

**Abstracts Expert Seminar: 'Soft Shepherd or Almighty Pastor:
Power (im)balances in PastoralCare' (Leuven, 5-7 January)**



'His Almighty Power' © Rhonda Meyers; USA

On Michel Foucaults Term 'Pastoral Power'

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1. As a recently widely discussed outcome of his "Genealogy of knowledge" Michel Foucault introduced the term 'pastoral power' into actual philosophical discourse on 'power'. Though the theological reception of Foucaults *Genealogy of pastoral power* and a clash with his reconstruction of that term from the semitic environment of the bible is still to come.

2. Even if the 'shepherd-herd'-metaphor was transported and assimilated to occidental culture by Christianity: Foucaults notion is not primarily related to religious-ecclesiastical contexts, but to political: 'pastoral power' in a first sense means a specific type of political power.

3. Its characteristic insists in the fact, that 'pastoral power' on a first view does not appear in a classical type of power (role-related, hierarchical etc.), but e.g. in forms of care or generosity (e.g. the manager of a company). On its reverse there are latent expectations of loyalty as well as subtle control, of which one is aware only later on. Therefore one might name that as "soft pastoral power" (s. H. Steinkamp, *Die sanfte Macht der Hirten*, Mainz 1999).

4. The notions of this type of power apparently relates to the Archetypus of The Shepherd (and his sheep): the good shepherd in the Old Testament psalms and in the New Testament (especially the gospel of John) 'knows' his sheep and he guides and cares for them. And he takes care that no one of them gets lost (→ the dual of caring and controlling).

5. According (but in a secondary meaning) to this Archetypus ecclesiastical practices and customs until today are shaped by the 'shepherd-sheep'- image: Up to now it is named as 'Pastoral' and nobody remembers its background and implications.

6. The most problematic shadow-aspect of the 'shepherd-sheep'-metaphor concerns the relationship between shepherd and sheep, which is a subject-object relation. This results into a growing ambivalence inside a great number of members of the church, who are at the same time members of democratic societies, trade unions, clubs etc. where they experience other interaction patterns with authorities and elected leaders. Living in two different social climates leads, for more and more of them, to 'cognitive dissonance': they try to escape by choosing one of the two alternatives. (Those who remain tend to fundamentalistic thinking; those who leave, tend to critical behavior or aggressive feelings onto church..

7. Shepherds (pastors) 'know what sheeps need', without asking them. They were given their responsibility to care for 'their sheep' by God, not by subordinates (e.g. contract, approval). (Foucaults diction: 'subjugates')

8. Within the social climate of 'Pastoral power' develop either religious individualists or 'herd-animals', but not: subjects! The consciousness is dominated by the idea that each member of the parish has a specific relationship to the pastor, which is more important to him than his relationship to the other members of the parish. These are interrelated with each other by the idea of ('His') 'herd'.

9. Different to his early scepticism concerning the emphatic modern notion of the human subject (french: *le sujet*, the 'subjugated') the late Foucault developed - arguing with the classical *epimeleia*-practice - a very ambitious, idealistic notion of the human subject as a nucleus of autonomy. That idea is attentively perceived in contexts of professional care and counseling during the past decade.

10. As long as a critical examination of the 'Pastoral' tradition is yet to come, a practical-theological reference (only) to the late Foucault might be suspected as being ideologic. The tention between *sujet* and *subject* remains a helpful orientations of a critical theory of ecclesiastical (pastoral) practice.

A Specific Tension to the Pastoral Care of Diocesan Priests. Reflexion Starting from an Empirical Research in French-Speaking Belgium

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Since the Sixties, the progressive disappearance of Christendom (like social model) and the recent changes affecting Christianity upset the identity of diocesan priests. The newest phenomenon is the multiplication of perceptions on what is the priest among the lay people and within the clergy. Starting from a research undertaken in 2010 in the diocese of Namur, increased by contributions of other studies undertaken since 2006 in two other dioceses, I propose here a typology of the pastoral ministry of the French-speaking diocesan priests today. A generalization of this analysis could be considered. It could be summarized by the forward setting of specific tensions to the clergy engaged into territorial pastoral care by this report: the same priest achieves several types of basically and theologically different ministries.

Self-Affirming Prejudice and the Abuse of Pastoral Power

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Pastors often invest deeply in helping relationships. The values that propel pastors to help others can easily become a lens through which others are judged in life-limiting ways, contributing to an insidious form of prejudice and abuse of power. In-group bias or favoritism is 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. Conversely, they often perceive those in out-groups—in this case, Roman Catholics who reject social justice agendas—as having a less human essence. This value-laden in-group bias leads to infra-humanization: a form of depersonalization of the other that is on a continuum with dehumanization.

