

# Evening Public Workshop

## 'Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly': Noticing and naming our power

**Dr David Crawley**

1

1. A scenario
2. What is power?
3. The topography of power
4. Our formation as people engaged in power relations

2

## A scenario ...

*NGO focused on social needs in poorer urban areas*

Michelle  
(manager, 40)

Carrie

(new, MSocWk, 30)

Bill

(10 year employee, 50)

3

## What is power?

The capacity or ability to direct or influence behaviour or events

- OED

The ability to make things happen in human society – or to resist and prevent change

- Roger Preece, *Understanding and Using Power*

**MR. STRONG**



**LITTLE MISS WISE**

*By Roger Hargreaves*



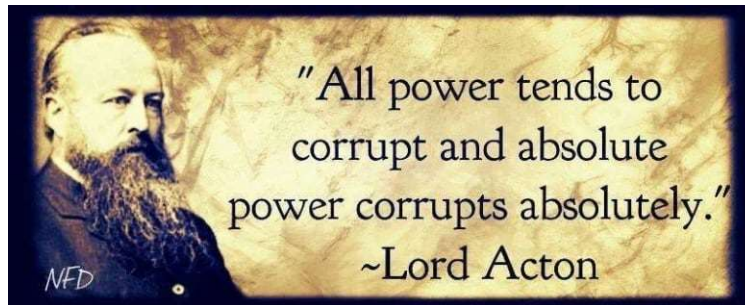
**LITTLE MISS STUBBORN**

*By Roger Hargreaves*



4

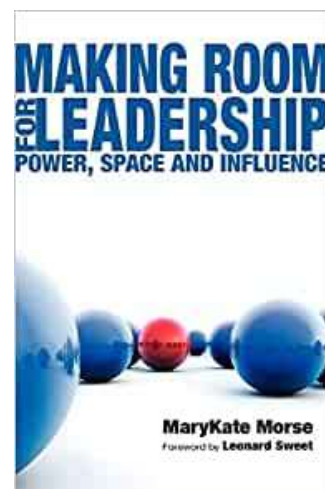
We may be wary of power, because of its abuse ...



5

"Power is God's gift. Powerlessness is not a virtue; rather, using power to help the powerless is. This is the true meaning of servant leadership. Jesus modeled this use of power over and over."

- MaryKate Morse, 58



6

## Power in religious contexts?

Positional		Spiritual	Reputational
Financial	Personal		
		Tradition/Status quo	
Interpretive/narrative	Cultural		
		Gendered	
Educational	Representational		
Theological	Sacramental	Pastoral/relational	
		Experiential	
Decisional	Inclusion-Exclusion	Historical	

7

## Two ways of thinking about power

### Held/measurable

Who holds the power? How much?

Is that good or bad?



### Systemic/shifting

What systemic factors shape the flow?

What are the effects? On whom?



8

Power is not simply divided between the powerful and the powerless (Model 1)

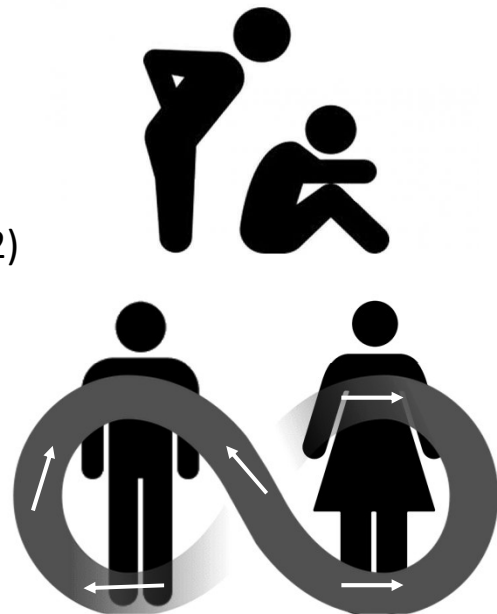
Power **flows** through and around our relational and social interactions (Model 2)

Latin: *in* (into) + *fluere* (to flow)

=> *influentia* (inflow)

=> **influence**

Power is at work whenever one person or group *influences* another to act, think, feel or see things in certain ways.



