

PERSUASIVE POWER AND PASTORAL CARE

I relate to process theology primarily as a pastoral theologian. For me this means engaging in a dialog between the lived experiences yielded by pastoral encounters and critical reflection on those experiences. Process theology helps me to interpret the nature of experience as such and also provides a reflective framework for critical inquiry. When doing pastoral theology I am aware of a mutual activity: experience influencing reflection; reflection influencing experience. At times one is dominant over the other but always they are in relation.

From this perspective I draw my first reaction to Loomer's essay. I find his description of the two conceptions of power clear, even persuasive, but I am not so sure they are really alternatives, at least in the disjunctive/exclusive sense. Indeed I don't think Loomer actually presents them that way despite his assertion that relational power is "an alternative conception."

In fact I find Loomer including linear power in his description of relational power when he says that relational power "is the ability both to produce (linear power) and to undergo an effect. It is the capacity both to influence others and to be influenced by others. Relational power involves both a giving and a receiving" (p.17).

This both-and quality suggests to me that Loomer is enlarging the concept of linear power by putting it in a relational context. Or to state it another way, relational power has a linear dimension to it. As a second reaction, I would like to go further and say, from a pastoral perspective, that these two concepts of power are sequential and give rise to a third type of power, not explicitly named by Loomer but evident in all genuine pastoral care.

To explain what I mean, I will use the context of pastoral care. I find that if one places Loomer's descriptions of power sequentially, they express quite well the dynamics and goals of ideal pastoral care encounters.

1. *Linear power.* A typical pastoral care encounter begins with a person's disclosure of something about him/herself. This is done usually "to produce intended or desired effects" in others and is initially a unilateral move. In such an encounter the pastoral carer is in an unequal position. Indeed the presenter can control what happens and may even compete with the carer for control of what happens. At this stage the stubborn facts of the presenter's past life situation are given or reenacted, often without any special attentiveness to the presence of the carer. Indeed it is desirable, and to some extent necessary, that the presenter disclose in this relatively non-relational, linear way. It is precondition for the response of the carer who ideally exercises relational power.

2. *Relational power.* Loomer's description of relational power reads like a compendium of pastoral care principles. It is "the capacity to absorb an influence" which, as Loomer correctly notes, requires strength. Any experienced pastoral carer knows it is hard work to receive the linear input from another. The receptivity of the pastoral carer is easily identified with the enlargement of value or size which typifies relational power. Such receptivity involves a risk—as Loomer recognizes—but the risk is required if ample space is to be created wherein (or wherefrom) new possibilities for "the true good" may emerge.

If the pastoral carer responds relationally to the presenter's initial linear power move, the likelihood of a mutual relationship of presence to one another occurring is increased. Only it won't usually happen all at once. There is a give

and take of power that slowly builds toward relationality. The operative dynamic throughout is freedom, the choosing to build a relationship and sustain it. These are crucial aspects of pastoral care and relational power.

Throughout the construction of such a relationship, there is the constant threat of linear power taking over. This may come from either the presenter or the pastoral carer. This prompts Loomer to ask a critical question: can the life of the relational power be sustained with sufficient strength in the face of perhaps overwhelming unilateral power? Loomer's response is to invoke rather marginally the biblical affirmation of the meek. It is here that I think a third power appears more clearly in pastoral care.

3. *Persuasive power.* In pastoral care encounters the strength to sustain relational power (which carries within it the force of linear power) comes from neither linear nor relational power but the insertion of both in the still larger persuasiveness of God. In more customary theological terms, it is the power of grace.

Persuasive power is God's way of receiving and giving, of taking up and giving back. It is real and it is in every situation. Loomer points toward what I am calling persuasive power when he says of relational power that its "aim is to provide those conditions of the giving and receiving of influences such that there is the enlargement of the freedom of all the members to both give and receive. This enlarged freedom is the precondition for the emergence of the greatest possible good which is neither preconceived nor controllable." The greatest possible good I take to be God's becoming which is also the largest possible size into which any occasion can be put. The exercise of relational power is a precondition for God's persuasive power to emerge as the greatest possible good. The faith which emerges from pastoral care encounters is more persuaded than Loomer suggests that there is a relational god of adequate size.

