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Self-Affirming Prejudice and the Abuse of Pastoral Power

Carrie Doehring

> If the other is only appreciated because he or she displays certain characteristics, attributes, or qualities whereby they become interesting for me "to learn from," and because in so doing they confirm and reinforce my identity, then, according to Levinas, we end up in one or the other form of (philosophical-ideological or religious) ethnocentrism and even racism.[1]

Professor Eloise Sangren teaches pastoral care and theology at a university-based seminary with a doctoral program. She is well known in her field of research. Several students want to be her teaching assistant next year. Those who get the chance to work with her will receive detailed letters of reference when they apply for pastoral and faculty positions. She must choose one from among these equally qualified, eager applicants. She finds herself drawn to a young woman who reminds her of herself at that age. Should she think further about her choice, perhaps by talking this over with a colleague?

1. Burggraeve, "Alterity Makes the Difference," 232.

Chaplain Daniel Johnson is part of a teaching team of pastors in a hospital-based clinical pastoral education (CPE) program. He is supervising Seung Lee, a young Korean-American woman who uses Buddhist practices. She brings verbatim accounts of spiritual care conversation with many periods of silence. He confers with the other supervisors about whether her quiet demeanor and accent are inhibiting her as well as patients from getting into conversations. He is frustrated that she seems to agree with everything he says without challenging him. In his training, an important learning component of CPE was the weekly interpersonal groups where conflict was encouraged as a way for students to learn more about themselves and group process. He wants Seung to be more assertive with patients and also with him.

Karen McKenzie is a pastor at Evergreen Presbyterian Church in Aspen, Colorado, an upscale ski resort town in the Rocky Mountains. A member of the young adult group, Sally, has asked to speak with her about a work-related problem with her boss, Mr. Townsend, a prominent real estate agent in Aspen. When they get together Sally tearfully describes how her boss blames her for scheduling and paperwork problems that are his responsibility. Once or twice a week he calls her into his office, shuts the door, and berates her. These tirades seem to be fueled by the alcohol she smells on his breath. These outbursts remind Sally of college experiences with a boyfriend who would become intoxicated at parties and then explode in the car afterwards, accusing Sally of flirting with other men.

Sally tells Pastor McKenzie that she prays each day that her boss will realize he has a problem with alcohol and get help. She wants to be able to forgive him, knowing that he is under a lot of stress because of the economic recession and the stagnant real estate market. If she quit her job she would likely have to leave Aspen, given the scarcity of jobs that pay a living wage.

Hearing about Sally's work experience, Pastor McKenzie feels angry at Sally's boss for making her life miserable. She does not want Sally to put up with her boss's behavior, which she sees as abusive. She is troubled that Sally wants God to help her forgive her boss and that she may be using prayer as a way to endure abuse.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THESE scenarios portray a teacher, chaplain supervisor, and pastor trying to be helpful. There is no overt abuse of power involving coercion, nor is there flagrant transgression of professional codes of conduct. Rather, these scenarios depict the potential for a subtle abuse of power arising from the well-intentioned wish of teachers, supervisors, and pastors

that their students and congregants become like them. This tendency to favor those whose attitudes, values, and beliefs are similar to one's own, to devalue those who are different, and to use one's influence to change others into one's own image are all aspects of self-affirming prejudice.

The purpose of this chapter is to increase awareness of the insidious dynamics of self-affirming prejudice as a potential abuse of pastoral power, understand these dynamics theologically and psychologically, claim core values that reflect existential and religious beliefs, and find ways to put these values into practice in order to counteract self-affirming prejudice in helping relationships. I will elaborate the dynamics of self-affirming prejudice using process theology, social psychological research on prejudice, and intercultural approaches to spiritual care that value alterity, defined as "the irreducible uniqueness of the other."[2] After briefly outlining the concepts or research from these three theoretical perspectives, I will illustrate how these perspectives help me understand self-affirming prejudice.

Before proceeding, I would like to pause in order to describe my context. I teach in a theologically progressive graduate school of theology in the United States that values social justice. Process theology is one of the theological perspectives taught here. It uses a systems perspective that sees all of life, including God, as relationally interconnected. Process theology is a relational theology: hence the term process-relational. Process-relational theology is progressive in its definition of power as a mutual interchange of influence: the ebb and flow of agential and receptive power. Briefly described, agential power guides and influences while receptive power takes in and receives. I argue that the agential power of those in teaching, supervisory, and pastoral roles is usually inflated by social and professional privileges, making it more likely that the pastor's agential power will be unintentionally used in harmful ways to make the care receiver into the pastor's own image.

I highlight the context in which I teach in order to describe how process theology is relevant and meaningful in a progressive theological community, which is oriented around social justice. I encourage readers with more traditional theologies of God's power to use my description of the pastoral relational aspects of power within their theologies. I would not want readers to reject outright my process-relational descriptions of self-affirming prejudice because of theological differences about how God's power is understood. I realize that such theological differences can easily

2. Burggraeve, "Alterity Makes the Difference," 232.

become a distracting stumbling block: hence my efforts at the outset to encourage readers to take what is useful and adapt it to their theology.