9

## Managing the flow of power



There are situations when it is appropriate that power flows *toward* us, i.e. that we assume a powerful position in a situation  
... *for example?*

There are times when it is important that power is devolved more toward the other  
... *for example?*

“I desire to model a relationship with counsellor educational power that opens space for dialogue and mutual learning, which models humility and openness ... It is an ethic of humility that seeks to follow Christ.” (Penwarden, 207)

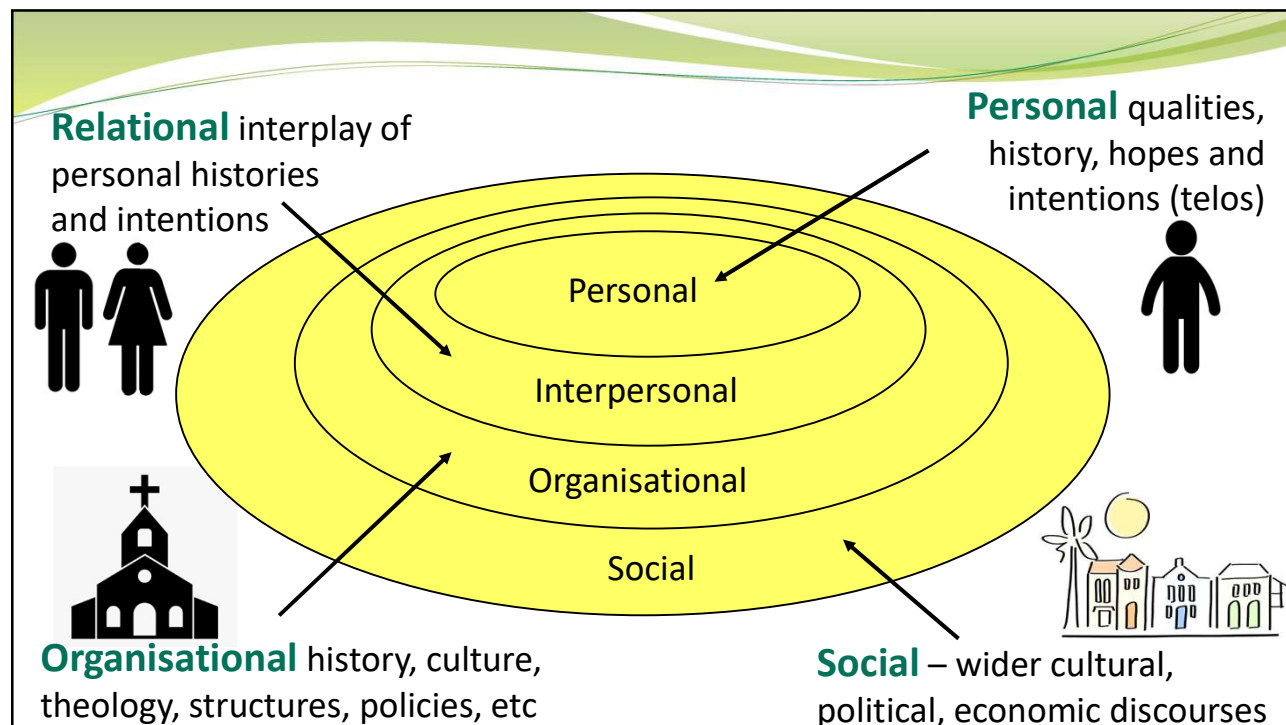
10

# Topography

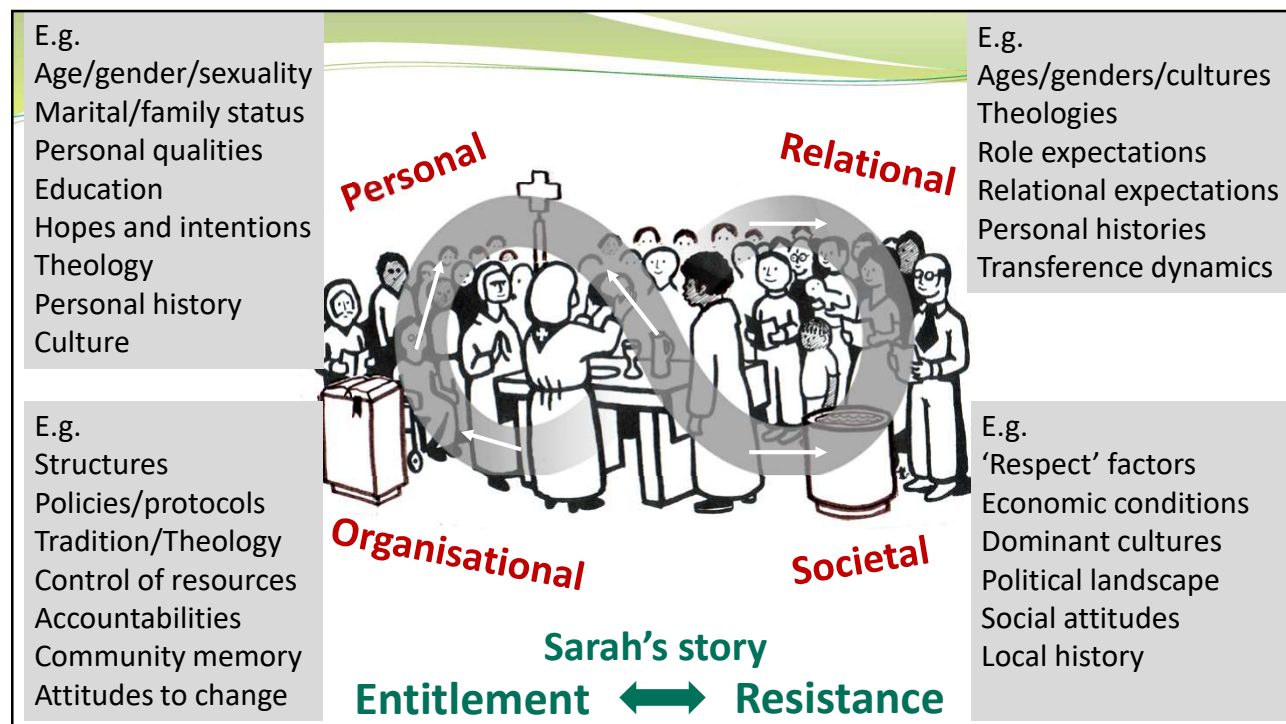
Beyond conscious intention, the flow of power is shaped by the **topography** of the system of which we are a part – **the personal, interpersonal, organisational and social landscapes**.



11



12



13

Thinking about this topography of power relations can help to explain a puzzling **disconnect** between some churches' practice of power and the teaching and example of Jesus.

*"When Jesus is not enough"*  
(Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, ch. 6)



14

“Why don’t we use our authority like Jesus used his? Why, instead, do even the brightest among us so often leverage our positions of power to promote our own agendas, to the relational detriment of the very people we claim to serve?”

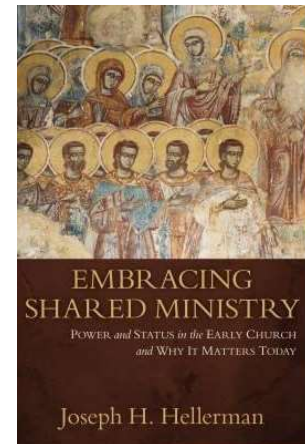
