

ACPE Theory Presentation of the Year

PREFACE

Allie Ulrich

My theory of supervision is grounded in the concept of spiritual midwifery – a metaphor that was once painful for me because of its connection to birthing and my own traumatic losses around birthing and parenting. Over the years, as I’ve experienced healing and growth in my own personal journey, the image of spiritual midwifery has become a powerful way for me to understand my role as a chaplain and spiritual care educator, as someone who participates creatively in the birthing process that is occurring for others in their spiritual lives. I see my role as a CPE educator to be one of facilitating movement toward new life. Just as a midwife comes alongside the one who is giving birth, as a guide through travail and transition, so do I as a CPE educator come alongside my students as a trusted guide through a process of change. As I accompany my students in the disorientation and pain that is often a part of the learning process, I hope to model for my students how they can compassionately come alongside patients and families to provide spiritual care in times of crisis and transition.

My theory of supervision is deeply grounded in spirituality. Theologically, I understand God to be profoundly relational and incarnational – embodied in our world and desiring to be in relationship with each of us. This relational understanding of God (and human beings made in the image of God) is the foundation of my spiritual care education, as I believe that meaningful growth and learning happens in the context of trusting relationships. I draw upon Pamela Cooper-White’s rich understanding of trinitarian theology to help me see the creative possibilities of a relational, fluid, and dynamic God who is actively at work in our world and in us. To help me hold the tension and paradox that I believe is an inherent part of the spiritual journey, I turn to the writings of the Christian mystic St. John of the Cross. I see parallels between the “dark night of the soul” described by St. John of the Cross, the “disorienting dilemma” of Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, and the painful period of travail and transition that is part of the birthing process – a disorienting time during which the midwife can serve as a trusted guide.

My personality theory flows out of my theological foundations, as I understand human beings to mirror the complexity and dynamism found within God’s very self. I use Richard Schwartz’s *Internal Family Systems (IFS)* as my primary personality theory. IFS’s conceptual framework has helped me to work with students’ resistances in the learning process, to move toward my students with greater curiosity and compassion for the complexity of their stories, and to guide my students in making connections between their inner and outer worlds. IFS invites me to pay attention to *Exiles* and *Protectors* - the wounded and protective parts of my students (and myself) that often come to the surface during CPE. As I encourage students to connect to their core *Self* and move toward greater self-differentiation, I hope that my students not only experience transformation in their personal lives, but also grow in their capacity to be more effective spiritual caregivers. To complement IFS’s primarily *intrapersonal* model of personality, I draw upon John Bowlby’s theory of attachment to help me understand the impact of *interpersonal* relationships on my students’ growth and development. I believe that it is essential for CPE students to have a

secure base (which includes trusting relationships with me as their educator and with their peers) in order to be able to explore new aspects of themselves and the clinical setting.

For my educational theory, I draw upon Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory; however, I focus on the strands of transformative learning theory that highlight the spiritual and emotional dimensions of learning (John Dirkx), as well as the relational aspects of learning (Mary Belenky). Combining the *soul work* approach of Dirkx and the *connected teaching/learning* approach of Belenky, I return to the image of the midwife to enliven my understanding of my role as a CPE educator. My group theory ties together all these strands – Belenky's connected knowing, Dirkx's soul work in groups, my relational theology, and concepts from Internal Family Systems. Louis Ormont helps me put this group theory into practice – as I focus on bridging techniques, immediacy, and honoring resistances in the group process. As I come alongside my students in this co-creative endeavor toward new life, I continue to be changed and transformed as well.

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Allie Ulrich

I was born and raised in a small, suburban neighborhood in New Jersey. My early life was fairly sheltered, and I grew up in a relatively stable family. While I am grateful for many of the values that my parents taught me from a young age (kindness, honesty, hard work, and integrity), I also recognize the dysfunctional patterns of relating within my family of origin that still impact how I understand myself and relate to others. For example, from a young age, I developed a perfectionism and self-criticism that remain with me today. Within my family, I tended to carry a fair share of the emotional weight; my mother was extremely anxious and over-protective, my father avoided emotions, and my older sister tested boundaries, while I attempted to hold things together as the peacekeeper and emotional caregiver. I have learned to pay attention to how these parts of myself can come out in my caregiving relationships and with my CPE students.

I was raised in the Protestant tradition, a cradle Presbyterian who later in life felt drawn to the liturgy and ritual of the Anglican church. As an adult, I was received into the Episcopal church and am now an active layperson in a diverse Anglo-Catholic congregation. From a young age, I was immersed in the life of the church and felt a sense of closeness to God. My intuitive sense of spirituality was nurtured in relationship, by a few caring adults. As my understanding of faith grew, so did my desire to seek more meaningful relationships with others and to engage with the wider world. As a young person, I began to participate in service trips to communities facing poverty and hardship; these experiences caring for people on the margins of society planted the seeds that eventually led me to seminary and the vocation of chaplaincy. During college, I felt a desire to stretch myself further, and this led me to spend a summer teaching English in Ghana and subsequently, a year living in a rural indigenous community in Guatemala as a Young Adult Volunteer with the PCUSA. My time spent in other cultures was hugely formative for me, as it both exposed me to the realities of poverty and suffering in our world, and at the same time, gave me a deep appreciation for the beauty of different cultures and perspectives, and the transformative power of God's love that can be experienced through living in community with others.

Three important themes have characterized my spiritual journey and influenced my understanding of CPE: a desire to continually seek new experiences that push me out of my comfort zone for the sake of growth; my own personal experiences of suffering in my adult life, which have served as a rich resource of empathy and compassion to draw upon as I care for others as a chaplain and spiritual care educator; and a belief in the resilience of the human spirit and God's creative influence in the world, which can open up possibility for new life to emerge from even the most unexpected places. I first came to CPE at a time in my life when I was wrestling with my own questions about God and spirituality, in the wake of a health crisis and a life-altering surgery that resulted in the loss of my fertility at age 27. During my last year of seminary, I unexpectedly landed in the hospital, where I found myself on the receiving end of a chaplain's spiritual care – an experience which eventually led me to pursue chaplaincy. CPE was a gift to me at that time – a transformative learning experience that helped me to make meaning of my experiences of pain. Now, after over a decade working as a chaplain in psychiatric facilities, hospice care, and hospital settings, I am working toward becoming an ACPE Certified Educator, with the hopes of facilitating that kind of transformative learning experience for others. The beginning of my supervisory training coincided with another painful loss in my life – after my husband and I said goodbye to two foster children whom we loved as our own and hoped to adopt. My experiences of grief, loss, and suffering have not only profoundly shaped me in my CPE process, but have also paradoxically become sources of strength and empathy to help me connect with others as a chaplain and spiritual care educator. I believe deeply in the power of creativity as an act of resistance to the destructive forces of isolation, suffering, and injustice in our world, and

I see CPE as a co-creative process that I participate in with my students and with God. I am privileged to participate in such a meaningful and transformative endeavor alongside my students.

THEOLOGICAL POSITION

Allie Ulrich



The Trinity (or Hospitality of Abraham), by Andrei Rublev, early 15th century

“In the beginning was the relationship.”
-Martin Buber

God as Relational

Andrei Rublev's 15th century icon of *The Trinity*¹ beautifully represents in visual form a truth that I have intuitively known about God since I was a child: that God is relational, and even more so, that God desires to be in relationship with *me* (and with all of us). Rublev's icon depicts a scene from the book of Genesis in which Abraham and Sarah are visited by three strangers who are later revealed to be angels; the image has widely been interpreted by 19th and 20th c. scholars to represent the Holy Trinity – “one God in three persons” as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three figures of the Trinity are seated at a table, and the lines of their bodies form a full circle that frames the composition. Each person of the Trinity gazes at the other with a look of pure love and delight, an image of the relationality that is at the heart of God's very being. In the foreground, there is a space at the table for the viewer to be incorporated into the image, and we are drawn into the loving gaze of the three persons of the Trinity as if invited into communion with the Divine.²

From a young age, I had an intuitive sense of spirituality, feeling the closeness of God in both the communion of the church³ and in the beauty and solitude of nature.⁴ My intuitive sense of spirituality was nurtured in relationship, by a few caring adults (including my youth minister and a seminary intern at our church) who encouraged me to explore my faith in God more deeply. As my understanding of faith grew, so did my desire to seek more meaningful relationships with others.⁵ Though I did not have the language for it at the time, I sensed the truth of what Martin Buber describes in *I and Thou* – that it is in relationship with others that we more fully understand ourselves and are able to experience a glimpse of the Divine, of that which is greater than ourselves. Indeed, relationship is the context in which divine encounter occurs.⁶

As an Anglican,⁷ my understanding of the relationality of God is rooted in the Christian concept of the Trinity. As pastoral theologian Pamela Cooper-White describes, many modern and contemporary theologians have begun to reflect on the Trinity “not [as]...static or ‘frozen’ dogma, but rather, in terms of a fluid metaphor...an act of sacred imagination, spanning centuries of Christian thought, in which...God may be intuited as alive, flowing, and flowering, multiple in activity...and above all profoundly relational and loving.”⁸ One of the most compelling images of the Trinity, first described by the 4th century Cappadocians,⁹ is that of *perichoresis*, or the mutual indwelling and interpermeation of the three persons or dynamic dimensions of the Trinity.¹⁰ Though technically not a translation of the Greek, *perichoresis* has sometimes been rendered into English as “divine dance” – an evocative image that speaks to the dynamism, fluid movement, reciprocal giving and receiving, and multiplicity-in-unity inherent in the Trinity. As Catherine LaCugna describes, *perichoresis* “provides a marvelous point of entry into contemplating what it means to say God is alive from all eternity as love.”¹¹ The slippage in the translation of the Greek *perichoresis* reflects the multi-faceted nature of the term: that it encapsulates both the relationality that is contained within God's very Self and also the incarnational and relational aspect of God that reaches out toward humanity, inviting us to participate in this divine choreography.

My practice of chaplaincy and spiritual care education is grounded in an understanding of God's inherent relationality. Just as God is a relational being, so are human beings, made in the image of God, fundamentally relational: we were made for being in relationship with God and one another. I believe that relationship is the context in which healing, growth, and transformation are possible, and therefore I strive first to build connection and relationship with my CPE students. My use of *covenants* highlights the importance of relationships in the learning process. At the beginning of the CPE unit, I invite students to create *learning covenants*, which are developed in dialogue with me as their educator, as well as presented to their peers, reinforcing their connection and responsibility to one another. I use the term *Covenant Group*, rather than IPR, to highlight the

mutual commitment to one another that is encouraged through the group process, as well as the ways in which trusting relationships within the group can point to the greater divine trustworthiness of God.¹²

As I consider the image of Rublev's Trinity as a grounding metaphor for chaplaincy and spiritual care education, I am also mindful of the alternative interpretation of the image as depicting the *Hospitality of Abraham*. The hospitality that Abraham and Sarah show to the three strangers parallels God's divine hospitality toward each of us.¹³ As a chaplain and educator, I hope to embody this same hospitality and welcoming of the stranger in my spiritual care practice and supervision, as I simultaneously model this for my students.¹⁴ I strive to create a caring and supportive learning environment that allows for students to share their stories and struggles, to build trust and relational intimacy, to give and receive honest feedback, and to practice vulnerability, as they are invited to bring the fullness of themselves and their emotional expression into relationship with others.¹⁵ This includes welcoming my students' tears, grief, anxiety, shame, and anger in the learning process - for example, when I allowed a student JF to express her anger toward me for inquiring about her quietness during Covenant Group (an intervention which was intended to be an invitation to participate, but which was instead received as a correction – bringing up intense feelings of shame for her). In individual supervision, I welcomed and accepted JF's anger, as I saw her ability to express her feelings toward me as a sign of trust in our relationship. This moment was pivotal in solidifying our supervisory bond, as together we were able to explore the dynamic of intention versus impact. My hope is that as students grow in their ability to be more vulnerable and emotionally authentic in trusting relationships with their peers and educator, they will also deepen their capacity to engage more authentically with patients and families as spiritual caregivers. At the same time, I recognize that I also grow and learn from being in relationship with each of my students, as there is a deep mutuality to the work of supervision.¹⁶ Working with JF's anger, for example, was a significant learning moment for me as well, as it prompted me to reflect on how I might more fully engage my own and my students' anger in the CPE process.



