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Power and leadership

Editorial

Mary H. Schertz

We think and fret about the various aspects of leadership and power more than we talk about them openly, freely, and thoughtfully. At one point, as I was editing these essays, it occurred to me that I have never actually heard the word *power* used in any of the hiring processes in which I have participated over the years. Yet any employment interview, to say nothing of the many other activities that churches and institutions do on a regular basis, is indubitably colored by how we think about and engage power.

As I was imagining this issue of *Vision*, I had two modest goals. One was to provide a marker: what are some of the ways we are thinking about power and leadership in our time, for our place in the river of faith and life? The other was to set the table for dialogue: how might we nurture more generous discussion of these issues as we gather to be God's people with and for one another? Our writers, as writers are wont, were not always content to remain comfortably within these modest goals—and so you will also find fresh and creative approaches to the issues of power and leadership that point us beyond where we are to where God might be calling us to go.

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I doubt that Mennonites struggle with leadership and power more than other denominations. But the various strands of our tradition have shaped the particular ways we struggle. The first articles in this issue deal with some of that history. We begin with the history of an idea, as Arnold Snyder leads us in reflecting on *Gelassenheit*. For me as for many others, this notion of yieldedness played a role in my journey toward claiming ministerial identity. There was a time when I simply rejected the idea as inappropriate

for Mennonite women. Later I began to see how empowering, and iconoclastic, the concept could be. Whether the word is mentioned or not, the spirituality of *Gelassenheit* lies beneath many of our struggles to understand what power is and what role it should take in Christian community. Snyder helps us understand what the concept did and—perhaps more importantly—did not mean for the sixteenth-century forbears who left their mark on us.

Steven Nolt and Brenda Hostetler Meyer also expand our awareness of how the past shapes our present. Two of the most significant challenges for our understanding of power are the way we structure our internal life and how we respond to our external world. Nolt writes a fascinating analysis of the revolutionary, but in some ways little noted, movement from bishops to conference ministers. He challenges some of our "in the box" thinking about relationship, ritual, hierarchy, and egalitarianism in ways that are important as we consider life in our congregations and conferences. Meyer describes a thwarted conversation between Guy F. Hershberger and J. Lawrence Burkholder on the issues of power raised by war and social responsibility. This conversation roams far beyond these two men, of course—figuring in some way in almost every conversation we have had about peace theology in the last fifty years. Minimally, it shadows any talk about the state between a Canadian Mennonite and an American Mennonite. Meyer, however, uses the concept of designated power to apply a gentle critique to both positions that can, I think, help us through that stalemate.

Regina Shands Stolzfus's sermon marks the transition into a series of essays that deal with some questions and concerns about leadership and power that arise in the active, everyday life of the church. Her powerful and provocative sermon sets the stage by reminding us that power and leadership are gifts of the Spirit—gifts we dare not dismiss as negative, gifts that Jesus showed us how to employ and enjoy for God's purposes. Joseph Kotva addresses directly the powerlessness that pastors and other church leaders sometime feel and shares some practical insights into the ethical dynamics of the power that pastors have. Rebecca Slough looks carefully and thoughtfully at some issues of leading worship that we have sometimes overlooked. Her analysis is especially helpful in transcending what we sometimes call rather hopelessly

the "worship wars." Beyond the questions of style and technology are some principles to which we should give serious and prayerful attention. Sally Weaver Glick, a veteran of substantial Quaker and Mennonite "processing," who has lived to tell the tale, offers thoughtful guidelines for addressing those knotty problems of who gets his or her way in congregational discernment. Her article is an intriguing example of Mennonite peace ecclesiology—of putting our money where our mouth is on peace at home.

And then there's Arlo Frech—our curmudgeonly commentator from (barely) North Dakota. Arlo helps us take a lighter view of some of these issues—and who better? I did not know exactly where to put Arlo's letter, but smack dab in the middle of the practical church section finally seemed most appropriate.

When I conceptualized this issue, I confess that I was thinking mostly about the church internal. But I am grateful that our writers had a wider vision that integrates the church gathered and the church in mission.