(Hellerman, 174)



15

### Hellerman: Unhelpful structures, influenced by our social context

- The church as business, with the CEO model of leadership, and one man’s vision as the telos.
- Emotionally immature and narcissistic leaders who cannot share power or attend to the emotional needs of others. (3 John 9)
- Compliant congregations who are under the sway of toxic leaders.
- Other ...?



16

“Why don’t we use our authority like Jesus used his? Why, instead, do even the brightest among us so often leverage our positions of power to promote our own agendas, to the relational detriment of the very people we claim to serve?”

(Hellerman, 174)



17

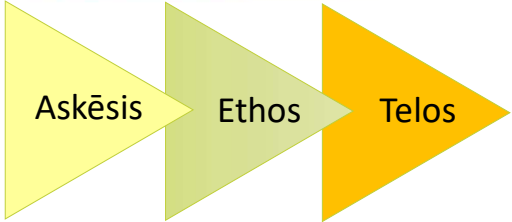
A framework for reflecting on what forms us in our handling of power:

***Telos, ethos and askēsis***

***(Vision, values and practices)***

(Informed by ideas from Michael White, Michel Foucault and James K. A. Smith)

18



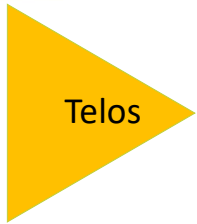
**Telos:** A vision for our lives.

**Ethos:** Values (ways of being) which will serve this life vision

**Askēsis:** Life practices (spiritual, relational, embodied) which help form us in these ways of being.

“Knowledge is only a rumor until it lives in the muscle”  
(Brené Brown, 7)

19



**What telos** do you hope your use of power might serve?

The big picture. E.g. using our power/influence on behalf of ...