A process theology of power as an exchange of influence within relational webs can be used to describe how in-group favoritism predisposes pastors to abuse power in subtle ways, by seeing those with differing values as less than human, and using their influence to convert others to their value system. Pastors offering care in religiously diverse settings, like hospice and health care organizations, will likely not use a classic approach to pastoral care that saves souls through conversion to orthodox beliefs. However, they may favor a clinical approach that seeks holistic healing as a secular form of salvation. In their care of people experiencing health crises or facing death pastors may try to use their pastoral power to influence them to pursue holistic healing, self actualization, and end-of-life reconciliation.

By intentionally embracing an intercultural approach to pastoral and spiritual care, pastors will be suspicious of their need for shared attitudes, beliefs, and values, adopting a hermeneutic of searching for differences in order to appreciate the alterity or otherness of those seeking care. Emmanuel Levinas provides a rationale for this hermeneutic of suspicion and searching. Levinas's ethical imperative "Thou shalt not kill" functions as a dramatic faith claim and practice at the heart of intercultural pastoral and spiritual care, making pastors continually aware of how easily they abuse their pastoral power when they look for similar values, favor those like themselves, and use their pastoral power to influence those whose values differ.

When God is understood as Other, then otherness in human beings is experienced as a sacred life-giving dimension of relational webs. Conversely, care that erases otherness in favor of similarities participates in the desecration of the other and is part of life-limiting, and even violent and dehumanizing, relational webs. In order to counteract this insidious tendency toward self-affirming prejudice, pastors need to be conscious of how their values shape their judgments of others. By paying attention to jarring moments when their values clash with the values of those seeking care, pastors can be alert for self-affirming prejudice when pastoral power is easily abused, and, conversely, for epiphanies of Otherness when power is a creative life-giving exchange of influence.

Fear and Betrayal in the Face of Clergy Misconduct in the U.S.

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Clergy misconduct often involving sexual abuse of children or adults is a fact of life now openly discussed in society and the media. Reports of minimization, denial, incompetence and corruption in response to disclosures of clergy misconduct are also commonplace. Why do faith communities and institutions continue to struggle in response to credible complaints and continue to make choices which exacerbate the pain of victims and further betray their trust?

Following a brief history of clergy misconduct in the U.S., this paper will examine the contradictions between the expressed values of faith communities and their public actions in response to clergy misconduct. What agendas are operating here? What are the structural realities which appear to shape the responses? Is there a capacity for justice-making as a means towards healing? How does an institution's fear of its own people result in its inability to act in its own best interest?

A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Dealing Honestly with Pastoral Power

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The image of the “soft and gentle shepherd” harbors more dangers for the abuse of power than the “almighty pastor” because it disguises the power pastors hold over congregants. Rather than eliding this power asymmetry (thus hiding the other aims that may be operating under the surface), I argue that we must accept both the power difference and the intense emotions and desires that can accompany it. Only if we acknowledge these dynamics honestly can we channel power in constructive ways. My analysis draws upon Pamela Cooper-White’s work in pastoral counseling, as well as sources in philosophy, theology, and other fields. Parallels with parenting will be developed; the distinction between persons and institutional roles will be raised but not resolved.

I will argue that, thanks in part to ongoing differences in age and maturity, equality of power and wisdom is an ideal that can never be realized in the world we know. Pastoral care relationships in particular exist because a vulnerable person, however powerful in other arenas of life, feels lacking in some area where the pastor is presumed to possess greater wisdom. Even when the relationship empowers the congregant, he is permanently indebted and therefore less powerful in that relationship. Therefore, strict equality is an inappropriate goal and an even more impossible condition for pastoral relationships. We must learn how to deal justly with unequal power.

Second, thanks to the way we must parent children, we will always tend to eroticize power differences. Here, I mean eroticism in the classical sense: Power differences cultivate feelings of desire, yearning, protection, and attachment. I argue that although we should work actively against the sexualization of inequality, we must accept the eroticization of inequality. For instance, beyond the classical dynamics of transference, pastoral relationships tend to generate deep anticipation and joy on the part of the pastor for the sake of possibilities to be realized by the congregant, and equally strong admiration and gratitude on the part of the congregant for the pastor’s care and wisdom. In addition, pastors are often grateful to congregants for personal and professional insights gained in the course of counseling. These intense emotional bonds arise out of the structured inequality of the relationship and so, again, must be acknowledged and managed rather than denied or eradicated.

My thesis is that, unacknowledged, these feelings and desires lead to subtle abuses of power excused through other rationales, and often to sexual involvement. In the West, for example, pastors often cultivate spiritual and emotional sensibilities in people with “practical” orientations. This approach opens the intimate pastoral relationship to abuse, as the pastor elicits emotional responses in the congregant. Pastors often attempt to create emotional comfort by claiming to be the congregants’ equals, in part to model vulnerability. This strategy compounds the problem by hiding pastoral power from both pastor and congregant.