Refugees: La Sagrada Familia, by Kelly Latimore, 2016

"I learn my theology from looking at the faces of people."
-Ignatius IV of Antioch

God as Incarnational

Kelly Latimore¹⁷ painted the modern-day icon *La Sagrada Familia* after meeting a young Guatemalan immigrant, who shared with Latimore about the perilous journey he had traveled through the desert and across the U.S./Mexico border, to arrive in the United States in search of a better life for his family. Latimore's icon draws a connection between the experience of immigrants and refugees in our world today and the journey of the Holy Family (Joseph, Mary, and Jesus) as they fled from Herod to Egypt nearly 2,000 years ago.¹⁸ In Latimore's icons, the image of God is depicted in the faces of real people in our world – the immigrant, the refugee, the prisoner, the stranger, the marginalized and oppressed. In describing the theology behind his art, Latimore says: "God is in plain sight, all around us...people with names, faces, and stories. They have something to teach us about what we know, about who God is, the world we live in and who are our neighbors. This is the real work of being human and of art. Being more present."¹⁹ At the heart of CPE and spiritual care is learning to be more fully present to the people around us and the incarnational presence of God among us – what Ignatius of Antioch understood as "learning theology from looking at the faces of people," or what CPE pioneer Anton Boisen later described as the study of "living human documents."²⁰

Just as the relationality of God can be seen in the communion that exists among the three persons of the Trinity contained within God's Self, this same relationality also spills over into our world in the incarnational aspect of God that reaches out to humanity and desires to be in relationship with us. The name *Emmanuel* ("God with us") points to God's promise to be with us in all aspects of human life. As Cooper-White eloquently describes: "*Perichoresis* also applies to the relationship between God and the world. God is in us and we are in God – not on some disembodied or theoretical...plane apart from daily life, but deep in our blood and our bones...God walks with us and in us...through the very human experience of living and suffering in the body."²¹ This relational God is not far-away and distant, but in-the-flesh, embodied in our world and in each of us.²² In the person of Jesus, we see in God's very nature a desire to stand in solidarity with all who suffer – God willingly suffers with us and for us, and through the death of Jesus, takes all the violence and destruction of the world into God's own heart.²³

Part of what first drew me to chaplaincy was a desire to deepen my own relationship with God, whose presence I experienced most profoundly in face-to-face encounters with other people, and especially, as I came alongside others in their suffering. I first experienced a glimpse of this during the time I spent volunteering in impoverished communities in Ghana and Guatemala as a young adult.²⁴ One of the most beautiful moments I witnessed in Ghana was another volunteer Jessica caring for a boy named Charles, by washing his mangled feet and tenderly removing jiggers from his heels. I learned from this moment that to truly care for another person often means moving toward, and not away from, pain.²⁵ I recognize now that I saw the face of God in both Charles' suffering and in Jessica's compassionate response to his suffering: I saw in this tender human encounter the embodiment of the true meaning of *Emmanuel*. Years later, when I discovered chaplaincy, I experienced a similar sense of the sacred in my interactions with patients and families in the healthcare setting – as I walked alongside people with chronic mental illness and substance abuse, as I accompanied hospice patients through the dying process, and as I bore witness to the pain of families facing devastating losses and trauma.²⁶ My core conviction that each person I encounter has the image of God within them guides me in all of my interactions as a chaplain and educator, and especially as I engage with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds than my own. When working with CPE students from different religious backgrounds or spiritual-orienting systems than my own, a guiding question I keep in mind is: "What resources of strength,

hope, meaning-making, and connection can this student draw upon from their own faith tradition or life story to help them when wrestling with questions of pain, suffering, and death?” For example, in working with an Orthodox Jewish student SH, I encouraged her to connect to the psalms and ritual prayers from her Jewish tradition that would help her to understand her role as a spiritual caregiver; SH was able to share some of these prayers with her peers during several morning meetings, as well as to sing a song she composed (based on psalm 84) for her peers at her CPE graduation. In working with another student BP, who identified as spiritual but not religious, I encouraged him to connect with the stories that had shaped his life as a playwright and creative writing teacher. I understand the diverse voices and experiences of my CPE students to be glimpses or reflections of the divine, with the ability to teach me something about who God is and who I am. I value diversity within the peer group, which guides me as I interview and select students for our CPE program. I strive to create spaces within the peer group and individual supervision for open dialogue around issues of faith, culture, race, and difference – for example, through an interactive workshop on Social Identity that I include as part of my CPE curriculum. However, I am also aware that despite my best efforts to create an atmosphere of openness and hospitality in my CPE groups, not everyone may feel welcome at the table or free to bring their full selves, particularly those who come from historically marginalized groups and cultures. As a CPE educator, I look at the margins and the center of the group, and I strive to create space for everyone’s voice to be heard and valued.²⁷ In working with a student DP, for example, who was the only African American male in his group, I was mindful of the ways in which DP might feel marginalized. In individual supervision, DP recounted several instances in which he experienced racial biases from patients/families in the hospital who made assumptions about him and his role, based on his outward appearance. Rather than shying away from an uncomfortable topic, I created space for DP to process these painful encounters, as I validated his hurt. Later in the unit, DP found the courage to bring these experiences to his peer group, using them as a springboard for engaging his peers in a conversation about racial bias; his peers benefited greatly from this dialogue and from the perspectives he shared, as did I as his educator.

Just as God moves toward us in our suffering in the person of Jesus, I believe that I am called to participate in the incarnational presence of God in the world by following God’s example of moving toward, and not away from, human suffering. I strive to embody this in my practice of supervision, paying attention to my students’ pain and to the ways in which their unique experiences of pain and woundedness might serve as “helpful teachers of [their] own and [their] neighbor’s condition.”²⁸ At the same time, I recognize the parallel process that is happening, as I draw on my own experiences of pain and woundedness to connect to my students in their struggles.²⁹ I believe that God’s presence with me in the fullness of my own humanity allows me to do the work of spiritual care, and indeed, my own humanity and brokenness is the very foundation of my spiritual care practice and my supervisory relationships.



Japanese Kintsugi Pottery

"I will give you treasures of darkness, riches hidden in secret places."

-Isaiah 45:3

God as Paradoxical

My own spiritual journey has been a winding and circuitous path, with times when I have experienced the closeness of God's presence, and seasons where I have felt a profound sense of God's absence, the confusion of doubt and disorientation, deafening silence in the wake of suffering. I think about what it is like to walk the path of a labyrinth: there are times when we seem very close to the Center, but are actually far away; and other times when we feel furthest away, but are actually just around the bend, and quite near to, the Center. It seems that the further along the path I am, and the more I come to know God, the less I know about God. The paradox of the spiritual life is that in many ways the journey to the Center involves unlearning what we think we know about God. As we are stripped of our narrow, comfortable notions of who we think God is, we are freed to experience a more expansive vision of the divine that holds space for mystery and the unknown. As Pamela Cooper-White ultimately concludes about all theological endeavors: "The paradoxical value of deeply critical, theoretical thinking [is] that it finally leads to the recognition of its own limits and a lifting of one's gaze past books and papers and theories toward the horizon of that which, inevitably, appears in the distance as a shimmering Unknown."³⁰ When all my formulations about who I believe God to be fall short, I turn to the *via negativa* and the apophatic writings of the mystics, who emphasize the transcendence rather than the immanence of God – the unknowable and mysterious nature of the divine. The spiritual tradition of the *via negativa* cherishes silence, stillness, and the space between words, reminding us that the true essence of God is beyond human comprehension or articulation. Absence, rather than presence, is what ultimately points us toward the mystery of God.

After my husband and I faced the devastating loss of our two foster children, whom we had loved as our own and hoped to adopt, I felt an acute sense of God's absence and abandonment.³¹ It was during this particularly dark time in my life that I reached for a copy of *The Dark Night of the Soul* and became friends with St. John of the Cross.³² When people speak of a "dark night of the soul" experience, they are often describing an extremely difficult or painful period in their lives; yet I was surprised to learn that when St. John wrote about the "dark night" (*noche obscura*), he was not referring to anything negative or sinister. Rather, he was speaking about a process of spiritual transformation that happens mysteriously, in ways that are hidden or obscured from our understanding. The journey is dark because it is unknown and unknowable. St. John says: "To come to what you know not, you must go by a way where you know not; to come to what you are not, you must go by a way where you are not."³³ One of the distinctive markers of the dark night is that it always results in greater freedom – that it involves a liberation from what binds us and keeps us from fully living into God's love.³⁴ This process of stripping away can be extremely painful and disorienting, as it feels as if God has abandoned us. Yet as Gerald May writes: "It is not God who disappears, but only our concepts, images, and sensations of God. This relinquishment occurs to...make possible a realization of the true God, who cannot be grasped by any thought or feeling."³⁵

In the midst of my own dark night, as I was wrestling with a sense of God's absence and coming to terms with my own trauma and brokenness, I gifted myself a piece of kintsugi pottery, as a reminder of the paradox that I can be both broken and whole at the same time.³⁶ The Japanese art of Kintsugi (literally, "mending with gold") is an ancient art of repairing cracked or broken pottery with a lacquer mixed with gold or another precious metal. Unlike other restoration techniques that attempt to hide previous damage, the art of kintsugi instead highlights the breaks and imperfections by filling them in with a precious metal, resulting in an object that is both more durable and more valuable because of its life and history. The art of kintsugi reminds me that

beauty and strength can be found in the broken places of life. Precious treasures can be found in the darkness, though as Iain Matthew acknowledges: “A deeper gift will feel like no gift at all.”³⁷

CPE can often be a disorienting experience, as students confront the realities of death and tragedy in the hospital setting, as well as their own vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of such suffering; notions of God that were once deeply held may be profoundly challenged or uprooted in the process. This disorientation can be a fruitful, and even necessary, part of one’s learning and growth. I believe that my role as a CPE educator is to provide space for students to wrestle with questions and doubts, with the seeming absence and silence of God in the face of extraordinary suffering – to help students remain in their discomfort without running from the pain or moving too quickly to “fix” or offer reassurance. As Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “By addressing the experience of God’s silence...we may be able to open up the possibility that silence is as much a sign of God’s presence as of God’s absence – that divine silence is not a vacuum to be filled but a mystery to be entered into, unarmed with words and undistracted by noise.”³⁸

Sometimes this dark night experience – or what Jack Mezirow might call a “disorienting dilemma” – is prompted by what students encounter in the clinical setting; at other times, it may be prompted by events happening in students’ lives outside of CPE, that are intersecting with and impacting their CPE process. KB, a student I supervised in her fourth unit of CPE, experienced a sudden health crisis midway through the year, that resulted in both the loss of a child during pregnancy and an unexpected diagnosis of Type 1 Diabetes that would have an ongoing impact on her own health as well as her ability to have children in the future. A sudden break had occurred in her understanding of herself and her relationship to the divine. As her supervisor, I gently encouraged her to sit in the pain and disorientation of her own experiences without glossing over her losses or moving too quickly past her pain. I was privileged to come alongside KB as she honored the shattered parts of her life and eventually began to wrestle with how to rearrange the broken pieces in the wake of these devastating losses. Having faced my own losses around infertility, I found that my own experiences of pain were a valuable resource of empathy to draw upon in caring for my student, while also helping her explore how her pain was impacting her CPE experience. I have found there to be riches of treasure in my own experiences of pain; likewise, I believe that my students’ experiences of pain are often the locus of their deepest learning, in both the CPE process and their own spiritual journeys. Like the kintsugi bowl, where the most precious material is found in the spaces in-between, I have found that the Holy often meets us most profoundly in times of transition and disorientation – in the spaces in-between. It is in the Void that the divine is given room to fill the empty space.³⁹

I believe that one of the tasks of spiritual care education is to help our students to live in the tension of paradox, holding a certain amount of uncertainty, ambiguity, and mystery as they walk their own spiritual path and accompany others on the spiritual journey. The paradoxical nature of the dark night that St. John describes is that spiritual transformation often happens in unexpected, hidden places – when it seems as if there is no way forward and no light to see the path ahead. As Margaret Guenther describes in *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*, such periods of transition and disorientation can be times of profound “spiritual homelessness,” yet an experienced spiritual companion (or CPE educator) recognizes this “time of desolation, of seemingly unmanageable pain...to be a sign of breakthrough and great progress.”⁴⁰



The Phoenix by Allie Ulrich, collage and oil pastels, 2004

"We are co-creators with God of what creation has left unfinished."
-Joan Chittister

God as Creative

I created the above piece of art many years ago, burning the pages of an old journal with a candle flame to create something new. The fluttering pages of the journal resemble the wings of a phoenix – a mythological bird known for its ability to be re-born from its own ashes. The phoenix has long been a symbol, across different cultures, of rebirth, resurrection, and renewal; the fiery bird is also reminiscent of images of God throughout the Hebrew scriptures, as well as descriptions of the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition.⁴¹ For me, the image of the phoenix ties together the relational, incarnational, and paradoxical nature of God – because of God’s loving, incarnational presence in us, with us, and alongside us in our suffering and even in death, there always exists the possibility, however improbable, for new life to emerge from the ashes. God’s love gives us hope that suffering and death are not the end of the story. Rather, God’s creative, life-giving, and redemptive Spirit in the world opens up the possibility for healing and growth to come from the most unexpected places. As Pamela Cooper-White describes, “God’s creative activity in the world is not something that is being done *to* the creation, but rather an intimately, intrinsically involved and continual process, unfolding around, above, under, and within the creation.”⁴² Theologians such as Gordon Kaufman have envisioned God as more than Creator, but rather *creativity itself* – an image that opens up new possibilities for the continued ways in which God is at work in and among us in the world today.⁴³

Because we are made in the image of a creative God, human beings are also inherently creative, in numerous and varied ways. I believe that God invites us to participate in the continued work of creation and redemption in the world. I view CPE not only as a transformative process but also as a creative endeavor that I participate in with my students and with God. I have intentionally built creativity into my CPE curriculum, because I believe that images, metaphor, poetry, and other forms of creativity are often better able to capture the ineffable nature of the spiritual life and the work of spiritual care. During CPE orientation, I have students introduce themselves using a *Spiritual Journey Mapping* exercise, in which students are invited to create a visual depiction of their spiritual journey, mapping the peaks and valleys, turning points, and major events in their spiritual development. This creative exercise invites deeper sharing and vulnerability within the peer group.⁴⁴ Later in the unit, I invite students to engage their narrative histories through an exercise entitled *Exploring Personal Myths*, in which students share stories, metaphors, and images from their childhood that have influenced their sense of identity and formation, and reflect on how these themes may be showing up in their spiritual caregiving encounters.⁴⁵ In didactics, I often use images and poetry as grounding metaphors. For example, in a didactic on Grief, I begin with a Mary Oliver poem about life and loss, to open up conversation with my students; in another didactic on Group Dynamics, I use the image of rowing together in a canoe as a metaphor for the group process. Many of my didactics include interactive elements that invite students into the co-creative process, as they share their insights and wisdom with the group.

More broadly, I see the relationship-building and dialogue that happens in individual supervision and the group context as a creative process.⁴⁶ While I am grounded in my theories, I also value leaving room for spontaneity and flexibility, as I respond authentically to students in the moment and adapt my CPE curriculum to meet the unique learning needs of my students. However, I am also aware of the limitations of a theological approach that is fluid, relational, creative, and process-oriented; some students may have more rigid or hierarchical views of God, and for them, being in a diverse hospital setting and peer group that exposes them to radically different understandings of God can be a disorienting dilemma in and of itself. Moreover, engaging in creative activities as part of the learning process may be intimidating or uncomfortable for some

people, especially those who may reject the idea that they are “creative.” I need to be patient with my students, to lean into the discomfort as a potential area for growth and learning (for both myself and my students). Seeing CPE as a creative endeavor allows me to be open to the messiness of the creative process, to see mistakes as learning opportunities rather than moments of judgment, and to let go of my own need for control and perfection.