- ‘Shalom’/‘Peace’ – Isaiah 9:2-7; Eph 2:14-17
- Flourishing/wholeness – physical, social, relational, psychological, spiritual, environmental (John 10:10)
- Social transformation – “I have a dream” (Martin Luther King)

20

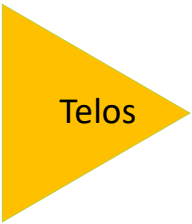


**Laidlaw College mission and vision statements:**


*A world shaped by love, compelled and informed by the gospel.  
To equip students and scholars to renew their communities  
with a faith as intelligent as it is courageous.*

 Graduate Profile (*ethos*)

21



**Do you have a personal and/or vocational *telos* which inspires *you*?**



22

## Problems around power sometimes reflect a difference of *telos/ethos*

*Andy (associate pastor):* That people would know that to be “a human being is to be loved and held precious to God”

➡ Leadership = attending to “the larger presence of God, shaping and moulding us together and journeying with us”

*Senior pastor:* To build a successful (= large) church

➡ Leadership = exercising authority as “God’s CEO” and valuing people (or not) on the basis of their cooperation with his vision



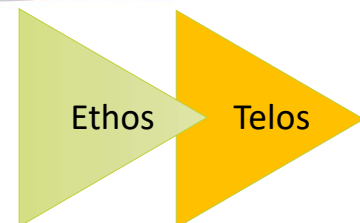
23

### *Ethos:*

What *values* (ways of being) do we want our use of power to embody, in line with our vision for life (*telos*)?

Example:

- On behalf of a *telos* of shalom/social justice, our handling of the flow of power should benefit, rather than weaken, those who are most vulnerable.



24

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.

(Ezekiel 34:3–4)



25

Laidlaw Graduate Profile ... naming aspects of *ethos* in relation to:

- **Formation.** E.g. Laidlaw graduates will be known as people of **love**, who encounter others with **authenticity** and **humility**, whether sharing laughter or tears.
- **Context.** E.g. Laidlaw graduates will participate in diverse communities, celebrating culture and difference in **respectful and authentic dialogue**.
- **Knowledge and understanding.** Laidlaw graduates will be renewed by a participatory expression of **faith, hope and love** as primary ways of engaging with people, life and thought.
- **Skills.** Laidlaw graduates will be equipped to articulate their faith in dialogue with others with **confidence and intelligence, curiosity and respect**.

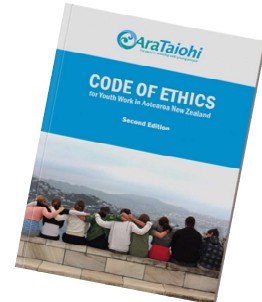
26

AraTaiohi

*Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand*

“The youth work relationship is both a privileged relationship and a power relationship. This is what makes ethics central to youth work. A power relationship is legitimate where power is given voluntarily and without coercion. Abuse of this power happens when the youth worker uses the power given by a young person to further their own interest to the detriment of the interests of the young person.”

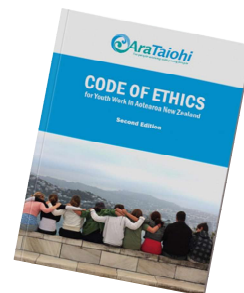
My working question: **“Whose needs are being met here?”**



27

Sometimes ethical principles require that power flows more toward those in leadership:

- 7.1 Youth workers will create and maintain culturally and age-appropriate physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual boundaries. Youth workers have an ethical responsibility to hold each other accountable in this regard.



28

## *Ethos*

What is **one value/principle** which guides your handling of the flow of power?



29

## Transferable frameworks for *ethos* thinking

Examples:

- E.g. Micah 6:8 - “do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with your God”.  
Holding both kindness and justice, for ourselves and others.  
E.g. maintaining both compassion and academic rigour in the formation of our students.  
>>> *How well do you manage that balance?*
- In all that we do, holding together *tika* (justice/rightness), *pono* (integrity/honesty) and *aroha* (care/compassion) – “the principles by which we exercise *tapu* and *mana*” (Te Puna Hauora o Te Raki Paewhenua website).  
>>> *Which of these do you find most challenging in your handling of power?*
- **Dialogic** vs **Monologic** ways of leading/relating ...