Process-relational theology works well with social psychological perspectives on how prejudice arises from human inclinations to see oneself in terms of ingroups and outgroups. Social psychological research demonstrates how religion contributes to and counteracts self-affirming prejudice. These theological and psychological perspectives on self-affirming prejudice provide ways to assess the life-giving and life-limiting qualities of helping relationships and also to articulate values of human dignity and social justice that can be put into practice in order to counteract insidious abuses of power. If teachers, supervisors, and pastors want to enact core values that counteract prejudice, they will need to assume responsibility for maintaining an "other affirming" intertwining of agential and receptive power that creates a relationship of trust, such that a multilayered sense of otherness (intrapsychic, interpersonal, spiritual, and cultural) emerges and is received.

Process theology, along with social psychology, are helpful conversation partners for intercultural spiritual care, which pays attention to religious and social differences within multi-faith settings. After describing this intercultural approach to care, I will suggest and illustrate strategies for monitoring and counteracting self-affirming prejudice in helping relationships using the opening vignettes.

While these three theoretical perspectives—process theology, social psychology, and intercultural spiritual care—are relevant in my context of teaching and spiritual care, they may be less relevant for readers using more traditional or orthodox theologies. I hope that readers will use my vignettes and reflections to help them think about similarities and differences within various contexts of teaching and care-giving, and that readers will feel free to use whatever is relevant to their contexts.

A PROCESS-RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF POWER

From a process-relational perspective the world is "an incredibly vast network of interlocked events. This network is the dynamic and relational web of life into which we are born and in which we live out our lives—for better or worse."[3] A process-relational understanding of existence combines "the

3. Loomer, "Committing Yourself," 257.

ultimacy of process with the primacy of relationships."[4] All of life is seen as interconnected in an organic process of becoming. Everything is constituted through its relationships with everything else.

These relationships are energized by power, defined as an interchange of influence within relational webs: an intertwining of agential and receptive power.[5] Agential power influences, guides, and shapes, while receptive power receives, takes in, and is influenced, guided, and shaped. This bimodal understanding of power can be contrasted with traditional views of unilateral agential power that are part of a hierarchically ordered worldview where power is synonymous with the control and force people use to have power over others.[6] Here power is seen as an individual attribute rather than a quality of relationships. It is located in the person who is in control or in charge.

> As long as one's size and sense of worth are measured by the strength of one's capacity to influence others (and this influence always takes the form of shaping the other in our image), as long as power is associated with the sense of initiative and aggressiveness, and passivity is indicative of weakness or a corresponding lack of power, then the natural and inevitable inequalities in life become wider and deeper.[7]

Within this hierarchical worldview power appears to be unilateral, given inequalities within systems of privilege. When competition is valued, then unilateral power will be valued. People exerting such power are seen as strong, while those without this kind of force are seen as weak.

Pastoral relationships participate in this web of life when there is role-appropriate intertwining of receptive and agential power. When this kind of role-appropriate mutuality is valued, then teachers, supervisors, and pastors will take responsibility for monitoring the ways that their role and social advantages inflate agential power. In order to counteract systemic tendencies to use inflated agential power in abusive ways, pastors must be able to assume intercultural responsibility for putting the other first. Before

4. Loomer, "Process Theology," 245.

5. "The principles of relational power mean that influencing and being influenced are so relationally intertwined that the effort to isolate them as independent factors would constitute an illustration of with one or both of Whitehead's famous two fallacies: that of simple location or that of misplaced concreteness" (Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," 22).

6. Magyar et al., "Sacrilege."

7. Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," 11.

elaborating this intercultural approach, I will review psychological understandings of self-affirming prejudice and religion, commenting on how this research can be interpreted and used within a process-relational worldview.

SELF-AFFIRMING PREJUDICE

Social psychologists have demonstrated how people often use social categories to divide people into two basic social groups: ingroups, of which they are a part, and outgroups, of those identified as different from them. People gain a sense of belonging when they see themselves as part of an ingroup, with its familiar system of roles, rules, norms, values, and beliefs.[8] These social calculations are done using prejudgments or stereotypes linked with aspects of peoples' appearance and identity, like gender and race. Prejudice can affirm one's own group (*self-affirming prejudice* or ingroup favoritism), express hostility or hatred towards a targeted group (*hate prejudice*), or protect one's group from threats (*threat prejudice*).[9]

How does religion contribute to or counteract prejudice? Religion is related to prejudice in a variety of life enhancing, life limiting, and destructive ways. While many social psychologists in the past focused on the ways religion contributes to, rather than counteracts prejudice, "the critical question isn't *whether* religion and spirituality are good or bad [when it comes to prejudice], but *when, how,* and *why* they take constructive or destructive forms."[10] Teachers, supervisors, and pastors are not usually guilty of

8. Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." Cabezón has a pithy description of the ways scholars of religious studies function as an ingroup: "We construct our sense of identity—our uniqueness and our otherness vis-a-vis religion in general, and non-Christian religions in particular—by appealing, for example, to notions like criticality/criticism, theoretical sophistication, methodological rigor (our ability to contextualize, to quantify, etc.), and the ability to be self-reflective and to expose our biases. These are some of the features of the intellectual program that defines us—the traits that we presume to possess and that religion, the religious, and especially the alter-religions/religious lack [as outgroups] . . . What is worrisome is that in creating a sense of identity around these core attributes, we usually do so in an uncritical way that simply presumes that we possess these attributes *in toto* and that they do not. Our sense of identity is therefore fashioned at the expense of the Other, through an implicit denigration of the Other, and specifically through a dogmatic (albeit often implicit) denial of the fact that criticality, theory, and self-awareness are also concerns for religion(s) in general, and for non-Christian religions in particular"(Cabezón, "The Discipline and Its Other," 27–30).

9. Brewer, "The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations."

10. Pargament et al., "Envisioning an Integrated Paradigm."

abusing their power by using religion to justify hate or threat prejudice.[11] Blatant abuse of pastoral power involving religiously linked prejudice is often fuelled by right-wing authoritarianism. As such, it is easy to see how fear-based and hostility-based prejudice uses religion to justify unilateral agential power directed towards outgroups. Self-affirming prejudice is a less obvious and more insidious prejudice. It often involves affirmation of one's ingroup rather than identifying others as part of outgroups through the use of stereotypes. It is often a form of automatic prejudice that shapes relational dynamics outside of awareness.

Self-affirming prejudice, or ingroup bias and favoritism, is defined as the tendency to over-evaluate or favor those whose attitudes, values, and beliefs are similar to one's own. When people invest in social categories meaningful to them—as, for example, when pastors identify themselves as progressive Roman Catholics committed to social justice—they tend to attribute human essence to those who are similar.[12] Conversely, they perceive those in outgroups—in this case, Roman Catholics who reject social justice agendas—as having a less human essence. These dynamics operate in subtle and often unconscious ways.

Social psychologists have recently started using neuroimaging to understand the specific brain mechanisms of unconscious and automatic activation of prejudice, focusing on the amygdala, a part of the brain that responds to the emotional intensity of a stimulus.[13] For example, when Caucasian research participants are shown a series of faces for brief time periods (30 msec) that only allow for subliminal processing, the amygdala is more active when black rather than white faces are shown. When participants have more time (525 msec) to process what they are seeing, their prefrontal cortex becomes active, suggesting that higher-order cog-

11. That said, pastors endorsing right-wing authoritarianism will be more likely to believe that outgroups threaten their ingroup's way of life, as noted by Duckitt, "Differential Effects of Right Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation." Pastors with high ingroup identity and right-wing authoritarian attitudes are susceptible to experiencing symbolic threat to their systems of meaning, as described by Stephan, Ybarro, and Morrison, "Intergroup Threat Theory." As terror management theorists propose, the more an ingroup uses their religious worldview and values to ward off their terror of death, the more aggressively they will challenge outgroups that threaten their world views, sometimes going so far as to experience such groups as evil. This dynamic is described by Greenberg et al., "How Our Dreams of Death Transcendence Breed Prejudice."

12. Demoulin et al., "The Role of Ingroup Identification in Infra-Humanization."

13. Amodio and Lieberman, "Pictures in Our Heads."

nitive processing is engaged. In other words, they become aware of their prejudgments and can think about them.

Guilt can play a positive role in motivating people to counteract prejudice. In a complex study,[14] research participants were told that their neurological responses to a multiracial series of faces were "anti-Black." Those who reported feeling guilty about these responses were subsequently more likely to go out of their way to talk with a Black member of the research team. The authors speculated that guilt is a complex social emotion that can play a dynamic role in motivating people to counteract prejudice.

Neuroimaging research suggests that the more the amygdala is activated by an intensely charged stimulus, the more self-affirming prejudice will shape power dynamics, often in unconscious ways. Pastors who track their internal reactions to relational dynamics are more able to be aware of emotionally charged needs that others become like them. Similar to the research participants who went out of their way to counteract prejudice because their values made them feel guilty about being prejudiced, pastors can think through their beliefs and values about self-affirming prejudice and become intrinsically motivated to counteract such prejudice. They will not be able to eliminate self-affirming prejudice because of the ways they automatically use social categories and react in emotionally charged ways. They will be able to counteract these urges if they learn to recognize them, think through what values they want to enact, and in this process become intrinsically motivated[15] to put these values into practice in how they relate to others.