I have intentionally structured this theological reflection around visual images, as I believe that God is infinitely creative, and that the creative arts have the power to touch aspects of the divine that words cannot. By making use of the outpouring of God’s creative energy in the world (as exemplified in image and metaphor), I hope that I have been able to offer a rich reflection on the various aspects of God that ground and inspire my practice as a chaplain and CPE educator. I trust that God’s creativity will fill in the rest.

¹ I was first introduced to Rublev's icon of *The Trinity* in a seminary class entitled "The Face of the Other," taught by Professor Bo Karen Lee and framed around an article she wrote entitled "The Face of the Other: An Ethic of Delight" (2011). Along with Lee's article, we read the writings of such relational theologians and philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas (1969), Martin Buber (1970), Miroslav Volf (2019), and John Zizioulas (1997). All of these thinkers have influenced and enriched my understanding of God and human beings as fundamentally relational.

² See Rohr (2016)'s description of the icon, in which he suggests that there was once a mirror glued to the front of the table, to reflect the viewer's image and thus incorporate the viewer into the scene (p. 28-31).

³ I was raised in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and my parents faithfully took my sister and me to church with them every week. I have vivid memories of sitting in the pews beside my parents, as we listened to the words of our pastor and sang hymns amidst the church congregation. My faith was formed and shaped in community.

⁴ I spent a great deal of time as a child playing outdoors, in my mother's backyard garden and the woods near our home. I have long felt a connection to something larger than myself, while immersed in the beauty of the natural world. In solitude, there is also communion, as we create space for God to meet us in quiet and intimate ways.

⁵ As my faith grew, so did my desire to engage with the wider world, beyond the sheltered community in which I grew up. As a teenager, I began to participate in service trips with my youth group to nearby communities facing poverty and hardship; from these experiences, I developed a deep desire to serve people in need and especially those on the margins. I experienced God working through these relationships, as I came alongside others and listened to their stories. These early experiences were the seeds that eventually led me to the vocation of chaplaincy.

⁶ See Buber (1970), p.112-113. "The purpose of relation is the relation itself – touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life."

⁷ Though I was raised Presbyterian, I later shifted to the Episcopal church as an adult, after being introduced to the beauty of Anglican liturgy through the Book of Common Prayer. My husband and I now attend an Anglo-Catholic Episcopal church that emphasizes "worshiping God in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 96:9) through engaging all the bodily senses - through the meditative sounds of Gregorian chant, the smell of incense, the sights of sacred imagery, and the taste of the Eucharist. The Anglican tradition has become a spiritual home for me, which has helped me to listen and attend to God's presence in my life in new ways.

⁸ Cooper-White (2011), p. 79-80. See also Moltmann (1993b) and LaCugna (1973) for modern treatments on the practical and pastoral implications of Trinitarian theology.

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

¹⁰ See Cooper-White (2011), p. 76-80; and LaCugna (1973): "Perichoresis provides a dynamic model of persons in communion based on mutuality and interdependence...[locating] unity instead in diversity, in a true communion of persons" (p. 270-1).

¹¹ LaCugna (1973), p. 312.

¹² See Oden (1972). An additional layer of relationality that is built into our CPE program has to do with the connections that are nurtured within the larger community of our spiritual care department; each CPE intern is paired with either a resident or staff chaplain who serves as their "clinical preceptor" – a mentor who helps orient them to the clinical setting, observe their interactions within in the hospital community, and provide guidance and encouragement throughout their CPE experience.

¹³ For Christians, this divine hospitality is tangibly represented in the Eucharist: God offering God's Self to us as food and nourishment. The chalice-like bowl of roasted lamb on the table in Rublev's icon alludes to the Eucharist, reminding the viewer of an altar at Communion.

¹⁴ Cp. Nouwen (1972), who speaks about pastoral care in terms of hospitality and welcoming the stranger. As Nouwen (1972) describes: "Concentration, which leads to meditation and contemplation, is the necessary precondition for true hospitality. When our souls are restless, when we are driven by thousands of different and often conflicting stimuli,...how can we possibly create the room and space where others can enter freely without feeling themselves unlawful intruders?" (p. 97). If I hope to create a hospitable space for my students to come as they are, I need to be attentive to my own spirit and seek out moments of stillness, silence, contemplation, and connection with God in my own life.

¹⁵ See my group education theory, as well as a didactic I give to first unit CPE students on Group Process, which elaborates on this. Cp. Rohr (2016), who writes: “The greatest dis-ease facing humanity right now is our profound sense of disconnection – from God, ourselves, each other and the world” (p. 39); and in contrast: “God is relationship itself...absolute relatedness... salvation is the readiness, capacity and willingness to stay in relationship” (p. 46).

¹⁶ I see the supervisory relationship as an asymmetrical but mutual relationship. Cp. Buber (1970), who writes: “Relation [includes] reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us” (p. 67).

¹⁷ Kelly Latimore is a St. Louis based artist who began painting as a member of the Common Friars, a monastic order for both ordained and lay people in the Episcopal Church. Latimore uses ancient techniques of traditional icon painting to create fresh, modern-day icons that depict God incarnate in our world, as the marginalized and oppressed among us, here and now.

¹⁸ Matthew 2:13-23.

¹⁹ Lowes (2021).

²⁰ Boisen (1936). In Boisen’s words: “I have sought to begin not with the ready-made formulations contained in books but with the living human documents and with actual social conditions in all their complexity” (p. 185).

²¹ Cooper-White (2011), p. 86.

²²As Anglo-Catholic writer and mystic Evelyn Underhill (2004) describes of the incarnation: “We are being shown here something profoundly significant about human life – God speaks in a Son, a Baby Son, and reverses all our pet values. [God] speaks in our language and shows us [God’s] secret beauty on our scale. We have got to begin not by an arrogant other-worldliness, but by a humble recognition that human things can be very holy, very full of God, and that high-minded speculations about [God’s] nature need not be holy at all; that all life is engulfed in [God, who] can reach out to us anywhere at any level.”

²³ The idea that Jesus takes the suffering of the world into God’s own heart comes from Migliore (2008), p. 78.

²⁴ In college, my deep desire to serve people in need, and especially those on the margins, led me to a rural village in Ghana, where I taught English for a summer in a local primary school, and after college, to another corner of the globe in Guatemala, where I served for a year as a Young Adult Volunteer with the Presbyterian Church (USA). The time I spent in other cultures and contexts was hugely formative in my spiritual life.

²⁵ Cp. Moltmann (1993a): “It can be summed up by saying that suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds. For the suffering in suffering is the lack of love, and the wounds in wounds are the abandonment, and the powerlessness in pain is unbelief. And therefore the suffering of abandonment is overcome by the suffering of love, which is not afraid of what is sick and ugly, but accepts it and takes it to itself in order to heal it” (p. 31). I understand suffering and death to be a part of life. While I do not believe that God causes or wills suffering, God does allow suffering to happen. Though I cannot answer the question of theodicy, I do believe that God is with us in suffering. In the incarnation, God, out of love and compassion for humanity, joined us in our human suffering, so that we might also know and participate in God’s divine resurrection life. Just as God moves toward humanity in its suffering, Christians are called to imitate this divine example by engaging with and addressing the suffering in our world, showing compassion to the downtrodden and broken-hearted, and working towards justice and relief for those weighed down by hardship.

²⁶ My vocational journey has led me to work as a chaplain in psychiatric hospital settings (both long-term and acute-care), in hospice care, a community hospital, and most recently, a Level I trauma hospital serving a diverse, urban population. In all of these settings, I have felt privileged to be invited into sacred moments with people in the midst of great suffering.

²⁷ One practical way that I do this during verbatim seminars is to have everyone around the table offer two pieces of feedback to the presenter (1. a celebration of what the chaplain did well in the visit, and 2. an exploratory question or challenge regarding what the chaplain might have done differently) before opening up the conversation more broadly to the group. This ensures that everyone’s perspective is heard, and that the presenter receives feedback from a diversity of voices.

²⁸Nouwen (1972), p. 100.

²⁹ For example, in my work with a student JR (which I expound on in my personality paper), I was able to draw upon my own experience of feeling unseen as a child (I was painfully shy and often felt like I was on the outside

looking in) as a resource of empathy to use in connecting with JR, as she worked through her fears of being rejected by her peers and patients/families in the caregiving setting.

³⁰ Cooper-White (2011), p. 241.

³¹ After years of coming to terms with the reality that we would be unable to have biological children together, due to a health crisis and surgery I underwent before our marriage, my husband and I decided to become licensed as foster parents. In 2020, my husband and I took in two foster children (toddlers ages 2 and 3) with a complicated history of trauma and abuse. We fell in love with our foster children immediately, though in many ways we felt out of our depths in addressing their responses to the many traumas they had endured in their short lives. After eight months in our home, the children were abruptly moved to live with relatives in their biological family and returned to what we believed was an unsafe situation. Saying goodbye to our foster children was the most painful experience of my life, one that upended my faith and sense of self. The intense grief of this loss, coupled with anger toward an unjust foster care system and the seeming absence of God in such suffering, sent me into a season of a “dark night of the soul” from which I am only now beginning to emerge. In the immediate aftermath of this loss, I found solace in reading St. John of the Cross, whose writings spoke to my sense of disorientation and the longing ache in my heart.

³² St. John of the Cross was a Christian mystic who lived in Spain in the 16th century. St John of the Cross’ efforts to reform the Carmelite religious order led to him being imprisoned, and it was during his time in prison that he composed *The Dark Night*, an eight-stanza poem and commentary that describes the journey of the soul toward union with God or the divine presence. Among the other mystic writers who have been companions to me on the journey are Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

³³ St John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I, 13.11. Or, as Matthew (2010) describes: “If God is beyond us, his approach is also liable to leave us feeling out of our depth. When the divine engages us more deeply, our minds and feelings will have less to take hold of, accustomed as they are to controlling the agenda, to meeting God on their terms and in portions they can handle. A deeper gift will *feel* like no gift at all...If anything is felt it will probably be our own selfishness and narrowness (wood crackling and twisting as the fire makes progress). When God approaches as who he is, I am liable to feel myself for what I am. As a physical sign of growth is growing pains, so a sign of God’s gift is the pain of being widened. This is the blessedness of night, that God, who wants to give, undertakes to make space in us for his gift” (p. 56).

³⁴ As May (2004) writes: “The dark night of the soul...is an ongoing spiritual process in which we are liberated from attachments and compulsions, and empowered to live and love more freely. Sometimes letting go of old ways is painful, occasionally even devastating. But this is not why the night is called ‘dark.’ The darkness of the night implies nothing sinister, only that the liberation takes place in hidden ways, beneath our knowledge and understanding. It happens mysteriously, in secret, and beyond our conscious control. For that reason, it can be disturbing or even scary, but in the end it always works to our benefit” (p. 4-5).

³⁵ May (2004), p. 146.

³⁶ I use both the kintsugi bowl and the labyrinth as images in my teaching. While I use the image of the labyrinth on my syllabus to illustrate how CPE is both an inner and an outer journey of discovery (see my personality paper), I use the image of the kintsugi bowl as part of a didactic I teach on Grief & Loss. Both images, the labyrinth and the kintsugi bowl, speak to the disorienting nature of the spiritual journey, which often includes sudden breaks and ruptures in our understanding of life (and God) that prompt us to envision new ways of piecing things together.

³⁷Matthew (2010), p. 56.

³⁸ Taylor (1998), p. 118.

³⁹ Steege (2010), whom I draw upon in my personality paper, says something congruent: “I was afraid [that when I looked within, I would find]...the ultimate in Empty. Because, you know, there was this...sense of Void in me. But now here I am, face to face with Empty, and what I find is something altogether different than what I feared. In this vast expanse of Void, something stirs...In hollows of my heart, something begins to fill and what I find is God...What I find is my Self. I go into the heart of my darkness and it is not the Black Hole of my imagining. It is, instead, the experience of Something More, something larger than the wasteland within, something there that fills my Void. I understand it as the Divine Self, the Eternal Spirit, God: the essence of my life, when everything else is done and gone” (p. 69).

⁴⁰ Guenther (1992), p. 87. See my educational theory paper, which elaborates on this image of spiritual midwifery as a model for both chaplaincy itself and the teaching of chaplaincy through CPE. I see parallels between the “dark night of the soul” described by St. John of the Cross, the “disorienting dilemma” of Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning model, and the painful period of travail and transition that is part of the birthing process – a disorienting time during which the midwife can serve as a trusted guide and companion.

⁴¹ In the Hebrew scriptures, God reveals himself to Moses in the form of a burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and guides the Israelites through the wilderness as a “pillar of cloud by day, and pillar of fire by night” (Exodus 13:21). In the Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit is depicted as both a bird (a descending dove in Matthew 3 and Luke 3) and as tongues of fire (descending upon God’s people in the story of Pentecost in Acts 2). The creative energy of God in the world is in many ways like a burning fire. As Cooper-White (2011) describes, “The Spirit as fire surrounds, flickers, illuminates, penetrates, consumes, and releases energy as it moves. It connects with Hebrew Bible images of the ‘refiner’s fire’ in Mal 3:2b that purifies and strengthens the people: ‘thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.’ The healing, persuading flow of God’s Spirit is as tenacious as the image of God’s irrepressible creativity, as the plant breaking through the concrete sidewalk. The Spirit’s relationship with us is one of continual healing and impetus for positive growth and change” (p. 93).

⁴² Cooper-White (2011), p. 83.

⁴³ See Kaufman (2004). Kaufman, in his Prairie View lecture series (2005), says: “God is the ongoing *creativity* in the universe - the bringing (or coming) into being of what is genuinely new, something transformative; the opening up of new possibilities through time... Therefore, it is important - especially in vocations attempting to diagnose and address destructive maladies and patterns of living - always to be on the alert, attempting to see where creative openings and possibilities may be appearing... Those of us dealing with difficult human problems need to train ourselves to be open to the signs that something truly *new* may be happening before us or to us; we dare not be rigid or dogmatic about what will be possible or impossible, even in difficult cases. Real *creativity* (God) - the bringing into being of something truly novel - is nearly always something we had not anticipated, but which may open up promising possibilities for healing.”