30

### *Ethical hopes named by my PhD participants ...*

- Mutual respect and care, valuing the dignity of each person.
- Balancing mutual respect with responsibility for the overall good.
- Acceptance of difference → environments of hospitality and participation.
- Opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues without being cast as a “troublemaker”.
- Knowledge of God mediated by the body of Christ, not by one/few - “discerning with”, rather than “discerning for.” Collaborative leadership.
- Authority cannot reside in one person beyond question, e.g. “The Man of God.”
- Submission is to what is discerned by the community, not to one person as the embodiment of divine authority.
- Authority used to “enlarge life,” not diminish it.

31

### *Transferable frameworks for **ethos** thinking*

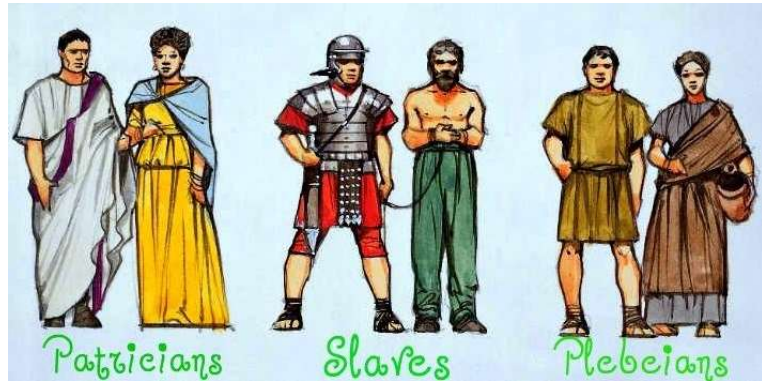
*E.g. Micah 6:8 - “do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with your God”*

- Holding both kindness and justice, for ourselves and others.  
E.g. maintaining both compassion and ethical rigour in the formation of our students (remembering that they in turn will influence others).  
*>>> How well do you manage that balance?*
- In all that we do, holding together *tika* (justice/rightness), *pono* (integrity/honesty) and *aroha* (care/compassion) – “the principles by which we exercise *tapu* and *mana*” (Te Puna Hauora o Te Raki Paewhenua website).  
*>>> Which of these do you find most challenging in your handling of power?*
- **Dialogic** vs **Monologic** ways of leading/relating.
- “Walk humbly” – 1 Peter 5:2-5; Phil 2:5-11 ...

32

- Paul's letter to the Philippians

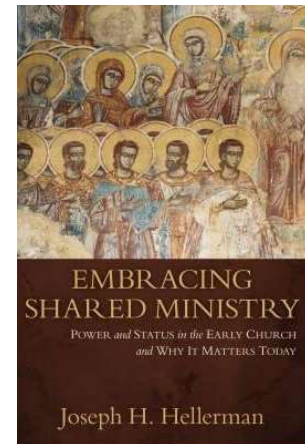
Paul and Timothy, servants [slaves] of Christ Jesus,  
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi,  
together with the overseers and deacons (1:1)



33

### Philippians 2:5-9

- <sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another,  
have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
<sup>6</sup> Who, **being in the form of God**,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
**by taking the form of a servant [slave]**,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death  
—even death on a cross!  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name ...



34

Sarah Coakley on Philippians 2 and the *askēsis* of cruciform love ...

The rhythm of this *askēsis* is already inscribed ritually and symbolically in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist; but in prayer (especially the defenceless prayer of silent waiting on God) it is 'internalized' over time in a peculiarly demanding and transformative fashion ...

What I have elsewhere called the 'paradox of power and vulnerability' is I believe uniquely focused in this act of silent waiting on the divine in prayer. This is because we can only be properly 'empowered' here if we cease to set the agenda, if we 'make space' for God to be God.  
(*Power and Submissions*, 34)

35

## *Askēsis*

The capacity for humble leadership and facilitating a bidirectional flow of power presumes deepening self-knowledge, humility and emotional/spiritual maturity.

This requires an ongoing commitment to personal, spiritual and relational growth.