The final articles in the issue give us new categories with which to move into the future. Christopher Marshall uses Paul's correspondence with Corinth to ground us in a biblical vision of leadership and power. In many ways, his article is a companion piece to Joseph Kotva's description of the paradox of pastoral power. In the interplay of these two articles, paradox and tension become possibilities—the very heart of God at work—rather than the negatives we sometimes assume they are. Irma Fast Dueck challenges us to see power as energy rather than commodity. In contrast to the stinginess with which we often guard power, power shared generously and distributed widely expands and engages us with abundance for all. Ray Gingerich goes straight to the heart of Mennonite peace theology to turn upside down some of our assumptions about violence and power. His bold assertion that nonviolence is power is one that our war-weary world is waiting to hear.

When I conceptualized this issue, I confess that I was thinking mostly about the church internal. But I am grateful that our writers, Gingerich and others, had a wider vision—a vision that integrates the church gathered and the church in mission. Both the church and the world will benefit from these thoughtful reflections.

Gelassenheit and power
Some historical reflections[1]

C. Arnold Snyder

First, some caveats and cautions: the early Anabaptists were concerned, above all, with salvation, and not with issues of power and authority. The basic question they asked was, How may we come into a right relationship with God and be saved? not, How should power be exercised among us? But of course, the Anabaptist answer to the first question shaped the Anabaptist answer to the second question. The few lines written here will highlight the role *Gelassenheit* played in the early Anabaptist understanding of how human beings are to come into a right relationship with God and with each other. In what way these sixteenth-century reflections might be helpful in the twenty-first century is a question that is best left for readers to answer.

Gelassenheit is the doing that, paradoxically, is a surrender of doing, a surrender of control. The early Anabaptists expected the practice of _Gelassenheit_ to be a continuous spiritual discipline and challenge.

At the very heart of the Anabaptist understanding of salvation was an assessment of the human condition and strong convictions about the path God had provided for a return to grace. The Anabaptist understanding was not articulated in abstract theological terms but rather provided specific steps to be taken: what was described was a spirituality, a way of living in biblical obedience to God, in a God-pleasing way. Running throughout this spirituality was the defining attitude of *Gelassenheit*: yieldedness, abandonment, resignation, and complete acceptance of what God wills.

The Anabaptist understanding of *Gelassenheit* was part of a larger assessment of humanity's place in this world, in the light of eternity. (Insofar as present-day assessments of the human condition differ from the Anabaptist understanding, the Anabaptist path may not be helpful or relevant.) The Anabaptists were clear that human reality must be described as sinful and fallen, far from

the grace of God. Nothing human beings can do will remedy this situation; in fact, most human beings live in denial and resolutely refuse to acknowledge that there is a fundamental problem. The first step on the path to salvation, the Anabaptists insisted, was to recognise human sinfulness, alienation from God, human powerlessness, and the eternal consequences of remaining in this state.

People who come to see things as they really are undergo several related experiences (the Anabaptist writings do not specify an order). The convicted sinner will recognise the power and sovereignty of God; this attitude is the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10 and many other passages). The sinner will feel remorse and will repent of sin (Mark 1:15 and many other passages). And the sinner will feel an utter despair at being powerless to make things right. In the words of Balthasar Hubmaier, "Such miserable little things are people who ponder and recognise themselves."[2]

Those who thus recognise themselves, and who despair of remedying their situation of fallenness and disobedience, will call to God in their helplessness. They can do so only in a spirit of genuine need and humility. This attitude is directed not just to one's own person but to everything this side of eternity, to all of creation. True humility (fear of God) recognises that in what really matters—in questions of eternal significance—the creation and the human ability to control aspects of creation can do nothing to help. Creation is not evil of itself but rather becomes evil when it puts itself in the place of God.[3] It is this idolatrous grasping of creation that must be renounced at a fundamental level. This renunciation was expressed well in a hymn composed by Adam Reissner around 1530, preserved in the *Ausbund*:

> *No one can come [to heaven]*
> *Who does not renounce the whole world.*
> *All creatures on earth*
> *Must yield themselves entirely to Christ,*
> *And offer up their bodies and lives to him.*[4]

No one can progress on the path to heaven without first attaining humility regarding his or her "miserable" condition, and humility regarding the real limits of "worldly" power.

Said another way, when the truth has been recognised—the reality of who God is and who we human beings are—the next step on the path is a thoroughgoing spirit of *Gelassenheit*. Being ready to yield one's will and one's life to God's will is an attitude that not only defines true repentance but also needs to shape the entire Christian walk up to the moment of earthly death.