⁴⁴ The idea for a *Spiritual Journey Mapping* exercise was borrowed from a Unitarian Universalist workshop resource, found at: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/life/workshop1/159093.shtml>. As Miller (2023) acknowledges: “Students [often] self-disclose using metaphor. They allow others in the group to see them and often end up seeing themselves more clearly. This self-revelation leads to transformative learning, which directly impacts pastoral function” (p. 74).

⁴⁵ This exercise is based on a series of reflective questions/prompts taken from chapter 2 of Wimberly (2019).

⁴⁶ As Miller (2023) writes: “I invite creativity and co-creativity into my practice my staying open, loose, curious, considering the ‘what ifs’; being serious as well as silly, ponderous and playful; noticing synchronicities; honoring intuition; and reframing, or thinking outside of the box” (p. 70).

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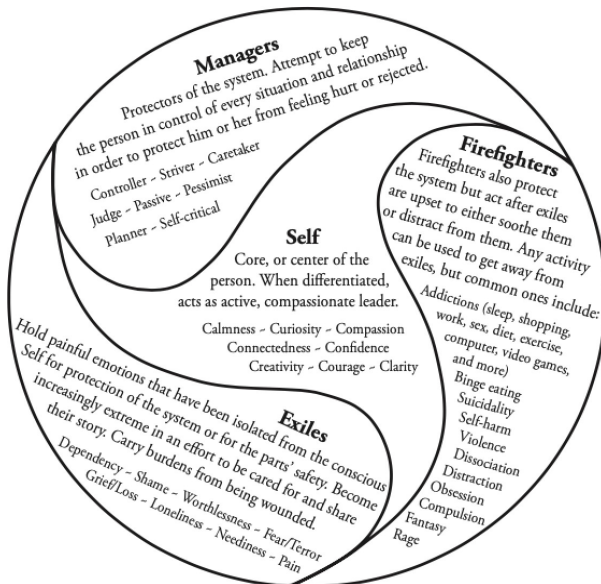
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PERSONALITY THEORY

Allie Ulrich



“The seat of the soul is where the inner and outer worlds meet.”

-Novalis

My understanding of human personality, which can perhaps be better described as a “theology of personhood,” is deeply rooted in my theological understanding of persons in relationship to the divine. I understand human beings, made in the image of God, to mirror the relational, fluid, and multi-faceted nature of God that is revealed in the Holy Trinity.¹ I have found *Internal Family Systems* to be a framework for understanding human personality that speaks to the complex, multi-faceted nature of human beings and is also deeply grounded in spirituality.² I see a connection between the image that is commonly used in Internal Family Systems (hereafter, IFS) to map out the parts of a person’s inner life (shown above) and the image of the labyrinth, as a metaphor for the journey into the deepest center of one’s self and back into the world – an image that I use on my syllabus to introduce students to CPE.³ I believe that CPE is both an outer and an inner journey of discovery – as students wander the labyrinth of the hospital setting and encounter a diversity of people and crisis situations that push them outside their comfort zones, they are also prompted to attend to their own wounds and to explore the sometimes disorienting inner landscape of their own spiritual and emotional experience.⁴ IFS helps give language to the ways in which these inner and outer worlds connect. As a spiritual caregiver and CPE educator, IFS has enriched my practice, helping me work with students’ resistances in the learning process, move toward my students with greater curiosity and compassion for the complexity of their stories, and guide my students in making connections between their inner and outer worlds.

IFS is a conceptual framework, developed by Richard Schwartz, that understands every human being to have a complex inner world - a system of parts, or sub-personalities, that each have their own thoughts, perspectives, feelings, and agendas. These parts relate to one another in much the same way that members of a family do. While many postmodern conceptions of the self also highlight the “multivocal, pluralistic nature of inner life,”⁵ IFS is unique in that it combines this paradigm of the multiple mind with a systems approach that focuses on how these inner parts function in relation to one another.⁶ According to IFS, each person consists of a system of wounded

and protective parts, with an underlying core Self.⁷ While all the parts of a person are understood to be inherently good and to have positive intentions for the person, some parts become burdened with pain (or strategies for coping with pain) from trauma or other negative life experiences, forcing these parts into extreme roles or behaviors within the internal system.⁸ *Exiles* are the most vulnerable parts in the system, that become burdened by painful life experiences and therefore lose access to their naturally valuable qualities (when unburdened, these parts are often the most playful, vibrant, and child-like aspects of a person). Exiles carry the burden of negative beliefs such as “I am all alone” or “My feelings and needs don’t matter,” as well as painful emotions such as shame, loneliness, fear, sadness, and worthlessness.⁹ To keep these unpleasant feelings at bay, other parts within the system, known as *Protectors*, develop strategies to hide, lock away, tamp down, numb or distract from the pain of our exiles. These *Protector* parts fall into two different categories: *Managers* and *Firefighters*. While *Managers* proactively attempt to manage or control a person’s outward circumstances to prevent the pain of exiles from being activated, *Firefighters* reactively attempt to extinguish the pain after an exiled part has been triggered. Common manager strategies include people-pleasing, self-criticizing, controlling, and striving for perfection; while common firefighter strategies include addictions, over-eating, aggression, suicidality and self-harm, obsession, compulsion, or any other behaviors that attempt to numb or distract.

Underlying all these parts, and at the center of every person is a *Self* – a core essence within each of us that remains unbroken and cannot be damaged, no matter what painful experiences or trauma we might endure. From a spiritual perspective, the Self can be understood as the soul or the indwelling of the divine – what Jenna Riemersma frames as the “God Image” or *Imago Dei* within us, “the seat of our authentic connection to the divine.”¹⁰ This core Self is defined by qualities such as compassion, curiosity, connectedness, clarity, calmness, courage, confidence, and creativity (what Schwartz calls the 8 Cs of Self-Leadership). Schwartz describes: “The Self has leadership and healing qualities...crucial to our highest, most harmonious functioning. Even the most severely abused, symptomatic clients have this healthy, healing Self, although many have very little access to it initially. The goal of IFS...is to differentiate this Self from parts...[in order to help] parts out of their extreme roles and [guide] them into harmonious collaboration.”¹¹

What attracted me initially to IFS was this notion of the core Self – that underneath the layers of protective coping strategies that develop over the course of one’s life, and the wounded parts that carry the burdens of our relational hurt and painful life experiences, there remains a core Self that can never be damaged or broken – what I understand as the indwelling of God within us. Underneath our burdened parts, this Self is accessible to each of us, meaning that we all possess the inner spiritual resources within ourselves to heal, change, and grow.¹² This notion of the core Self was personally compelling to me, as I came to terms with my own experiences of trauma and suffering, as well as the trauma I had witnessed our foster children enduring. Yet IFS really began to come alive for me during a summer intensive CPE group, when I noticed that each of the students I was supervising seemed to represent a wounded or protective part of myself. Moreover, I realized that how I was engaging with and responding to each of these students mirrored how I was relating to these internal parts of myself, whether with compassion and curiosity, annoyance, frustration, or disdain. MG represented the Controller part, who strove to manage the people and circumstances around her to protect the wounded part of herself that had experienced a profound sense of powerlessness in her childhood; JR was the Distancer, whose protective strategy was to keep others at arms-length in order to guard against rejection; DP was the Anxious Planner, whose efforts to anticipate every possible scenario that might arise masked deep feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness; RB was the Intellectualizer, who stayed in his head and spoke in abstract

philosophical language to avoid uncomfortable feelings; SH was the Doer and Achiever, who held herself and others to rigid, unrealistic expectations, hiding her fear of failure and vulnerability underneath; and ED was the Self-Sufficient One, who had learned from growing up in a military family to be low-maintenance and adaptable, yet because of this often “walked a fine line between independence and isolation.”¹³ I have found IFS to be a framework that has helped me to understand and find deeper compassion for both the wounded, vulnerable parts of my students that require tender care, as well as the manager and firefighter parts of my students that serve protective functions. At the same time, IFS has helped me to find greater self-compassion for all the parts of myself that interact with and are sometimes activated by my students – parts that I am coming to listen to more compassionately and even befriend.

Honoring the Function of Protectors & Working with Student Resistances

IFS offers a powerful framework for working with students’ resistances in the learning process, which often reveal themselves in the form of *Protectors*.¹⁴ According to IFS, meaningful personal growth is often connected to identifying and bringing balance to parts of ourselves that may be over-functioning, thus restoring greater harmony within our internal system.¹⁵ Schwartz acknowledges: “Highly polarized internal systems are rigid and delicate ecologies that will react severely to being disrupted. Trying to change any one part without considering the network in which it is embedded is likely to activate what is called ‘resistance,’ but is actually a natural and often necessary ecological reaction. For this reason, it is important to have a useful map of these relationships and to be respectful of the valid reasons for which they are so protected.”¹⁶ I have learned to honor the parts of my students that serve protective functions for them (though these parts may be functioning in extreme roles that no longer serve them), and to see these protectors as valuable signposts to deep needs underneath (potential areas for growth and healing). In working with MG, a white midwestern Presbyterian female in her early 20s, I noticed several of her protector parts dominating, especially in the early weeks of the unit. MG would often try to portray herself as more mature and experienced than her age would suggest, jumping in to answer her peers’ questions during orientation and didactics; I wondered if there was a performative aspect to this, covering over an underlying insecurity about her own worth and competence. Within her peer group, MG began to assert control, policing others regarding their follow-up with patient referrals and making corrections to the schedule on the communal board in the office. In response, several of MG’s peers began to voice frustration with MG’s micro-managing behaviors.¹⁷ I also began to find myself feeling annoyed with MG, and as I reflected more on this, I realized that what I was reacting to in MG was a part of myself that I sometimes dislike and resent.¹⁸ As I got to know MG more, she shared that from a very young age she was the one to “hold things together” for her family of origin, taking on the caretaker role for her mother through years of cancer treatments, as well as for her grandparents through various illnesses. I came to see that this obsessive, controlling part of her was a coping mechanism that she had developed over the years to protect herself from the reality of her own vulnerability and how much she deeply desired someone else to care for *her* (as she had experienced a good deal of hardship and trauma in her young life, which left her feeling out of control and powerless). As I acknowledged and honored the function that this protective part had served for MG – her protectors had literally helped her survive a chaotic childhood, and in many ways helped her to become a competent and capable adult – I began to find more compassion for MG as her supervisor, and MG slowly began to let down her guard, as she realized that her protector parts didn’t have to work so hard. This manifested in MG relying on her peers more for collaboration and support (rather than over-functioning and trying to control everyone else), as well as MG demonstrating more vulnerability in both individual supervision and the peer

group. Paying attention to MG's protectors, as well as honoring the function they had once played for her, gave me a way to work with her resistances, and ultimately created the conditions for her to be able to better learn and grow, as she learned to receive feedback from others with more openness.¹⁹

Moving Toward Exiles: Bringing Exiled Parts out of Isolation

The IFS model also reminds me to pay attention to the pain of exiles (my own and my students')²⁰ and to be curious about what these exiles might have to teach me – what Riemersma describes as “listening well to the gift of pain.”²¹ Just as I encourage students in their spiritual caregiving to move toward, and not away from, the pain of patient and families in their care, I also strive to model this for my students by creating space in both individual supervision and the group context for students to bring all aspects of their experience, including their pain and woundedness.²² Especially early on in a CPE unit, my focus is on building a trusting relationship and supervisory alliance with my students. Likewise, in the group process, I aim to facilitate a supportive, trusting environment where students can share their stories, practice vulnerability with one another, and release the burdens they may be carrying. I strive to welcome all parts of my students, to nurture and tend to the wounded parts that have been neglected and thus help invite these exiles out of isolation. As I offer space for this, I hope to model for my students how they might do the same for patients feeling the burdens of loneliness, isolation, fear, and sadness.

JR, an Afro-Latina student in her late 20s whom I supervised in her first unit of CPE, experienced the pain of one of her exiles being activated when she was turned away by a patient's family member who refused her spiritual care during a crisis. In JR's verbatim of this encounter, she named that she felt “disrespected, unwanted, and ultimately rejected” by the family and staff involved. Her peer group helped her to explore these feelings during her verbatim seminar, and in subsequent individual supervision sessions, I became curious about the exiled part of JR that carried the burdens of feeling rejected and unwanted, and how this part of her was impacting her spiritual care visits as well as her interactions with her peers. In individual supervision, JR shared how she was routinely bullied and made fun of in school, which later resulted in her lashing out in anger and destructive behaviors during her teenage years (one of her firefighters). When this ‘fight’ response was not an option, she developed the alternative protective strategy of making herself smaller and fading into the background.²³ I assessed that this protector part was coming out for JR in the peer group context, where she was initially quite guarded and reserved. Her protector parts were working so hard to make sure that the exiled part of her that had felt rejected as a child wouldn't have to feel that kind of pain again. As I gently invited JR to see this vulnerable part of herself with more compassion and curiosity, she began to lean into greater vulnerability and openness within her peer group, as she shared more of her story and her personal struggles; this translated into more meaningful visits with patients and families in the hospital, as she grew in confidence and the freedom to bring her whole self into her interactions with others. As I paid attention to JR's pain and invited her to attend to an exiled part of herself, I believe that she experienced a great deal of healing personally, while also learning to function more effectively as a chaplain, deepening her capacity to attend to the wounded and vulnerable parts of others.²⁴

Connecting to the Core Self: Self-Differentiation & Self-Leadership

I believe that my role as a CPE educator is to help guide students in the process of moving toward greater connection with their core Self, as they learn to accompany others on this same spiritual journey.²⁵ As Mary Steege writes, in collaboration with Schwartz: “In the IFS model, spiritual presence is the single most important element in facilitating a successful session... Spiritual presence is the key ingredient in the process of healing, so what we are looking for is a

way to connect with this presence, a way to tap into the power of spiritual energy for personal and communal transformation.”²⁶ One of the goals of CPE is to help students move toward greater self-differentiation and self-leadership within their internal and external systems, which can lead to both their own personal growth and their development as more effective spiritual caregivers. As students explore the labyrinth of their own inner worlds, my hope is that they also learn to navigate the labyrinth of the clinical setting more effectively, as they grow in their understanding of self in relation to others.