In short, pastors must never deny their power over congregants. Rather, they must remain conscious of their power, and they must recognize, describe, acknowledge, and harness desire in restrained ways that empower the other appropriately.

Body and Soul

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Theme in general

1. In view of a local minister in a protestant church of Calvinistic denomination I firstly draw his/her position from the background of the churchly structures in which the leadership of the church community is embedded.
2. Based on empirical research in concrete situations of ministers, accused of sexual abuse, I will look for power imbalances (strong and weak moments) in the leadership structure.
3. Following point 1 and 2: Where should in a situation like this pastoral attention be necessary; and in what direction should pastoral attention reach out in order to overcome the power imbalances.
4. To make my contribution concrete I will focus on the United Protestant Church in Belgium and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.
5. If I decide to choose the title above ('Body and soul'), it will have a plural meaning by referring to the community as 'Body of Christ' and the soul of the community and of its people, in need for care and protection.

Global plan

As far as I can see now, I reserved the month of August to do this, I will work this out in the following way

- 1 In the history of the church different types of churchly structures were developed. According to Lindner we can distinguish into four types. The protestant churches, in particular the churches of Calvinistic denominations, will be drawn with regard to the other three types and will be characterized as presbyterial-synodal. It means, shortly, that the leadership structure is based on representative leadership. ('Bottom – up' in stead of 'top-down'.)

On a local level it means that the local church council, which members are chosen by the members of the parish, is called to lead. The minister, also called by the members of the parish, is in principle one of them. Mostly he/she is the chairman of the council and in that position he/she is not only in the centre of management, but also in the centre of the local leadership structure.
2. Along with this normative structure in an ecclesiastical point of view, I will examine empirical material from the question, what happens if the minister is accused of sexual abuse. How functions the council and how the minister? Which of them has what kind of power in this situation? How do they use it and what is the effect in a concrete situation? Certainly this depends also on the character, the personality of a minister and of his realization in what kind of situation he finds himself. So here also are also psychological elements to consider.
3. From point 1 and 2 I hope to learn:
 - how we can find points of attention in the leading structure of the church which can cause imbalances in pastoral attention and care.
 - how to prevent power imbalances in situations like this.
 - in what way pastoral attention and pastoral care should be paid to the various people and

to local institutions and to the community as such in order to empower them.

We will make a connection here with instructions some churches already made.

The Meaning of Informed Consent in Pastoral Counselling

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This paper investigates the meaning of informed consent in pastoral counselling. Its perspective is determined by three elements. First, the object of our investigation is the encounter and conversation between a pastor and a patient. Second, we focus on pastoral counselling in the context of health care. Thirdly, the approach of our investigation is an ethical analysis and evaluation.

We start our investigation with a description of the asymmetry and power imbalance in the pastoral relationship and by an ethical analysis of this power imbalance in terms of premoral and moral evil. This implies that the pastor should not harm but empower the patient. We define pastoral counselling as the empowering companionship between the pastor and the patient. In order to empower the patient, the pastor should ask informed consent.

Then we explore the concept of informed consent through the literature of medical ethics, patient's rights and pastoral ethics and make some feasible applications. Express consent can only be applied to planned sessions of pastoral counselling. Implicit consent, on the other hand, can be appropriate for unplanned or incidental pastoral counselling, as long as the patient is sufficiently informed. When the patient is not able to consent, the pastor can ask for a surrogate informed consent or search for advance directives. Establishing informed consent can be considered as a dialogical process of speaking and listening, and creating opportunities to consent or refuse in an express or implicit way.

Based on the three sources of morality, we finally affirm that not only the consent of the patient, but also the intention of the pastor is essential to deal with power in an ethical way. Hence we clarify the complexity of the pastor's intention and emphasise the importance of the pastor's moral and emotional integrity.

‘When I am Weak, then I am Strong’: An African Christian Reflection on the Ambiguities, Paradoxes and Challenges of Pastoral Power

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This paper presents a reflection on some of the ambiguities, paradoxes and challenges that have to be navigated in the exercise of pastoral ministry. It begins with the notion that power is an ambiguous, multivalent resource and danger that is a part of our human reality and that all human persons have and engage with power at some level. Utilizing Michel Foucault’s sense that power is basically a form of relationship between persons, it explores the way in which power is embedded in our use of language, knowledge and money. The essay draws on Jungian insights into the personal, collective and archetypal aspects of our ‘shadow’, and Foucault’s studies of power struggles against domination, exploitation and subjugation. The contexts for these reflections and major sources of illustrative material lie in the colonial and post-colonial experiences of African peoples in interaction with Europeans in church and community. Suggestions are made, in the concluding sections of the paper, of some ways forward in the necessary exercise of pastoral power drawing on biblical, Jungian and African notions of leadership.