned sense of superiority, which I generally do not intend to manifest. As a speaker, it is important for me to notice the impact that I am having and then inquire of myself what is going on for me when my behaviors have unintended consequences. The theory-in-action analysis of Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, *Theory in Action: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1974), focuses on learning from the unintended consequences of one’s actions.

20 Issues of confidentiality, especially regarding those who are intending to be ordained or certified are very complicated and deserve a more complete treatment. For the sake of learning the FAM theory, it is important to note that there will be a greater likelihood of learning when the issue of confidentiality is thoroughly discussed and agreed upon.

21 Though I have been practicing this theory for about nine years, I attend a monthly day-long supervision groups with two professional consultants to hone my own learning, to see how it is that I am blocking my own learning, and to seek ways to further the learning of the field education supervisors who attend the groups I facilitate.

22 Cf. especially: John 2:12-25 and Mark 11:15-19. NRSV.


26 Mark 10:49b.

27 Mark 10:47.

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Certainly, there are other ways in which God might be speaking. One might get at these by looking at the institutional or cultural levels and asking, for instance, who is benefiting in this situation? Who is left out?