DP, a Black Baptist male in his late 40s who identified as gay, came to CPE with palpable nervousness and anxiety. DP’s anxiety manifested in him asking so many hypothetical questions in orientation that it was as if he was trying to plan for every possible scenario that might happen.²⁷ In his previous career in theater, he had developed the coping mechanism of planning for every possible contingency, as a way to protect against criticism and rejection; in the past, this intense anxiety had resulted in him developing painful stomach ulcers. An important part of DP’s learning in CPE had to do with developing greater awareness around his anxious manager and noticing when that part of himself was activated in his spiritual care encounters. As I invited him to reflect on this in individual supervision, he was able to find greater self-compassion for that part of himself that had served a protective function for him,²⁸ while moving toward greater Self-leadership. In supervision, I encouraged DP to identify practices that centered and grounded him in the moment, and he began a practice of taking deep breaths and praying silently when he started to notice his anxiety well up in the midst of difficult spiritual care encounters. As the CPE unit progressed, DP began to more fully embrace the idea of "entering into the unknown" with curiosity and openness, rather than fear, which translated to deeper and more meaningful spiritual care visits.

Strengths and Limitations of IFS

One of the strengths of Internal Family Systems is that it offers a holistic, psycho-spiritual model of persons; IFS is a non-pathologizing approach that allows me to hold tension, complexity, and paradox as I work with individuals and CPE groups. I believe that IFS is also trauma-informed, as it honors and respects the protective parts of a person that have been forced into extreme roles in response to a person’s trauma and suffering. Moreover, IFS is an embodied approach, in that it encourages me to pay attention to feelings and bodily sensations that come up for me as a supervisor, and to help my students identify these as well (what Schwartz calls *trailheads*, or entry points to parts of ourselves that are in need of healing). However, one of the limitations of IFS is that it is primarily a therapeutic model, and not an educational model. While IFS provides a rich framework for understanding *intrapersonal* relationships within a person’s internal personality structure, I would argue that IFS does not give enough attention to the impact of *interpersonal* relationships on a person’s growth and development. Here, I find the attachment theories of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, and especially the concept of a *secure base*, to be helpful in complementing IFS and filling in some of the relational gaps that IFS misses. Whereas IFS focuses primarily on *intrapersonal* relationships, attachment theory brings *interpersonal* relationships to the forefront, highlighting the importance of trusting relationships in supporting an individual’s growth and development. For some CPE students, especially those who have not had the benefit of secure attachment relationships to support their growth and development in the past, access to *Self* may be severely limited or impaired. Even students who are otherwise relationally secure and confident are likely to find their anxiety running high – and their *Exiles* and *Protector* parts strongly activated – in the high-intensity environment of the clinical setting, especially during the early weeks of a CPE program. I believe that trusting relationships, including a secure attachment to a supervisor and peer group, can aid students in accessing and connecting to their core *Self*. As

an educator, it is essential for me to create a *secure base*²⁹ for my students, from which they can explore new aspects of themselves and the clinical environment, as they risk trying on new behaviors and ways of relating to themselves and others. Providing a *secure base* involves being emotionally attuned and available to my students, as well as responsive to their unique learning needs; it also involves modeling for students what leading from one's core *Self* looks like, as I relate to them with curiosity, compassion, and connection. Practically, I provide a *secure base* for my students by keeping an "open door" to support students when they are feeling overwhelmed; normalizing students' anxieties, especially during orientation but also throughout the CPE process; emphasizing that mistakes can be learning opportunities; and being available by phone to answer questions during students' first overnight on-call shifts. One student SH, who was feeling anxious about her ability to handle the intensity of overnight shifts, called me in the middle of the night on her first on-call shift for a "pep talk" – which demonstrated to me that she felt enough trust in our relationship to reach out to me, as I had already laid the groundwork for a secure supervisory alliance. Over the phone, I helped SH to take some deep breaths and encouraged her to sit down for a few moments to drink some water. Those few minutes of support gave SH enough courage to respond to the next incoming call and continue her on-call shift for the night. I strive to create a similar *secure base* and trusting relationship with each of my students, and my hope is that as the unit progresses, students begin to internalize this *secure base* for themselves, as they become more readily able to access their own core *Self*. By the end of the unit, I tend to receive fewer calls in the middle of the night, as students progressively move toward greater independence and self-leadership.

The Impact of Family & Culture on the Internal System

While IFS primarily focuses on an individual's internal system, it also acknowledges how personality is shaped and influenced by various external forces such as family, culture, and society. IFS views all these systems (self, family, culture, and society) as interlocking and affecting one another – in fact, these inner and outer systems mirror one another (the inner labyrinth of the self and the outer labyrinth of relationships with others).³⁰ Schwartz describes: "Systems thinking helps us examine the various systems surrounding or within a [person] to find and release constraints. Constraints may exist in a [person's] system of inner personalities; in the [person's] relationship with various family members; ...in the way various institutions outside the family affect it (school, work, mental health system, etc.); and in the way the [person's] ethnic community and the larger society affect the family's values and beliefs. All of these human systems are interlocked. They affect and are affected by one another."³¹ Schwartz acknowledges the impact of developmental burdens, legacy (or inter-generational) burdens, burdens created by trauma or other constraining environments, and even the burdens of poverty, chronic illness, and socioeconomic context that may influence one's internal and external systems.³²

As a white, upper-middle class, heterosexual female, I need to be mindful of the cultural burdens that many of my students, particularly those who come from historically marginalized groups, may carry. For example, DP carried the burden of feeling "not good enough," which was influenced by cultural and religious traditions that had taught him to believe that he could not serve in a position of spiritual leadership as an openly gay Black man. JR's family dynamics, her relationships with her peers in school, and her experience as an Afro-Latina growing up in a majority white neighborhood all contributed to her feelings of being unwanted and rejected – a burden she carried from childhood that continued to impact how she related to herself, to others, and to God. As an educator, I am aware of how these broader influences of culture, society, and family can impact a student's personal growth and development. With this in mind, I teach a

didactic on “Social Identity” to encourage open dialogue around the impact of race, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, etc. on students’ perspectives, identity, and development. In a didactic on “Group Process,” I include an interactive workshop to help students reflect on the roles they tend to play in their families of origin, inviting students to make connections between the roles they inhabit within their families and the roles they might be taking on in the peer group or the patient room. As Schwartz acknowledges, IFS “often alternates between a person’s working with his or her internal system and experimenting with Self-leadership in external relationships.”³³ Growth in one area is often mirrored in another; for example, as students are working on relational boundaries in their spiritual care, they may also be practicing creating boundaries with their families, which may in turn prompt them to reflect on Peacekeeper or People-Pleasing parts of themselves that don’t like to disappoint other people. My hope is that through the learning process of CPE, students can begin to explore both their inner and outer worlds, and to make connections between the two. As a CPE educator, I can help guide students in this journey by asking exploratory questions, inviting deeper reflection, remaining curious and connected, and offering a balance of support and challenge in the process.

Concluding Thoughts

The IFS model has influenced the way I think about various aspects of my CPE curriculum and overall program design – from the interview process and orientation to final evaluations. I expect that students’ *Protector* parts will be strongly activated in the interview setting, as well as in orientation and the early days of a CPE program, and I strive to normalize students’ anxieties as they arise in the learning process. Throughout the CPE unit, I pay attention to students’ *Exiles* and *Protectors* – seeing these as signposts to deep needs underneath (and potential areas for growth and healing). I look for signs that students are moving toward greater self-differentiation and self-leadership in their relationship to self and others, using Schwartz’s 8Cs as a guide to continually assess and evaluate where students are in their learning. My hope is that the CPE experience will spark a lifelong journey of transformation for students, that will expand well beyond the confines of the clinical context and into all corners of their lives.

On a personal level, IFS has been profoundly transformative in my own learning and growth as a CPE educator, helping me to connect more deeply to my core *Self*. IFS encourages me to look within myself, and to listen well to the pain of my own wounded parts, as they come up in response to my students. If I notice that one of my parts is taking over (such as my perfectionist part or my people-pleasing part), I try to remain curious about this, as it can give me valuable information about transference/countertransference that may be showing up in the supervisory relationship.³⁴ The journey of developing as a CPE educator prompts me to continually look within, as I uncover new parts of myself that are in need of healing and continue on the labyrinth-like path of spiritual growth and transformation alongside my students.

¹ See my theology paper.

² I first encountered IFS through my own personal journey with spiritual direction, and by way of contemplative writers such as Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, and Thomas Keating. Merton (2007) describes the journey from the “false self” to the “true self” (what he describes as “who we are in God”). Rohr (2003) also uses the language of true self/false self; while Thomas Keating (2020) views the False Self as our “wounded self” or the part of us that searches for things in the world to help us cope with our wounds. Keating saw Centering Prayer as a type of “divine therapy” to heal the wounded self. Each of these contemplative writers uses language that parallels the IFS concept of a core Self, that becomes obscured or covered over by a person’s wounded and protective parts.

³ See also my theology paper, which draws upon the labyrinth metaphor to describe the spiritual journey.

⁴ Dirx (2006), whom I draw upon in my education theory, speaks of a similar interplay between our inner and outer worlds: “Paradoxically, we enter more fully into relationship [with others] by deepening our understanding of ourselves, of the inner worlds which seem so much a part of us but yet are so distant from the everydayness of our normal, waking lives. To connect with the whole, we need to know ourselves, who we are and what we are about. Our relationships with others are only as strong and deep as the relationship we have with ourselves. But such inner work does not suggest we ignore or minimize the outer world until such time that we have arrived at self-knowledge. The path of understanding to the inner world leads through the outer world. The work of the soul is intimately bound up with our being in and of this world, not secluded and apart from it. It is an active life that is interlaced with contemplation and discernment”(p. 129).

⁵ See Pembroke (2006). A review of 20th century theories of personality shows that multiplicity has long been a feature of our understanding of the self. Freud, echoing Plato’s tripartite model of the soul, proposed the three mental agencies of personality to be the id, the ego, and the superego. Jung conceived of the multiplicity of the self in terms of archetypes in the psyche, namely the persona, the anima/animus, the shadow, and the Self. Objects-relations theorists after Freud, including Klein and Winnicott, conceived of the person as consisting of an inner landscape of internalized objects representing early childhood attachments and relationships. IFS similarly understands the self as a multiplicity of parts or sub-personalities in relation to one another.

⁶ IFS applies concepts from systems thinking and family therapy to the inner world of subpersonalities, providing a helpful framework for reflecting on the roles that a person’s parts take on within the internal system. See <https://ifs-institute.com/resources/articles/evolution-internal-family-systems-model-dr-richard-schwartz-ph-d> for a fuller treatment on the evolution and development of the IFS model.

⁷ The following is my attempt to synthesize the most important elements of Richard Schwartz’s IFS model. My understanding of the following terms and definitions has come largely from Schwartz (1995), Riemersma (2020), and Steege (2010), along with the descriptions and definitions found on the IFS Institute’s website: www.ifs-institute.com.

⁸ “A good analogy is an alcoholic family, in which the children are forced into protective and stereotypic roles (the scapegoat, mascot, lost child, and so on) by the extreme dynamics of their family. But these roles do not represent the essence of the children; on the contrary, once released from his or her role by intervention, each child can find interests and talents separate from the demands of the chaotic family. The same process seems to hold true for internal families – parts are forced into extreme role by external circumstances, but they gladly transform into moderate, more functional roles once they see that the system can safely operate that way” (IFS Institute website: <https://ifs-institute.com/resources/articles/evolution-internal-family-systems-model-dr-richard-schwartz-ph-d>).

⁹ Riemersma (2020) describes it in this way: “Exiles are the sensitive, hurting parts who carry the memory and the marks of pain from our past. We might have experienced humiliation, disappointment, grief, terror, or abandonment, either from an event or from a person...But who wants to keep feeling all those bad thing? No one! We try to keep these vulnerable parts hidden away, pushed down, locked up, and sometimes entirely (we think) left behind...IFS uses the term burdened to describe the exile’s encumbered state. Burdens are extreme ideas or feelings that are carried by parts and govern their lives. It’s as if the part is now shackled with an emotional load (like sorrow, rejection, or loneliness) or a cognitive load (e.g. negative beliefs like ‘I’m not good enough,’ ‘I’m not worthy of a positive relationship,’ or ‘My feelings and needs don’t matter.’) Our parts weren’t designed to carry these loads, which prevent them from being what they were designed to be” (p. 19-20).

¹⁰ Riemersma (2020), p. 18-19.

¹¹ <https://ifs-institute.com>

¹² As Steege (2010) writes: “It doesn’t matter how deeply we may have buried our sense of Self, Holy Spirit is the seed for Life and it will work its way up through the rocky ground of the most hardened heart” (p. 9).

¹³ These are ED’s own words used to describe her experience of growing up in a military family in which she was often uprooted due to her family’s frequent relocation. Her Self-Sufficient part had learned to protect against the pain of disrupted relationships by never getting too close to anyone or relying on anyone else too fully to meet her needs. Ironically, this coping strategy, which functioned to protect her from loneliness and isolation, often prevented her from the very thing she desired – which was deeper relationship and connection with others.

¹⁴ I see a parallel between *Protectors* and what Ormont (1992) describes as *resistances*: “Resistances are mechanisms of repression and sameness, embedded in the character structure. They show themselves as mechanisms that once worked for the person, or seemed to work, but that now stand in the way of emotional growth” (p. 120). Ormont sees resistances as a normal part of the human make-up: “As strong as our impulse is for change, for gain, for novelty, perhaps no one lives without virtually as strong an impulse to hold on to familiar habits and practices, patterns that offered protection, or seemed to. It seems part of our human makeup to resist change – indeed, even those changes that we, in our more enlightened moments, can see as potentially valuable to us” (p. 119).