14. Amodio et al., "A Dynamic Model of Guilt Implications."

15. Intrinsic motivation comes from within people who want to live out their egalitarian or humanitarian values; extrinsic motivation comes from the desire to conform to societal expectations by not appearing prejudiced. In one research study, those with high internal motivation to live out egalitarian values showed very little stereotype activation compared with those who lacked such values and goals. See Moskowitz et al., "Preconscious Control of Stereotype Activation." Devine, Brodish, and Vance describe such people as *Strategics* in that they are most concerned with using strategies that conceal prejudice. *Strivers* are internally motivated people who strive to overcome prejudice and accumulate skills that help them continuously live out their humanitarian values. See Devine et al., "Self-Regulatory Processes in Interracial Interactions."

Illustrating the Dynamics of Self-Affirming Prejudice

When Professor Sangren considers the students who have applied to be her teaching assistant, she is drawn to a young woman who reminds her of herself when she was a graduate student. These memories are emotionally charged because she struggled to find a member of the all-male faculty willing to advise her. Even though it is more of an even playing field now for men and women in graduate studies, her memories may create social categories: ingroups of young women students and outgroups of male faculty and students. While seeing herself as an ally of women students could have benefits, the liability is that she may impose values and meanings on female students that are as limiting as the imposition of patriarchal values that stifled her as a graduate student.

CPE supervisor Chaplain Johnson becomes agitated when he perceives Seung as rejecting the kind of formation he experienced in CPE where intense interpersonal group process encouraged confrontation. He would never consciously describe Seung as having a lesser human essence. However, in his emotionally charged reactions, he may perceive her as limited in terms of the core human capacities that he values: namely, self-actualization through confrontation. If he is conscious of these dynamics and wants to counteract prejudice because it goes against his core values, he will need to think carefully about the goals of supervision and the process of reaching these goals. If he were to use the intercultural approach I describe in the next section, he would be likely to reconsider his cherished values of growth through self-assertion and confrontation. Is he imposing these values on Seung? If he were to value Seung for herself, and appreciate the mystery of who she is, might they together construct goals and a process of change that honors this mystery?

As an older female minister, Pastor McKenzie has seen and experienced sexual harassment and the ways women, in her assessment, sometimes use religion in life-limiting theological and psychological ways to cope with abuse. These are emotionally charged issues for her. Much as she wants to empower Sally, she will be tempted to use power in unilateral ways, especially if she sees Sally as a younger version of herself. She may even see women like Sally as having a less than human female essence when they use religion to endure abuse. While her pastoral care focus is on Sally, her reactions to Sally's boss may also get in the way of pastoral care if she experiences hate prejudice towards him, seeing him only in terms of his alcohol abuse and bullying behavior. Her emotionally charged reactions

will activate prejudice, which may in turn tempt her to use agential power in unilateral ways to try and achieve justice for Sally. If she is aware of these dynamics, Pastor McKenzie can consider more carefully how to monitor prejudice and live out values of justice in the ways she relates to Sally and her boss.

IDENTIFYING VALUES THAT MOTIVATE PASTORS TO COUNTERACT PREJUDICE

Process-relational theology provides a dynamic systemic way of understanding power dynamics in helping and mentoring relationships that complements psychological understandings of both the problem of prejudice and strategies for counteracting self-affirming prejudice. This theological approach also helps pastors to articulate values about relational justice and suggests ways to monitor power dynamics in order to counteract prejudice. What values might come to light in this theological and psychological exploration of self-affirming prejudice? Process theologian Bernard Loomer says that the exercise of power must operate with an appreciation for each person's uniqueness ("the conditioning contexts, histories, psychological dynamics and relationships, which largely determine what we most concretely are"). He goes on to say that:

> To do otherwise is to relate to each other inadequately in terms of abstract classes, or stereotypes, or groups looked at in a cross-sectional manner without reference to their peculiar histories. In this fashion we fail to deal with the inexhaustible and variegated richness, the confusing complexity, and the omnipresent and intertwined ambiguities present in the concreteness of individual and group life . . . Power, to be creative and not destructive, must be inextricably related to the ambiguous, contradictory, and baffling character of concrete existence.[16]

In this chapter I use a process-relational understanding of power to illustrate how to construct a theological rationale for valuing alterity and social justice, which motivates pastors to identify and counteract self-affirming prejudice. Ideally, pastors will want to construct theological values that fit their beliefs and practices. They may find that process-relational theology is congruent with their belief system, or they may wish to construct

16. Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," 24–25.

a theological understanding that is more relevant and meaningful within their worldview and beliefs.