Pastoral Care Literature—A brief look at some recent pastoral care literature may reinforce the pastoral applicability of Loomer's basic discussion of power.

I cite first of all Don Browning's *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*. In one sense Browning may be read as saying that modern technological rationalization has exerted a linear power move on pastoral care reducing it to the practice of techniques for helping people with the problems of their privacy. Browning argues for a larger context, a greater size for the practice of pastoral care—the context of moral inquiry and decision. This constitutes a relational power which allows pastoral care to be what it should and also enable the influence of God to be more operative.

I think also of John Cobb's brief book *Theology and Pastoral Care*. In this reflection Cobb, avoiding technical process jargon, identifies the movement of pastoral care as one which takes the central thrust of the human spirit (linear power of self transcendence) and facilitates it toward a more encompassing wholeness (relational power) which itself is best situated in the context of church. Here the influences of God's Spirit may be most fully felt.

Gordon E. Jackson has produced the most extensive attempt yet to relate pastoral care and process theology in his book of the same name. There are numerous similarities between his description and Loomer's but I would focus on just one. Jackson uses the theory of conformal feelings to analyze the controlling influence which the past often has on individuals. This is quite like

linear power in its effect. The pastoral response is to help open up new subjective aims for the person, primarily by the pastoral carer becoming a trusted, significant other who channels those aims, very much in the relational sense Loomer describes. Jackson makes explicit, as Loomer does not, that the aims for new possibilities (and the grounding of relational power) is in God who is always in, or with, every situation. Thus the persuasiveness of God is both operative in and supportive of relational power in this view of pastoral care.

Finally, I would mention my own interest in developing a process theology of death and immortality to respond to typical pastoral situations which provoke theological questions. In one sense there may be no clearer example of linear power in human experience than death. It is unilateral, controlling, impersonal and universal. For me, process theology helps in responding to death precisely and ironically because it is unable to assert unequivocally subjective immortality. Conceptually at least, this enlarges the size of experience by initially relating death not to my continued existence but to God's and the world's. Within this context the hope for subjective immortality may be identified but only in a large relational sense. And the persuasiveness of God and God's becoming is rather baldly offered as the ground for sustaining hope, both in living and in dying.

These brief glances at some recent attempts to weave process theology into pastoral care are meant only to underscore the value of Loomer's discussion of power and to extend its relationality by at least one more size.

ROBERT L. KINAST

The Catholic University of America

THE PERSUASIVENESS OF DIVINE LOVE

The omnipotence of God has been a cherished Christian belief for many centuries. Yet in our own twentieth century the psychological motives for that same belief have been seriously called into question by Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts following his lead. In his controversial book, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud proposes that human beings, religiously speaking, remain children all their lives. That is, just as a child both fears its father and relies upon him constantly for support and protection, so human beings all their lives fear God as a somewhat tyrannical father figure and yet trust implicitly in his ability to protect and care for them in the midst of life's vicissitudes. Even though actual experience seems to give the lie to this belief in the divine omnipotence, human beings cling to it because it represents an instinctual wish-fulfilment rooted in the subconscious. Belief in an omnipotent father god is then for Freud an illusion. That is, it is not patently false; it could be true. But its value for the individual is in all likelihood as a coping mechanism against the superior forces of nature. Ultimately, human beings will learn how to deal with their subconscious fears and anxieties, and the need for an omnipotent father god will slowly disappear.

In my judgment, Freud's critique of traditional theism in *The Future of an Illusion* should be taken seriously, not to question belief in God altogether, but rather belief in God as omnipotent. It may well be true that belief in God's omnipotence is grounded in infantile wish-fulfilment, that it really does not cor-