¹⁵ Cp. Ormont (1992): “We all adopt mechanisms to protect us at early stages of life. However, circumstances change, and sometimes those mechanisms become obsolete or even crippling to us. When this happens, we need the ability to discard them and to meet the world in new ways...Devices of ours that we thought we once needed now bar our way to making new and better adaptations. We can’t learn the new if we refuse to let go of the old” (p. 119-120).

¹⁶ Schwartz (1995), p. 59.

¹⁷ My approach to addressing this in individual supervision with MG’s peers was to explore with each of these students the parts of themselves that were being activated by MG’s behavior, effectively helping them to do what Schwartz calls a *U-Turn*. Riemersma (2020) describes: “The IFS concept of the U-turn proposes that, when a situation or person is triggering for us, rather than looking at what they are doing wrong, we turn our attention around and notice parts of us that are getting activated. Rather than exclaiming, ‘That person is driving me crazy!’ we ask ‘What is coming up in me?’ With this simple redirect, the difficult people [we encounter] become gifts, serving as our tor-mentors. By tormenting us with those frustrating and annoying things they do, they serve as mentors for the parts of us that need healing” (p.184-5). I also invited each of these students to directly address their feelings and concerns with MG, communicating to her how her behaviors were impacting them.

¹⁸ I can relate to MG’s desire to grasp for control and obsess over every little detail, especially in the midst of unpredictable and overwhelming situations. My own perfectionism and striving for approval developed from a young age, as an attempt to guard myself against the often unpredictable and critical responses of my mother. Like MG, I took on the emotional responsibility for my family at a young age. I’ve learned that my quickness to fall into a caregiver role and to tend to the needs of others before my own is often a way for me to guard against having to acknowledge my own neediness and vulnerability. I need to be mindful of how this part may show up for me in relation to my students. The annoyance I was feeling toward MG’s controlling part ultimately pointed me toward a controlling part of myself that was in need of healing and understanding. As I came to acknowledge and honor this protector part of myself, it also allowed me to find more compassion and understanding for that part of MG.

¹⁹ MG wrote in her final self-evaluation: “With both the help of Allie’s guidance and exploring my relationships with my peers, I was able to be vulnerable in ways that previously I would have deemed personally unacceptable. I have shared my story, my emotions...[and] been seen and loved and known...From [my peer group] I have learned how to rely on people...I also learned how much it meant to me to be affirmed in my ministry in both positive and ‘negative’ feedback, and also what it meant to affirm others. I think I have spent a lot of time in ministry feeling that I was at odds with my peers, and this has shown me that being there for each other is a much more valuable way to create a robust ministry.”

²⁰ See also my theology paper, which elaborates on an incarnational and relational theology that compels me to move toward, and not away from, human suffering.

²¹ Riemersma (2020), p. 42. I have found that a student’s pain can often be the locus of their deepest learning, just as I have found that my own pain has had much to teach me. As Riemersma (2020) elaborates: “‘Somewhere along the line, we’ve missed the reality that our ‘negative’ emotions are among the most important guides to our inner health – if we listen to them...One common experience, however, keeps us all stuck. Instead of moving toward our pain and

listening to the valuable messages it has for us, the vast majority of us move against or away from it...But what if instead of moving against or away from the pain we feel, we moved toward it? That's what Jesus invited us to do and modeled with his life. He stepped into the world and moved toward the people in the most pain, with the most sorrow, with the biggest hurts. He moved toward them and their stories...What if we did within our hearts what Jesus did outside them – moved toward the pain and hurt and actually listened to it?" (p. 42-44).

²² See also my theology paper, in which I write about chaplaincy and CPE supervision as an act of hospitality and welcoming of the stranger, mirroring God's divine hospitality toward each of us.

²³ Riemersma (2020) describes this protector part well: "You might be familiar with the three common responses to danger: fight, flight, or freeze. 'Get Small' is...a cross between flight and freeze. The body freezes when it can't escape, and the person inside 'flees' by becoming as invisible as possible. For people surrounded by big personalities or big situations where 'fight' or 'get big' seems impossible, 'Get Small' is a pretty resourceful response. Unfortunately, this strategy usually takes away a person's voice and ability to speak into a situation or use appropriate power to take self-protective action" (p. 102).

²⁴ In her final evaluation, JR wrote: "After confronting one of my biggest fears – rejection – I discovered that being present in the moment of the patients' spiritual journey was enough. I realized that offering a quiet, silent presence can be just as powerful and impactful as a verbal prayer. It wasn't until I finally confronted my inner fears of rejection...that I began to achieve this goal. As I continue to work on this, I look forward to the spiritual care I'll be able to provide."

²⁵ In the IFS model, as well as in the models of transformative learning and spiritual midwifery that constitute my educational theory, individuals are seen as capable and empowered, possessing the inner resources within themselves to heal, change, and grow. Schwartz (1995) concluded, in his decades of work with even the most severely troubled and traumatized individuals, that "everyone has a Self, no matter...how polarized the internal system" (p. 87).

²⁶ Steege (2010), p. 36-37. Steege elaborates: "Self-energy is key for any therapeutic intervention. In other words, things go better with God in the room. Stay in Self. In IFS, this is the closest thing that we have to a mantra, and most IFS practitioners embrace some form of spiritual grounding or attunement. We sense into the presence of Self. It can happen on the inside, in a matter of moments. It can happen on the outside as a time of shared meditation. It can be explicit or implicit. Like any spiritual practice, it gets easier and more fluid as you go along...Christians sense into Self-energy all the time, only when we do it, we call it prayer. We, too, open ourselves to the presence of the Holy Spirit, seek its leading and its guidance. We set aside our own needs, our own desires, and our own designs in order to make way for God's unfolding" (p. 37).

²⁷ I recognize that students' protective parts may be particularly activated during orientation and the early weeks of a CPE program, as students are exposed to a new and chaotic clinical setting, as well as the disorienting learning process of CPE. For this reason, I include space in orientation for students to name their fears and anxieties, and to normalize these as part of the learning process.

²⁸ This protector had even deeper roots in DP's childhood. As I got to know DP over the course of the summer, he shared that as a child, he had to take up the responsibility of being the "man of the house" from a young age, as the only male in a household of women. Taking on this manager role, in which he could ensure that everyone else was cared for and protected, was a way of guarding against his own deep fear of abandonment. DP's anxious planner part was also working overtime to hide away the exiled part of himself that had always felt "Not Good Enough" – a part of himself that was impacted by cultural and religious ideas that caused him to doubt his gifts and calling to ministry as an openly gay Black man.

²⁹ According to Bowlby and Ainsworth, a secure base is formed through a primary caretaker's bonds with an infant child during early development. As Bowlby (1988) writes: "In providing his patient with a secure base from which to explore and express thoughts and feelings, the therapist's role is analogous to that of a mother who provides her child with a secure base from which to explore the world" (p. 159).

³⁰ For example, Schwartz (1995) makes the connection that parts of a person "may take on burdens of perfectionism or disapproval, becoming internalized critical parents...a process that has been called 'internalization' or 'introjection' in other intrapsychic models [namely object relations theory]" (p. 138). Thus, a person's parts often mirror the external voices and attitudes of parents, significant figures in one's life, and one's larger cultural community.

³¹ Schwartz (1995), p. 19.

³² Schwartz (1995), p. 134-140. Schwartz also speaks of cultural burdens, saying: “Whole cultures can carry legacy burdens as the result of being massacred, colonized, enslaved, or impoverished. Or a culture may carry a burden such as patriarchy or racism, whose origins are less clearly traceable. Cultural burdens constrain all the families within the culture, and in turn burden the individuals within the families” (p. 140).

³³ Schwartz (1995), p. 95.

³⁴ One practice I have found especially helpful is to do what Riemersma (2020) calls a *Spiritual MRI*, by checking in with myself and asking: “How do I feel toward this part, person, or experience?” I return to Schwartz’s 8 Cs, or qualities of the core Self, and pay attention to any feelings or thoughts I notice that do not align with the 8 Cs. If I am feeling defensive, skeptical, scared, bored, angry, or frustrated, for example, when interacting with my students in individual supervision or the group, this indicates to me that I have a part(s) in charge. Doing a *Spiritual MRI* can help me pay attention to what’s coming up in the inter-subjective field that may be impacting my relationships with my CPE students.

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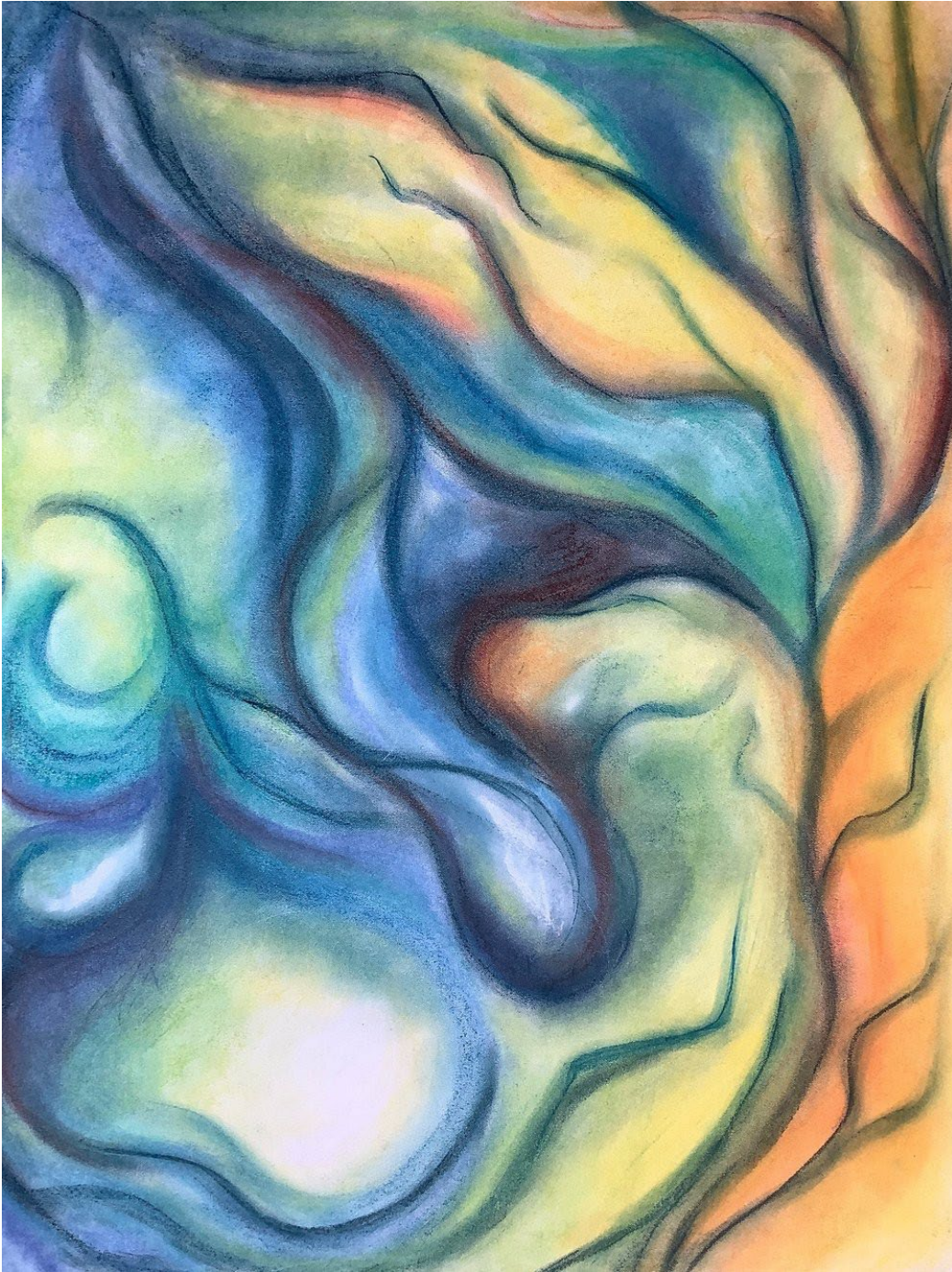
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EDUCATION THEORY POSITION**Allie Ulrich**

Toward New Life by Allie Ulrich, oil pastel drawing, 2013

"The greatest privilege of a human life is to become a midwife to the awakening of the Soul in another person."

-Plato

Teaching with Soul: CPE as Spiritually Transformative Education

As I began exploring educational theories for CPE, I was immediately drawn to transformative learning theory. I have often described my own experience of CPE as transformative – a process that not only helped me to develop as a spiritual caregiver, but also one that prompted me to reflect more deeply on my own life story, experiences, and relationships, ultimately impacting the way I relate to myself, to others, and to God. I first came to CPE (as a student) at a time in my life when I was wrestling with my own questions about God and spirituality, in the wake of a painful season of loss. After months of hospitalization and a life-altering surgery that resulted in the loss of my fertility at age 27, I had firsthand experience of what it was like to be the vulnerable patient in the bed, on the receiving end of a chaplain’s spiritual care. My own experiences of pain eventually gave birth to a sense of calling to chaplaincy – a vocation in which I could accompany others through their own seasons of suffering and pain. At that time in my life, CPE was a gift that helped me to make meaning of my experiences of pain, and to see them as a resource of empathy to draw upon in caring for others. As I accompanied others on their own winding spiritual paths through suffering and disorientation, I found myself moving toward new life as well. Today, part of my motivation to become a CPE educator is a desire to facilitate that kind of transformative learning process for my CPE students.