I want to be clear that I am not proposing a universally true process-relational theology of self-affirming prejudice that is applicable to all religious traditions and faith perspectives. While this process-relational theology can be translated into Christian, Jewish, and non-theistic traditions like Buddhism, it is presented here as a contextual theology for those with a quest orientation to religious beliefs that espouses conditional rather than absolute views of religious truth.[17] Those with more traditional theistic theologies who view religious truth as absolute may agree with my psychological description of self-affirming prejudice, but will likely want to support and elaborate this psychological understanding using more traditional theologies, especially those involving an all-powerful theism. As I noted at the outset, the purpose of this chapter is to increase awareness of the insidious dynamics of self-affirming prejudice, understand these dynamics theologically and psychologically, claim core values that reflect existential and religious beliefs, and find ways to put these values into practice in order to counteract self-affirming prejudice in helping relationships. Readers are encouraged to find theologically meaningful ways of understanding and counteracting self-affirming prejudice. I use process-relational theology as one way among many to understand self-affirming prejudice. In the next section I offer an intercultural approach to spiritual care that counteracts self-affirming prejudice and abuses of pastoral power.

INTERCULTURAL SPIRITUAL CARE

Intercultural care takes into account the multilayered relationships between persons, which include the various familial, organizational, and cultural systems in which they are embedded. In its most literal sense, intercultural

17. There is considerable psychological research on the relationships between psychological attitudes towards religious truth, like the quest orientation, and a fundamentalist religious orientation. A major finding is that when right wing authoritarianism (RWA is defined as submission, aggression, and conventionalism in response to authorities) is part of a fundamentalist orientation, this orientation correlates positively with various kinds of prejudice. See Altemeyer and Hunsberger, "Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice"; Altemeyer, "Why Do Religious Fundamentalists Tend to Be Prejudiced?"; McCleary et al., "Meta-Analysis of Correlational Relationships between Perspectives of Truth in Religion and Major Psychological Constructs." Fundamentalism without RWA usually is not correlated with prejudice. Quest is usually negatively correlated with prejudice.

care is a term used to describe helping relationships between those from different countries. In a broader sense, it can be used to describe the way all helping relationships negotiate power dynamics that arise from various kinds of differences. I prefer the term intercultural rather than multicultural or cross cultural because of its emphasis on relational dynamics that have to do with power and alterity or radical otherness. The prefix "multi" in the term multicultural usually suggests a tolerant co-existence of many or diverse cultures without attention to power dynamics that afford or deny social privilege.[18]

In this chapter I sketch an intercultural approach to spiritual care that draws upon process-relational theology and the relational ethics of Emmanuel Levinas.[19] I will rely on the writing of Roger Burggraeve who lucidly details Levinas's ethic of responsibility toward the other, a term used to describe the "insurmountable irreducibility of alterity."[20] Levinas underlines the "natural" way that the ego survives by continually integrating "the other into its project of existing as a function, means, or meaning."[21] Human beings are culturally conditioned to use agential power to serve the interests of the ego and not the other. This propensity toward self-interest and self-affirmation seems to be part of the fabric of life, especially when life is a seen as a matter of survival. In this dog-eat-dog relational system, the fittest are those who enlist agential power in order to survive.[22]

Levinas proposes a different way of relating: putting the other first by "holding back"[23] or restraining self-interest and all of the automatic ways we put ourselves first. In order to counteract the value of survival so embedded in hierarchical relational systems, one must receive the other unconditionally. Receiving others unconditionally is radically countercultural. It is:

18. For an elaboration of the nuanced meanings of intercultural, multicultural, and cross cultural, see Lartey, *In Living Color*.

19. For an elaboration of how Levinas's relational ethics radically changes understandings of the client and the process of psychotherapy, see Dueck and Parsons, "Ethics, Alterity, and Psychotherapy."

20. Burggraeve, "Violence and the Vulnerable Face of the Other," 30.

21. Ibid.

22. Human beings clearly have the capacity to be empathic. See, for example, discussions about neuroscience research on mirror neurons that are part of empathy, summarized by Hogue, "Brain Matters." Levinas helps us appreciate how easily self-interest dominates, eclipsing empathy, especially when people are using social categories to align themselves with ingroups and experience outgroups as threats.

23. Burggraeve, "Violence and the Vulnerable Face of the Other," 32.

> . . . not at all a self-evident, "natural" idea that would emerge spontaneously in our everyday struggles. It is anything but self-evident. On the contrary, it establishes an "inverted order," an *Umwertung aller Werte* [a revaluation of all values], for it is possible only as a radical transgression of our "ordinary striving" . . .[24]

Process-relational theology can be used to understand what Levinas is saying about the quality of other-oriented relationships. Self-interest and survival automatically inflate agential power and eclipse receptive power. We have become accustomed to our relationships being infused and limited by these survivalist values. When we put the other first unconditionally we invert this seemingly natural way of relating. A new way of relating opens up: relational mutuality and reciprocity that is not possible when survival is the be all and end all of life. According to Levinas, we choose life when we choose unconditional receptivity that fosters webs of life shaped by reciprocity and mutuality. We choose death when we opt for the survival of the fittest, a value that fosters relational webs where agential power dominates.