Gelassenheit plays a central role in the Anabaptist understanding of sin. The sin that condemns, they were convinced, is not the "original" sin of Adam and Eve but rather the freely chosen sin that all the descendants of Adam and Eve decide to pursue (hence *adult* baptism as a sign of repentance and commitment). Sin is a matter of the will—a will that is predisposed by human nature to sin, to be sure, but that freely chooses to sin nonetheless. Because we freely choose to sin—that is, we choose to carry out our own desires instead of what God wills for us—it follows that our will must also be involved in the remedy for sin. Our habit of insisting on our own way must be reversed. But of course, human beings have no power to provide a remedy for sin. What then can be done?

We must learn to stop doing. As Pilgram Marpeck wrote, "It does not depend on our willing or running, but rather on the mercy of God and on His grace in and with Christ. He gives the will, He can also do and accomplish it in His own. We must simply in all of our actions stand idle ourselves, as dead in ourselves, if Christ is to live in us, which life and walk alone are pleasing to the Father."[5] We must "stand idle," learn to entrust and yield our lives to the living power of God in Christ. *Gelassenheit* is the key to true repentance and overcoming sin. Yielding our will to God's will means removing the greatest impediment to the presence of God in our lives, which lies in our own stubborn hearts. *Gelassenheit* is the doing that, paradoxically, is a surrender of doing, a surrender of control. But *Gelassenheit* extends beyond the moments of repentance for sins committed and speaks to the sin that will continue to tempt us and to which we will succumb out of weakness. All our lives we will have to practice the surrender of our wills to the power of God, so that God will be free to work in and through us, by the power of Christ born in us. The early Anabaptists expected the practice of *Gelassenheit* to be a continuous spiritual discipline and challenge.

Gelassenheit also plays a key role in the Anabaptist understanding of how Christ's atonement for sin becomes efficacious for the salvation of sinners. Christ's death on the cross atoned for the sins of all humankind, but only those who *yield* to the living power of God will in fact inherit the merits of Christ's sacrifice. The Anabaptists believed that salvation is granted to those who are personally transformed by the living power of God. Those who recognise how things are with sinful humanity, who repent, despair, and trust in the physician Jesus Christ in a genuine yieldedness of heart, will be led to faith and rebirth by the power of God. Just a few months after the first baptisms in Zurich, Balthasar Hubmaier wrote,

> *As much as it is possible for a wounded person he will also surrender to the will of the physician. . . . The physician counsels, helps, and promotes him so that he can follow his Word and commandment. Now before they are believed, all these teachings, which reveal the sickness and point to the physician, are letter and they kill. But by faith the Spirit of God makes them alive so that they start to live, turn green, and bear fruit. . . . Thus Paul confesses publicly that he does not live but Christ lives in him.*[6]

The faith of which the Anabaptists spoke was connected more to genuine trust, rebirth, and regeneration of the person than it was to belief in a historical event. True faith would be preceded by true repentance and yieldedness to the power of God.

The Anabaptists were not impressed by talk that claimed that salvation was by faith alone. True faith, they said, certainly does believe in the truth of the historical work of God in Christ on the cross, which forgives sin into eternity. But this belief is the beginning of the story, not the end. Insofar as it is true, faith also enters into yielded persons (those who have truly trusted in God and have therefore yielded their lives to God) and transforms their hearts and lives with power. Those who have faith do not simply *believe* the gospel message is true, they also *trust* the physician and give themselves into his hands, to be remade in a living process of transformation (John 3:3-8; Gal. 6:15).

To be clear: salvation is a pure gift of grace for the Anabaptists and not the result of any human works. Insofar as human effort is involved in repentance and rebirth, the effort is directed entirely to the cessation of effort, the negation of human glory and pride, and a reliance on God alone. Coming to true faith means that God's work is no longer being impeded and that a rebirth has taken place in a real and visible way. The believer lives no more (the old Adam and Eve have now yielded), but rather, Christ now lives in the believer (Gal. 2:20, a verse beloved by the Anabaptists).

Menno's words about living according to the will of God should be heard as the Anabaptists heard them, not as a simple call to obey the ethical demands of Jesus, but rather as an appeal to the power of God within.