Transformative learning theory gives language to the process of learning, change, and growth that is at the heart of CPE. The clinical setting of CPE pushes students outside of their comfort zones, as they come face-to-face with people in crisis and transition. These encounters with the depths of human suffering – combined with the unfamiliar methodology of CPE, a dynamically unfolding curriculum, a challenging group process, and the deep introspective work encouraged in individual supervision – often profoundly challenge students’ expectations and cause them to re-examine previously-held beliefs and values. The process can be disorienting and emotionally intense. Yet in the disorientation, there is an opportunity for CPE students to change and widen their perspectives, as they are invited to critically reflect on and make new meaning out of their experiences. Transformative learning is defined as “the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference...to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally capable of change.”¹ Broadly speaking, transformative learning theory is focused on the ways in which people interpret and make meaning of their experiences.² Over time, as we interpret our experiences in particular ways, we construct certain ways of seeing and understanding the world that become like lenses or filters through which we interpret other experiences. As Patricia Cranton describes: “When something unexpected happens, when a person encounters something that does not fit with [expectations]...the choices are to reject the unexpected or to question the expectation. When people critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view, transformative learning occurs.”³

In Jack Mezirow’s writings on transformative learning, what I find most compelling – and most applicable to the learning that occurs in CPE – is the emphasis on *meaning-making* in the learning process, as well as the role of a *disorienting dilemma* as a catalyst for transformation. From the perspective of transformative learning theory, learning involves more than passively absorbing or receiving information from external sources; rather, it is an active, constructive process of meaning-making that is both deeply personal as well as profoundly contextual and relational, as people seek to integrate new experiences from the external world into their existing frameworks of understanding, in order to create coherent narratives of their lives. The practical implication of such a constructivist view of learning is that “knowledge for the learner does not exist in books or in the experience of the educator...[but in] the learner’s ability to construe and

reconstrue the meaning of an experience in his or her own terms.”⁴ In such an educational model, learners are empowered to take ownership of their own learning. As a CPE educator, I seek to empower my students in their learning, by inviting my students to formulate individual learning goals and write weekly reflections that serve as a starting point for conversations in individual supervision. I honor the wisdom and insights that students bring with them to the CPE process from their previous life experiences, by incorporating group discussion, interactive workshops, and creative activities into many of my didactics. As an educator, I believe that my role is to *attend to a process* of meaning-making that is occurring for my students – such as allowing a student DP to cry and express his anger and pain, as he struggled to make sense of the tragic death of a teenager who was brought into the trauma bay of the hospital and to understand his role as a chaplain in the aftermath of such a tragedy. As students bear witness to an enormous amount of crisis and suffering in the clinical setting, they are often prompted to face deep existential questions, feelings of overwhelm, and powerlessness. I hope to come alongside my students as a guide and helper, as they strive to integrate and make meaning out of their experiences – just as they are learning to do for patients and families in the hospital, as they provide spiritual care.

According to Mezirow, the process of transformative learning begins with what he describes as a *disorienting dilemma* – something that disrupts or calls into question old ways of understanding.⁵ A disorienting dilemma could involve a sudden, dramatic event that has the result of shifting a person’s perspective (such as a major life transition, death, crisis, or illness); but a disorienting dilemma is just as likely to result from a more commonplace, everyday occurrence such as an eye-opening discussion, a thought-provoking reading or work of art, or an encounter with someone from a different culture. In CPE, a disorienting dilemma might be an overwhelming crisis, medical code, or trauma in the hospital setting; an unsettling encounter with a patient or family that prompts anxiety; a moment of receiving difficult feedback during a verbatim presentation; a conflict with a peer; a challenging word from an educator that prompts a change in perspective; or even a major life event that happens outside of CPE that impacts a student’s learning process. The disorienting dilemmas that arise in CPE are different for each student, and often context-specific – meaning they may vary depending on if student is learning in the context of a trauma hospital, hospice setting, psychiatric facility, or as part of a community-based CPE program. A disorienting dilemma that arose for me, in the context of a mental health facility early on in my own CPE training, was encountering a patient whose outbursts of rage prompted me to look at my own anger toward God, in light of painful losses I had experienced in my life. KB (whose story I elaborate on in my theology paper) found herself in a disorienting dilemma when she faced an unexpected health crisis during her fourth unit of CPE, which caused her to re-examine her theological understanding of suffering and her role as a hospice chaplain in caring for others at the end of life. For another student JD, a disorienting dilemma arose when I gave her feedback that her positive, cheerful affect often didn’t match the content of her speech, as she shared about difficult patient encounters or painful events in her life. This was the opposite of what JD had always believed about herself – which was that her facial expressions often communicated a more negative affect than she intended. Receiving feedback that challenged her previously-held beliefs became the catalyst for JD to explore the stories she was telling herself (and that others had told her) about how she presents herself. This ultimately helped her to move toward a more authentic way of relating with others (both patients and peers), in which there was greater congruence between her internal emotional experience and her external affect.

Mezirow’s emphasis on the disorienting dilemma as a catalyst for transformation reminds me that moments of confusion, disorientation, anxiety, and discomfort are not antithetical to the

learning process, but in fact, are a vital and necessary part of growth and change. As Mezirow writes: “Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation. These challenges are painful...[as] they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self.”⁶ As an educator, I am aware that disorienting dilemmas can often bring up intense feelings of frustration, shame, guilt, confusion, helplessness, and anxiety for students, as they find themselves in the liminal space between what they once knew and what they are coming to know. I strive to be open and curious about what is coming up emotionally for my students and to normalize these uncomfortable feelings as part of the CPE learning process.

While I appreciate Mezirow’s language around meaning-making and the disorienting dilemma as a catalyst for transformative learning, one of the limitations I find in Mezirow’s theory is that he views transformation as a primarily cognitive and rational process, driven by critical reflection and problem-solving in response to a disorienting event. However, I believe that meaningful transformation involves not only rational but also extrarational and relational dimensions. Thus, to complement the transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow, I draw upon the work of John Dirkx, who highlights the importance of the spiritual and emotional dimensions of transformative learning; as well as Mary Belenky, who highlights the importance of relational and connected ways of knowing in the learning process.

Learning as “Soul Work”: The Spiritual and Emotional Dimensions of Transformation

John Dirkx describes transformative learning, from an integrated and holistic perspective, as a process that goes beyond the rational to include spiritual, emotional, imaginative, intuitive, and embodied ways of knowing.⁷ According to Dirkx, transformative learning “involves an understanding of the self through spiritual, emotional, and mythological dimensions of experience” and has to do with “a deep emotional and spiritual connection between our inner lives and some aspect of our outer experience.”⁸ Dirkx’s perspective on transformative learning builds on the work of Robert Boyd, who viewed transformation in terms of *individuation*, or the process of developing a more integrated sense of self in relation to others⁹ - which I would argue is one of the primary tasks of CPE and aligns with many of ACPE’s stated outcomes and indicators.¹⁰ Boyd saw *discernment*, rather than critical reflection (as Mezirow proposed), as the basis for transformative learning; such discernment “begins with openness to images and symbols and leads to illumination through sorting, relating, and bringing images into consciousness.”¹¹ An approach to transformative learning that values such extrarational dimensions calls for instructional methods that center the role of imagination, emotion, story-telling, narrative, imagery, and metaphor.¹² I intentionally shape my CPE curriculum with this in mind. I begin CPE orientation with a creative *Spiritual Journey Mapping* activity that helps students tell the story of their spiritual journey through visual representation. Throughout the CPE unit, I weave creativity, story, poetry, imagery, and metaphor into many of my didactics and other learning activities. The verbatim template that I have students use includes reflection questions such as: “What feelings arose for you before, during, and after this patient visit?”; “What parts of your own life story helped you connect to this patient (or caused you to disconnect from them)?”; and “What spiritual/theological themes, sacred stories, or texts come to mind as you reflect on this clinical encounter?” In individual supervision and the group process, I strive to be attuned to my students’ emotional experience, to help students explore spiritual and existential questions that are arising for them in the clinical context, and to pay attention to images and themes that emerge in conversation and connection with one another.

Learning in Relationship: Relational and Connected Ways of Knowing

I believe that the kind of transformative learning and deep soul work involved in CPE can only happen within the context of meaningful relationships. With the high intensity of the clinical

setting, and the disorienting nature of the CPE, meaningful relational connection is necessary so that students can learn and grow without feeling too overwhelmed or isolated in the process. I believe that a person can only learn about themselves, the world, and the sacred through being in relationship with others.¹³ Belenky and her colleagues offer an educational perspective that emphasizes *connected knowing* – an approach to knowing that involves students “[learning] to get out from behind their own eyes and use...the lens of another person.”¹⁴ *Connected knowing* is grounded in empathy and the sharing of stories and experiences to foster understanding. I see Belenky’s emphasis on *connected knowing* and Dirkx’s emphasis on *inner soul work* as two sides of the same coin – as I believe that learning “takes place within the dynamic and paradoxical relationship of self and other.”¹⁵ *Connected knowing* provides a helpful critical purchase to transformative learning, in that it helps me to engage with learners who may not be ready, willing, or able to do the critical reflection necessary for change and transformation to occur. Mezirow’s model of transformative learning is grounded in the assumption that adult learners are motivated to change and are mature, independent thinkers from the start, capable of engaging in critical reflection and discourse; yet this is not always the case, and there are a myriad of reasons that a student might come to CPE, including as a requirement for graduate school or religious ordination.¹⁶ According to Belenky, Mezirow’s approach fails to acknowledge the cultural and societal inequities that may impact a learner’s ability to engage in transformative learning.¹⁷ When engaging with students who have been silenced by society or family, culturally marginalized, or who have other vulnerabilities, “one has to think and act on the level of the particular and the individual.”¹⁸ *Connected teaching* is a relational approach that adapts to the unique needs of students and engages the lived realities of their experiences.¹⁹ When working with a student MK (a Byzantine Catholic priest who had immigrated from the Ukraine as an adult, and who had limited English proficiency), my approach was to meet him where he was, draw upon his experiences, and help him develop his voice through sharing his story. MK struggled to meet the basic requirements of the CPE program, to complete written assignments, and to make use of individual supervision, beyond asking basic procedural questions. Drawing on my own experience of knowing what it is like to be an outsider navigating life in another culture,²⁰ I was able to find deeper compassion and empathy for MK, which extended my patience with him. I tried to think of outside-the-box ways to support him and make the program more accessible to him – such as allowing him to write his reflection papers for individual supervision in Ukrainian, or having him record something orally since writing was more of a challenge for him.²¹ I showed interest in MK’s life story, which he began to share more of in individual supervision as well as in the peer group, and I tried to enter into his perspective to see the world through his eyes. I sought to look for his strengths, rather than weaknesses, and to empower his voice by listening to his experiences with care and attention. Such a *connected teaching* approach, according to Belenky, “provides tools for bringing even the very young and the silenced into voice so that they might develop their capacities for participating on an equal basis with others.”²² This is a necessary condition for transformative learning to occur. *Connected teaching* helps me to pay greater attention to the lived realities and cultural experiences of my students that may influence their learning styles and ability to engage in the experiential transformative learning model of CPE.

Education as Spiritual Midwifery

I also find Belenky’s description of the *midwife-teacher*²³ to be a helpful image, as I consider my role as an educator in relationship to my students. Just as a midwife comes alongside the one who is giving birth, as a guide through the birthing process, so do we as CPE educators function as guides through a process of change and transition. As both a chaplain and CPE

educator, I believe that my role is to help facilitate movement toward new life.²⁴ I see parallels between Mezirow's *disorienting dilemma*, St. John of the Cross' *dark night of the soul* (see my theology paper), and the painful period of *travail and transition* that is part of the birthing process. In such times of transition and disorientation - the liminal spaces between what was and what will be - a midwife-teacher can serve as a helpful guide and companion. Belenky writes: "Midwife teachers are the opposite of banker-teachers. While the bankers deposit knowledge in the learner's head, the midwives draw it out. They assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it."²⁵ While midwife-teachers have wisdom and skills to help facilitate the learning process, they are not the ones "laboring" or giving birth. Rather, a midwife's efforts are directed at supporting the internal work that a person is already doing and facilitating movement toward greater freedom, healing, and a deeper connection with self, others, and the divine. As Belenky describes: "Midwife-teachers focus not on their own knowledge...but on the students' knowledge. They contribute when needed, but it is always clear that the baby is not theirs but the student's."²⁶ So, for example, when teaching didactics, I often engage students in discussions and interactive workshops in order to draw out the insights, wisdom, and life experiences that students already bring with them to CPE. In working with a student JF, an African American woman in her early 70s who had a wealth of life experience, I sought to encourage her to bring all of herself into the CPE space. JF had many years of experience in corporate banking and ministry, yet struggled to attune to her own emotional experience. Much of my work with JF in her first unit of CPE centered around helping her to more fully acknowledge her emotions and to begin to see the ways in which her emotional experience was impacting her spiritual care with patients and families. My interventions with JF helped her to move toward greater emotional attunement and awareness, as she began to see her own life experiences as a resource of empathy to draw upon in caring for others.