How is putting the self first and valuing survival of the fittest destructive? Is survival not the most basic requirement of life? When we put ourselves first we "reduce the other to the same"; this relational dynamic fosters various kinds of moral evil, which Burggraeve lists in ascending order starting with self-affirmation/other disregard, progressing to tyranny, and escalating to murder and racism.[25] In a process-relational worldview, these kinds of evil are part of relational webs where power is used in unilateral ways that dehumanize others. James Poling writes eloquently about such relational webs: "The construction of evil systems [personal, social, and religious] requires the cooperation of many people in many ways through countless decisions to ignore the possible consequences for those who are vulnerable."[26] Similarly, Catherine Keller states:

> When we misuse the power that flows between us, when in our need and greed we collectively warp the very channels of that energy, the abuse of power becomes a disease that perpetuates itself "unto the seventh generation" . . . The violative influence infects the whole system: interpersonal, intrapersonal, transpersonal.[27]

24. Ibid., 35.
25. Ibid., 35–37.
26. Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 135.
27. Keller, *On the Mystery*, 80.

Levinas invokes the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" in order to cast in high relief the choice between life (putting the other first) and death (putting the self first). This radical imperative is meant to stop us in our tracks and make us reconsider every minute choice we make in the course of our daily lives. Within interconnected relational webs, putting the other first within one relational web may well generate ripple effects that seem denying alterity within other relationships. Choosing life by putting the other first is complex and ambiguous, especially when "evil is a chameleon that maintains itself by remaining intertwined with the good and masking itself as good."[28]

How can this radical ethic of putting the other first be practiced within a process-relational worldview that values mutuality and the intertwining of agential and receptive power? At first glance, it may seem that Levinas is advocating that teacher, supervisors, and pastors abdicate agential power in favor of receptive power. This is problematic for those in professional roles who need to use agential power in order to monitor contracts of care and practice within professional ethical codes. When there is role appropriate intertwining of agential and receptive power within asymmetrical helping relationships, those in positions of trust will use agential power to monitor power dynamics. They will shift into receptive power in order to receive the other, not to meet their own needs. As they move with the other in a dance where agential and receptive power is shared, this role appropriate mutuality will be oriented toward putting the other first.

Putting the other first in intercultural care begins with monitoring the ways that social privileges shape religiously oriented helping relationships, making it insidiously easy for teachers, supervisors, and pastors to impose their religious or spiritual beliefs and values on those seeking care. For example, when Christians do not think critically about how they are comparing their tradition to others, they risk subsuming the other's idiosyncratic values, beliefs, and spiritual practices within their own. Many comparative approaches to religion used by Christians search for similarities with various religions of the world. This search for similarities replicates the historical ways that Christians in various contexts have interpreted religions of the world through the lens of Christianity. Think, for example, of the frequently used metaphor that all religions of the world are like separate paths culminating in the same mountaintop experience of a singular transcendent reality, or the metaphor of sight-impaired persons clustered around an

28. Poling, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 119.

elephant, each declaring the part they touch as representing the whole. The mountain top and elephant represent a singular transcendent being.[29] The search for similarities is a search for one God who, historically, has been the Christian God found lurking in what is thought to be the deep grammar at the core of all religions.[30]

Searching for similarities is, in fact, a way of obliterating alterity; as such, it is at odds with the basic premise of intercultural spiritual care that puts the other first. "No interreligious encounter and learning is possible without a fundamental ethical respect for the irreducible and unique alterity of the other that transcends all belonging to a 'reducing genre' or kind."[31] A process-relational understanding of power abuses in spiritual care relationships takes into account the broader cultural context of postcolonialism, which may at first seem like a distal rather than proximal context for understanding pastoral abuses of power. A process-relational worldview, with its appreciation for parallel processes between helping relationships and larger cultural systems of privilege, helps us appreciate echoes of colonialism in religiously self-affirming prejudice: "If we repress our colonial and neocolonial histories, they will come back to haunt us all the more."[32]

In the second vignette, the supervisor is certainly not blatantly guilty of wanting Seung as a Buddhist to emulate Christian practices. In fact, his initial calling to chaplaincy was shaped by a rejection of classical approaches to Christian pastoral care that sought to save souls by converting others to Christian beliefs. As a chaplain-in-training he embraced a clinical approach to pastoral care that emulated the person-centered unconditional acceptance of psychotherapist Carl Rogers. His experience of interpersonal group process was part of his self-actualization that left behind the life-limiting moralism he associated with classical pastoral care. Ironically, with Seung he risks becoming a missionary for the kind of CPE transformative

29. Prothero, *God Is Not One*.

30. Historian of religion Bruce Lincoln describes how minimalist definitions of religion have been used as a lens to understand all religions of the world. He builds upon the radical critique of Geertz's definition of religion made by Asad (See Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.) "Geertz unwittingly normalized features of his own (necessarily parochial) cultural/religious background . . . Geertz's error, [Asad] argues, was not simply the product of some individual failing, but a specific manifestation of problems inherent to the project," as Lincoln notes. See Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 1.