⇒ At the heart of *askēsis* are rhythms of meditation, prayer and worship

36

⇒ At the heart of *askēsis* is the practice of genuinely **dialogic** encounter with the other

**Dialogic** encounter (I-Thou):

*Encounter in which each party has presence, may participate on their own terms, and meaning is negotiated*

**Monologic** encounter (I-It / Thou subsumed in I):

*Encounter in which one party dominates, dictates the terms, and makes authoritative interpretations*



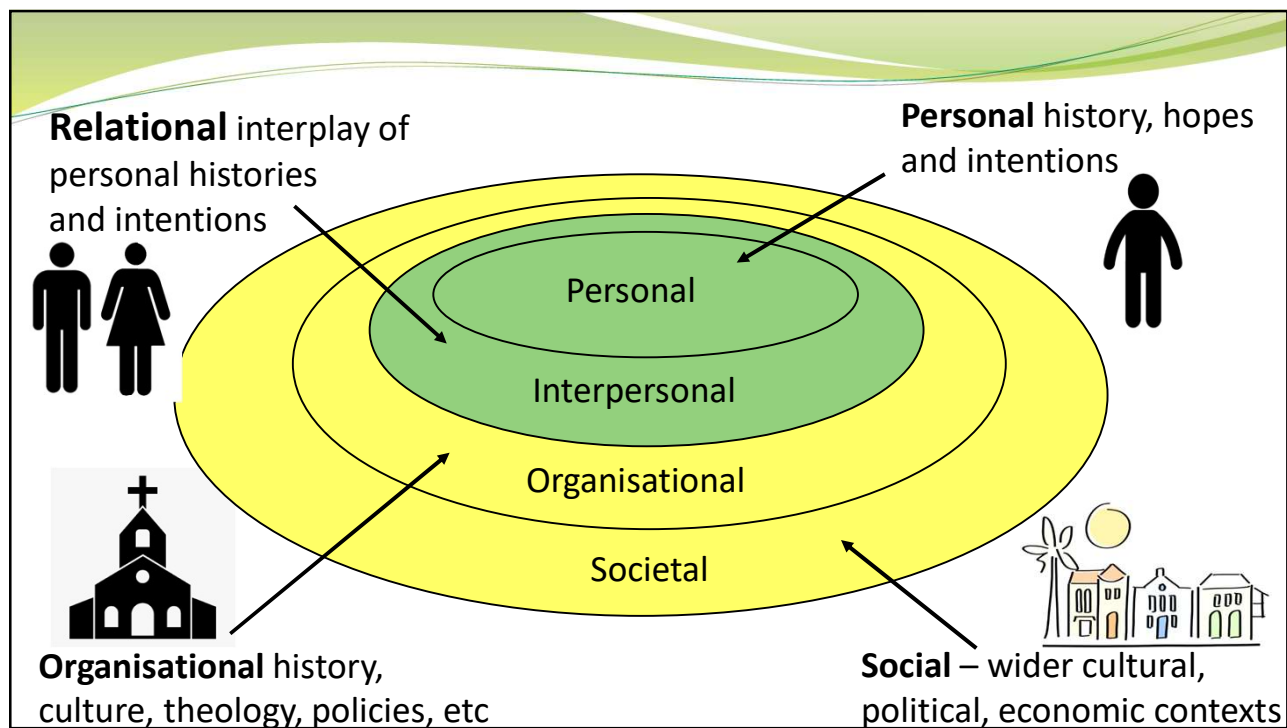
37

At the heart of *askēsis*, then, are ...

- ⇒ rhythms of meditation, prayer and worship;
- ⇒ the practice of genuinely dialogic encounter with the other;
- ⇒ a willingness to see myself through the eyes of the other.

*What other practices in your life help you to keep naming and noticing your power?*

38



39

## Organisational/social

Having in place corporate practices that help to develop:

- The ability to critically evaluate the flow of power within a social system.
- Critical reflection on social and cultural discourses influencing the flow of power.
- The courage to keep asking incisive questions of our own context and structures:
  - Who defines the 'truth' (the narrative) of the way things are?
  - How are decisions made here?
  - Are our key processes dialogic or monologic?
  - Whose voices are privileged? Whose voices are not being heard or valued?
  - Who benefits most from the current flow of power? How do I benefit?
  - Whose interests are marginalised? How hospitable to difference are our processes?
- The resilience and wisdom needed in the face of heavy-handed "power over" or toxic styles of leadership (Lipman-Blumen).

40

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, so that even if your qualifications or your experience grant you mana, or your social context positions you with power, do not regard these as entitlements to be exploited, but instead focus on the priority of love.

With the Spirit's help, encounter others as they are, not who you would prefer them to be, and risk vulnerability in offering yourselves to them as fellow humans, co-learners and companions in the journey toward life.

(Philippians 2 reframed)

41



42