The image of midwifery also helps me think about when and how to intervene (whether with support or challenge), when I see that students are "stuck" in the "birthing process" of their learning. So, for example, JF needed more support, in the form of affirmation and encouragement, as she was learning to articulate her story and claim her own unique gifts, perspective, and authority - particularly as an older black woman whose voice had been marginalized and silenced in the past. Another student RB, who tended to keep conversations on an abstract, philosophical plane, and who seemed unruffled by the enormous amount of tragedy he was witnessing on his assigned clinical unit (the Trauma ICU), needed more challenge from his educator and peers in order to confront and explore the emotional reactions he was having to what he was experiencing in the hospital. A midwifery approach to education helps me navigate the delicate balance of support and challenge that is needed, as I reflect on what interventions might be most helpful in order to facilitate movement in my students' learning.²⁷ I recognize that overwhelming amounts of challenge without sufficient support, or too much support without sufficient challenge, will cause students to stall or stagnate in their learning.²⁸

Group Theory: Soul Work in Groups

Most of the learning that happens in CPE is within the group context, as students are exposed to the different perspectives of others through relationship and dialogue. In verbatim seminars, students are able to receive critical feedback from their peers and educator on their spiritual care visits; this helps them to see their blind spots and to envision different ways of engaging with patients and families as spiritual caregivers. One of the reasons that verbatim seminars are so effective is that students receive a diversity of voices and perspectives from the

group – which holds more power than any single, individual perspective; in other words, “the group has a wisdom beyond the individual” that is central to the CPE learning process.²⁹

In addition to structured group processes such as verbatim seminars and didactics, the unstructured group process is an essential part of the CPE curriculum. I use the term *Covenant Group*, rather than IPR or Interpersonal Relations Seminar, to highlight the mutual commitment to one another that is encouraged through the group process, as well as the ways in which trusting relationships within the group can point to a greater divine or Ultimate Trust.³⁰ I use Louis Ormont as my primary group theorist, drawing upon Belenky’s concept of *connected knowing*, my relational understanding of theology (see my theology paper), and concepts from *Internal Family Systems* (see my personality theory paper). As both Belenky and Mezirow acknowledge, relationships and dialogue are central to learning.³¹ Within the CPE group, each peer brings distinct perspectives, resources, and experiences that contribute to the group’s learning. Belenky describes: “The personality of each member of the group enriches the group’s understanding. Each individual must stretch her own vision in order to share another’s vision. Through mutual stretching and sharing the group achieves a vision richer than any individual could achieve alone.”³² I value cultural and religious diversity when forming my CPE groups, because I believe that learning is enriched when students are exposed to a variety of perspectives and frames of reference that are different from their own. The shared experience of interacting with patients and encountering disorienting dilemmas through CPE creates a bond between group members, which further enhances relational learning.³³

According to Ormont, the group is a microcosm, representing a “small scale replication of [each] member’s total life.”³⁴ Within the group context, individuals will recreate behaviors from their everyday lives and relate to others in the group in the same ways that they relate to people in their lives outside the group. Thus, the ways in which students are interacting with patients and families in the clinical setting is going to be similar to how they are engaging with their peers in the group. For example, a student who has a tendency to “fix” and “problem-solve” in the patient room is also likely to do so with their peers. From the perspective of IFS, the group context activates students’ wounded and protective parts, bringing these parts of the self into awareness; this similar to what Ormont would describe as the “surfacing of resistances.”³⁵ The peer group, then, provides a context in which students can develop greater self-awareness of their relational tendencies and patterns, practice new ways of relating to others, and learn to correct and adjust behaviors that may be inhibiting them in their interpersonal relationships.³⁶ While students are learning *interpersonally*, there is also learning that happens *intrapersonally*, for as Ormont writes: “The successful group member finishes not simply with a superior capacity to relate to others, but also with more inner comfort and a far better ability to realize his or her own potential.”³⁷

My hope is that the CPE peer group provides a context in which individuals can “tell the meaningful story of [their] lives” and “seek to understand the other members.”³⁸ The goal is to foster spiritual and emotional connection within the group, beyond surface-level sharing of stories and what Ormont would call “non-emotional chatter.”³⁹ As Ormont describes: “Feelings are the necessary currency of group.”⁴⁰ I encourage the expression of emotions within the group context by asking students what they are feeling, or what they suspect a peer might be feeling. I also encourage students to “stay in the moment” and “in the room” – focusing on what Ormont calls *immediacy* or Yalom describes as the “here and now.”⁴¹ As students are invited to focus on what is happening within themselves and between group members, they can begin to grow in both self-awareness and the ability to relate to others on a deeper emotional level – which will ultimately help them to become more effective spiritual caregivers in the hospital setting.

I find Ormont's technique of *bridging* to be helpful in encouraging *immediacy* within the group process. According to Ormont, *bridging* is "any technique designed to strengthen emotional connections between members, or to develop connections where they did not exist before."⁴² So, for example, when a student D is engaging in non-emotional chatter, I might ask another group member, "What is D doing right now?" D's peer might reply: "D is moving away from the grief that P just expressed." Such an intervention has the effect of moving the group to a deeper emotional level, while shedding light on relational resistances. According to Ormont, the kinds of interventions that are most helpful when facilitating a group are those that are aimed at both "liberating new emotions in a member *and* enabling the members to relate in some new way."⁴³

When as a group facilitator, I am unsure of how to work with relational resistances that are arising within the group, Dirkx gives me another perspective from which to understand the group dynamic. According to Dirkx, there are times in a group's life when one individual emerges as a *focal person* – an individual who serves as a "representative of the group's underlying emotional concerns."⁴⁴ For example, despite my best efforts to encourage *immediacy* and employ *bridging* between group members during a recent Covenant Group, the group continued to focus on a single group member MC, and MC's difficult relationship with her clinical preceptor (a chaplain resident who was serving as her mentor, and who became the focus of the group's energy, despite not even being in the room!). Reflecting on this group dynamic afterward, I was able to see that MC had emerged as a *focal person* through which the group could discuss larger issues of authority and leadership that were of concern to individuals in the group, as well as the group as a whole. Working through these concerns about power, leadership, and authority was essential for the group, and for each of the students individually, in order to move forward in their learning.

Assessing and Evaluating Learning: Transformative Learning Never Ends

The transformative learning model of CPE offers ample opportunities for students to grow in their understanding of self, others, and the divine. Through challenging encounters in the clinical setting, interactions with a diversity of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, an intensive group experience, and the action-reflection model of CPE, students are prompted to grow in awareness of how their own perspectives and assumptions influence their relationships with others. The goal is not to change or alter students' beliefs, but to facilitate movement toward greater reflectivity and openness to the possibility of growth. I see assessment and evaluation of students' learning as an ongoing process that happens throughout the CPE unit. From the interview/application process, to CPE orientation, to mid-unit and final evaluations, I seek to assess students' openness to hearing different perspectives, receiving feedback, leaning into discomfort, and being open to new ways of engaging with others in the world. Through weekly written reflections and verbatims, I invite students to engage in reflective practice as a part of their learning – to reflect on their strengths and growing edges, and the challenges that arise for them in the clinical setting. This reflection continues with me in individual supervision and with their peers in Covenant Group, in the context of supportive community. As I write final evaluations, I use the CPE outcomes as a guide to evaluate growth and learning. I hope that some of the seeds planted during CPE will continue to grow and produce fruit in my students' lives and vocations. And I see final evaluations as one last "gift" I can give to my students, to affirm areas of growth and encourage them to continue along the endless path of transformation. As I come alongside my students and guide them in the CPE process, I continue to be changed as well.

¹ Cranton (2006), p. 23.

² Mezirow (1997) acknowledged that “a defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience” (p. 5).

³ Cranton (2006), p. 19.

⁴ Mezirow (1991), p. 20.

⁵ Mezirow writes that a change in perspective “begins when we encounter experiences, often in an emotionally charged situation, that fail to fit our expectations and consequently lack meaning for us, or we encounter an anomaly that cannot be given coherence either by learning within existing schemes or by learning new schemes. Illumination comes only through redefinition [of our meaning schemes or frames of reference]” and occurs in response to “a crisis that impels us to redefine old ways of understanding” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 94).

⁶ Mezirow (1991), p. 168.

⁷ Dirkx’s perspective on transformative learning draws upon insights from Jungian psychology, as well as the work of Boyd and Myers (1998), who coined the phrase *transformative education* (as distinct from transformative learning) to describe the kind of education that “[helps] individuals work towards acknowledging and understanding the dynamics between their inner and outer worlds...[resulting in] a more meaningful, integrated life as evidenced in authentic relationships with self and others” (p. 261).

⁸ Dirkx (1997), p.79 and Dirkx (2001), p. 69. Dirkx elaborates on this in a dialogue with Mezirow (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006), saying: “I have come to refer to this view of transformative learning as soul work or inner work. This view suggests a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world. This integrated view also seeks to account for the ways in which the social, cultural, and embodied as well as the deeply personal and transpersonal aspects of our being potentially play out in the process of transformative learning...a kind of learning that integrates our experiences of the outer world, including the experiences of texts and subject matter, with the experience of our inner worlds”(p. 125-6).

⁹See Dirkx (1998); Boyd (1991); and Boyd & Myers (1988). Viewing transformative learning in terms of *individuation* is congruent with my personality theory of Internal Family Systems, which sees personal growth and development in terms of *self-differentiation*. I see individuation and self-differentiation as closely related terms.

¹⁰See specifically the first three competency areas addressed in the ACPE Outcomes and Indicators: Spiritual Formation and Integration, Awareness of Self and Others, and Relational Dynamics.

¹¹ Cranton (2000), p. 194.

¹² See Dirkx (1997).

¹³ See my theology paper.

¹⁴ Belenky (1997), p. 115.

¹⁵ Dirkx (1997), p. 83. The action-reflection model of learning inherent in CPE involves a dynamic back-and-forth between relating to others and relating to self.

¹⁶ See also Cranton (2006): “We must keep in mind that it is not our job to impose points of view on others or expect that everyone will rise to the challenges we present. It is often the case that, for a variety of reasons, people are not ready, willing, or able to make deep shifts in their habits of mind. But we still encourage reflection and hold open the possibility of transformation” (p. 156).

¹⁷ Belenky (2000) argues: “Unless it is understood that Mezirow’s theory only depicts the culmination point [of learning], practitioners might overlook the reality of their students’ lives. Most adults simply have not developed their capacities for articulating and criticizing the underlying assumptions in their own thinking, nor do they analyze the thinking of others in these ways. Furthermore, many have never had experience with the kinds of reflective discourse that Mezirow prescribes” (p.73).

¹⁸ Belenky (2000), p. 79.

¹⁹ According to Belenky (2000), connected teaching is an approach that “emphasizes students’ strengths, incorporates their experiences, and de-emphasizes competition and hierarchy in the classroom” (p. 93).

²⁰ See my theology paper, in which I refer to my experiences living abroad in Ghana and Guatemala.

²¹ Another intervention I made was to ask the entire peer group to email out verbatims in advance (rather than distributing them for the first time in class), so that MK could have more time to read through them to understand what was being conveyed. I made this adjustment after observing that MK was having difficulty providing feedback to his peers and otherwise engaging in their verbatim sessions. When I offered this as a change, MK was relieved, both for the opportunity to read in advance, but also for the acknowledgement of his struggle around comprehension due to the language barrier.

²² Belenky (2000), p. 82.

²³ The teacher as midwife is an image that goes as far back as Plato’s *Theaetetus*. Modern treatments of the teacher as midwife can be found in Belenky (1997), Gill-Austern (1999), and Warren (1993). In the field of spiritual care, authors such as Hanson (1996), Guenther (1992), and Faller (2015) have made connections between the role of the midwife and the role of the spiritual caregiver, as one who helps facilitate movement toward new life. The rich metaphor of spiritual midwifery helps me to see continuity in my identity as both a chaplain and CPE educator.

²⁴ Cp. Mezirow (1991): “Transformative theory is not a stage theory, but it emphasizes the importance of the *movement toward reflectivity*...advanced through increased ability and experience, which may be significantly influenced by educational interventions” (p. 160-1).

²⁵ Belenky (1997), p. 217.

²⁶ Belenky (1997), p. 218.

²⁷ Kegan (1994) writes about teaching as mix of support, reflection, and confrontation, in which the timing of each is a delicate art form. I also find Belenky’s categories of *Silenced*, *Received*, *Procedural*, and *Subjective Knowers* to be helpful in further assessing what students might need in their learning, and whether support or challenge is most needed. For example, *Silenced* and *Received Knowers* tend to need more encouragement and support, as they learn to articulate their thoughts and develop their own voice; whereas *Subjective Knowers*, who value everyone’s subjective experience as true, may have difficulty offering critique to peers in the consultation process, and may need more challenge to lean into confrontation.

²⁸ See Daloz (1999)’s discussion of the balance of support/challenge in the mentoring relationship.

²⁹ Hemenway (1996), p. 138.

³⁰ See Oden (1972). Both Belenky and Ormont similarly emphasize the importance of mutual commitment and accountability in the group. Belenky (1992) describes this in terms of a “mutually shared agreement that together the [group] is creating” (p.144), while Ormont (2001) employs the use of the term “contracts.”

³¹ See Mezirow (1991) and Belenky (1997). Mezirow (1991) states: “We give meaning to experience in large part by participating in dialogue with others” (p.58).

³² Belenky (1997), p. 119.

³³ As Belenky (1997) notes, “Authority in connected knowing rests not on power or status or certification but on commonality of experience” (p. 118).

³⁴ Ormont (2001), p. 38.

³⁵ Ormont (1992) defines resistances as: “mechanisms of repression and sameness, embedded in the character structure...that once worked for the person, or seemed to work, but that now stand in the way of emotional growth” (p. 120).

³⁶ As Burris (2022) describes: “A cohesive group can resemble a family system in which formative dynamics, rules, and limitations can arise but which also provides the potential for corrective experiences” (p. 18).

³⁷ Ormont (1992), p. 1. This also aligns with my theory of personality (IFS) which sees the interpersonal and intrapersonal worlds as mirroring one another. Burris (2022), who applies IFS theory to the group context, writes that there is “tremendous human potential that can be actualized by using both an internal model and social dynamic

processes...[combining] the healing potential of internal work [with] the power of community, universality, and secure and safe social environments to reveal and heal our social wounding” (p. 6).

³⁸ Ormont (1992), p. 56.

³⁹ Ormont (2001) views “remote, non-emotional talk” and “unrelated chatter” as stifling to the group (p. 264).

⁴⁰ Ormont (2001), p. 375. Cp. also Belenky (1997)’s emphasis on emotional communication as a means of connecting with others and learning about oneself: “Connected knowing involves feeling, because it is rooted in relationship” (p. 144).

⁴¹ See Yalom (2005) and Ormont (2001). According to Ormont (2001): “Without immediacy, our members could never truly understand one another” (p. 39). I also see a parallel between Ormont’s description of *immediacy* (the “charged engagement” of the group) and Burris (2022)’s description of “the contagious Self-energy of the group” from the perspective of IFS theory (p. 2).

⁴² Ormont (2001), p. 264.

⁴³ Ormont (1992), p. 85.

⁴⁴ Dirx (1991), p.71. According to Dirx, a *focal person* “emerges in the small group through the psychological process of collective projective identification” (p. 82). This focal person serves as “(1) a representation of the unconscious emotional concerns of the social system which are fundamentally opposing and seemingly contradictory; (2) a critique of the status quo and movement toward a new awareness; and (3) a voice for transformation of the social system” (p. 73).

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