31. Burggraeve, "Alterity Makes the Difference," 237.

32. Rieger, "Theology and Mission between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism," 202.

process and values that "saved" him. How can he put Seung first and appreciate what is unique and idiosyncratic about her beliefs, values, and practices?

Besides restraining the impulse to search for similarities, teachers, supervisors, and pastors need to restrain the impulse to put the self first in how they use knowledge. Given the ways that their professional status inflates legitimate, expert, information, and reference power,[33] they need to consider whether knowledge is being used in the service of self or the other. Levinas highlights the alliance of rationalism with social and professional privilege when he describes "the political character of all logical rationalism" as an "alliance of logic with politics."[34] The more that agential power is inflated by social and professional privilege, the greater the danger of knowledge being used in ways that eclipse the mystery of the other.[35] Agential abuse of psychological and theological knowledge "will no longer leave the other in its otherness but always include it in its whole . . . From this stems the inability to recognize the other person as other person, as outside all calculation, as neighbor, as first come."[36]

Agential power is necessary in order to negotiate the parameters of helping relationships that put the other first in ways that protect the other from harm. Receptive power on its own is dangerous when those in helping

33. French and Raven, "The Bases of Social Power." French and Raven define social power as the ability to influence another person in a given setting.

34. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 171.

35. For example, envisioning empathy as standing in the other's shoes and seeing the world from the other's perspective is problematic because of the impossibility of leaving our own perspective behind. As Iris Marion Young notes, "When this rough and ready appeal to look at issues from the point of view of others is systematized into a moral theory, however, problems may arise. In her elaboration and revision of Habermas's theory of communicative ethics, Seyla Benhabib performs one such systematization. She conceptualizes moral respect as a relation of symmetry between self and other, and thinks of moral reciprocity as entailing that the perspectives of self and other are reversible. I agree with Benhabib's overall project of elaborating a communicative ethics that recognizes difference and particularity. I argue in this essay, however, that identifying moral respect with a reversibility and symmetry of perspectives impedes that project. It is neither possible nor morally desirable for persons engaged in moral interaction to adopt one another's standpoint. I develop a concept of asymmetrical reciprocity as an alternative to this notion of symmetrical reciprocity developed by Benhabib. A communicative ethics should develop an account of the non-substitutable relation of moral subjects. Each participant in a communication situation is distinguished by a particular history and social position that makes their relation asymmetrical." (Young, "Asymmetrical Reciprocity," 340–41.)

36. Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," 35.

roles neglect their professional responsibility for monitoring the contract of care and assessing various kinds of risks. In order for trust to grow within helping and mentoring relationships, agential and receptive power need to be intertwined, sometimes in seemingly paradoxical ways:[37]

> The other stands in a position over me because the other is that person who pulls me out of myself, which effects transcendence. The other stands above me as the only one who offers an alternative to dwelling within the labyrinthine circuits of my own interiority.[38]

This paradoxical intertwining of agential and receptive power allows those in helping relationships to enter into the experience of the immediacy of the "strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and possessions,"[39] such that "the absolutely foreign [aspects of those seeking care] can instruct us."[40]

> It is in this moment that the other is, or can be, before me in and of herself. Levinas describes this moment as coming into contact with the *face of the other* . . . The face is a living, naked presence . . . This immediate moment of coming into contact with the face is a moment of transcendence, a kind of deliverance, if you will, from the ordinary structures of being.[41]

How can those in helping relationships emulate this other affirming intertwining of agential and receptive power that creates a relationship of trust, such that a multilayered sense of otherness (intrapsychic, interpersonal, spiritual, and cultural) comes into being and is received?

37. "Optimal relational trust encompasses a dynamic bimodal exchange of influence; we participate in optimal relational trust not only by receiving trust, but also through offering and building trust. As pastoral providers we must learn not only to become, in the words of Karen Lebacqz, 'trustworthy trustees,' but also to become humble and courageous in offering and developing trust as we participate in the work of the covenant: doing justice and loving mercy." (Morgan, "Burdens of Disclosure," 174.)

38. Diedrich et al., "A Dialogue between the Thought of Joan Tronto and Emmanuel Levinas," 50.

39. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 143.

40. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, 207.

41. Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," 42–43. "The face of the other is the discrete but imperative word that affects me and appeals to me neither to use force nor to misuse, violate, totalize, hate or destroy the other: 'Thou shalt not kill.'" (Boileau, "The Wisdom of Love," 18.)

What does this look like in the practice of care? I would like to suggest several strategies.

STRATEGIES

In order to counteract this insidious tendency toward self-affirming prejudice, pastors need to become more conscious of how their values shape their judgments of others. Two strategies help pastors monitor self-affirming prejudice. First, pastors can reflect on the values formed in the relational matrices of their childhood, young adulthood, and adulthood in order to monitor embedded values from childhood that may still influence their judgment of others. Clarifying values will help them become conscious of when they are imposing their embedded values on others. The second strategy is to pay attention to jarring moments when their values seem to clash with the values of others. The emotional charge of these jarring moments signals that something is going on below the surface: values held dear seem to be threatened. Recognizing emotionally charged moments when values seem to clash with the other's gives pastors a choice: they can either respond in automatic ways by imposing their values on others, or they can intentionally hold back on using agential power and put the other first.

What if Pastor McKenzie were to go through this self-reflective process as soon as she realized that her sense of urgency to intervene was emotionally charged? She could reflect on childhood values that made her feel responsible for the suffering in her parents' conflicted marriage. She might remember her childhood experience of worshipping together as a family and praying that the appearance of family solidarity at church would change the family dynamics at home, where her parents fought in demeaning ways that left everyone miserable. She might remember looking at Jesus on the cross and Mary sorrowing beside him, and thinking that if God could make her good enough, it might restore peace at home. As a young adult she rejected these childhood hopes, realizing that her parents were responsible for doing something about their relationship; this was not her or even God's responsibility. At this stage in her life, she was angry that her childhood beliefs made her carry the emotional burden of worrying about her family. These experiences shaped her feminist beliefs and her calling to ministry.

Now, listening to Sally, she imagines that Sally is trying to cope in the same way she did as a child. This interpretation is emotionally charged for Pastor McKenzie, who wants Sally to reject this way of coping and stand up for herself. By exploring the ways Sally's story reminds her of her childhood beliefs, values, and practices, Pastor McKenzie will be more able to put Sally first and see Sally for who she is.

Chaplain Johnson could benefit from the same exploration. Raised in a strict Lutheran home, he internalized a life-limiting moral way of understanding suffering as a consequence of personal sin. He went to a denominational college in order to prepare for ministry, having experienced a call during an intense church retreat as a teenager. At college his difficulties with anxiety increased, and he was referred to a compassionate psychiatrist. Medication and psychotherapy helped Chaplain Johnson experience a sense of God's goodness and forgiveness. His first CPE supervisor became his mentor. Chaplain Johnson found the interpersonal group process, especially the freedom to get in touch with anger and express it in constructive ways, very liberating.

Now he finds it jarring when Seung sits quietly at the beginning of their supervision time. He remembers how hard it was for him to be in charge of his own supervision when he was first an intern. Remembering his own journey makes him realize how different his vocational development is from Seung Lee's. This jarring moment signals that he is expecting her to be like him. If he can pay attention to this moment, sit with it, and not impose his own values on Seung, he may be able to find ways to put her first. He could try to use his own spiritual practices to hold back from using his agential power. He might, for example, center himself through prayer in order to be fully present in the moment to whatever may emerge. Putting Seung first could be very unsettling, especially if he has developed a ritualized way of doing supervision that interns quickly pick up, as they emulate his goals and the supervisory process he values. Such reflections may lead Chaplain Johnson to realize that Seung is not actually being passive and accommodating. By putting her first and having her take the lead, Chaplain Johnson can receive the gift of not knowing what will unfold.

> Through pastoral encounter with others, participants will experience the paradox of familiarity and otherness which situates them within, and draws them beyond, the present and immediate. Can we regard authentic pastoral practice, therefore, as that which draws us into encounter with the "Other," towards a deeper

> understanding of our own identity-in-relation? The process of going beyond the situated and concrete in the encounter with the Other may also serve as a metaphor for the human experience of the transcendent. It speaks of an encounter with transcendence and authentic faith occurring at the very point of loss of certainty and self-possession: divine activity and presence encountered in the mystery of alterity.[42]

CONCLUSION

Process-relational theology, with its distinctions between unilateral individual power and mutual relational power, provides a psycho-systems way of understanding self-affirming prejudice. The relational ethics of Levinas puts in place an ethical framework for plumbing the life-limiting and destructive potential of self-affirming prejudice within hierarchal relational systems that value individual survival and control. In order to counteract self-affirming prejudice and the inevitable inflation of pastoral power through social and organizational privileges, teachers, chaplains, supervisors, and pastors can enact Levinas's ethic of putting the other first. Equipped with strategies for identifying and exploring moments that are emotionally charged and jarring for them, they will be ready to encounter alterity. After ensuring that an appropriate contract of mentoring, supervision, or pastoral care is in place, these intrepid teachers, chaplains, and pastors can enter into the unknown of receiving the mystery of the other. The stage is set and the curtain rises. When the other senses that his or her alterity will be honored and valued, then the other will go first and a dance will unfold.

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42. Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 206–7.

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