Yielding one's will to God's living will thus opens the door to spiritual regeneration, which in turn opens the door to a life of obedient discipleship. Discipleship is not doing the best one can by human power, but rather is the outworking of spiritual regeneration and a continued attitude of *Gelassenheit*.

A life of discipleship reflects the nature of Christ that now lives within. Menno Simons wrote,

> *We must spend the remainder of our days not after the lusts of men, but according to the will of God, so that we may say with Paul, I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. For he died for all, that they which live should not hence-forth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.*[7]

Menno's words about living according to the will of God, about living no longer for ourselves but for Christ, should be heard as the Anabaptists heard them, not as a simple call to obey the ethical demands of Jesus, but rather as an appeal to the power of God within. If Christ has not come to dwell within (if one is not yielded and reborn), the call for biblical obedience will produce nothing but outward posturing. Menno says, "[The believer] is clothed with the power from above, baptized with the

Holy Spirit, and so united and mingled with God that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature and is made conformable to the image of His Son."[8] Obedience is not too much to ask of people who are partakers of the divine nature. At the heart of Anabaptist spiritual life is a continuous, active yielding to the living Spirit of God, to the point that the divine nature becomes our nature, according to the image of the Son of God in the measure that grace provides.

The spiritual process described so far involves individuals in their inward struggles coming to terms with the reality of life in a fallen world and the challenge of trusting their all to the great physician, Jesus Christ. With baptism (which early Anabaptists often described as a threefold baptism of spirit, water, and blood), the inward process of *Gelassenheit* merges with the outward yielding that must take place within the body of Christ. Leonhard Schiemer beautifully described the baptism of the Spirit in terms of *Gelassenheit*: "The first baptism is that of the Spirit to which one submits in obedience as Christ was obedient to his Father, even unto death on the cross, Phil. 1[:29-30]. . . . In this baptism one surrenders to God with life and limb, but flesh and blood cannot surrender in that way without the Holy Spirit. Therefore a certain witness that one has the Holy Spirit is this complete surrender to God."[9] Baptism is first and foremost a profound spiritual surrender to God, which is then proclaimed outwardly in water.[10]

***Gelassenheit* begins at a deeply personal level, but with water baptism, *Gelassenheit* becomes a public, communal matter, in which each member's visible walk of discipleship is tested by brothers and sisters in the faith.**

Baptism with water not only publicly affirms the reality of spiritual baptism (dying and rising in Christ), it is at the same time a visible covenant made with like-minded believers. The commitment made at baptism is no less than a promise of yieldedness by members to one another. In his definitive baptism book, Balthasar Hubmaier wrote that "the one who is baptized testifies publicly that he has pledged himself henceforth to live according to the Rule of Christ. By virtue of this pledge *he has submitted himself to sisters, brothers, and to the church*."[11] This understanding continued in the tradition. The submission of brothers and sisters to one

another was formally instituted in Anabaptist communities as the practice of mutual admonition, or the ban (Matt. 18:15-18), practised above all prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

In the Anabaptist tradition, G*elassenheit* begins at a deeply personal level, but with water baptism, G*elassenheit* becomes a public, communal matter, in which each member's visible walk of discipleship is tested by brothers and sisters in the faith.

The early Anabaptists insisted that inner transformation must precede and inform outer obedience, and further, that spiritual regeneration and living discipleship must honestly mirror one another. The integration of inner, spiritual reality with the outward life of discipleship and obedience is undoubtedly the greatest strength and appeal of Anabaptist spirituality. If history is any measure, however, integrating the spiritual and communal lives is also a point of vulnerability.

A community of people who are yielded to the living Spirit of God will, ideally, find their way through issues of power and authority in a spirit of prayer, humility, openness, and flexibility. The history of Anabaptist descendants shows a different reality, already in the sixteenth century. The Swiss Brethren (according to Marpeck) were so zealous in disciplining their leaders that they could scarcely find any. Menno Simons provided direction for Mennonite congregations by admonishing pastors to crucify themselves, seek only God's honor, and live blamelessly—after which they were to teach, administer the sacraments, and exclude "all impenitent and apostate sinners and brethren, proclaiming grace to those that repent."[12] Schisms were immediate. Historical examples abound of powerful leaders in communities requiring a humility of members that they themselves seemed to lack, or conversely (and more recently), of members requiring a humility of leaders that they themselves were loathe to exemplify.

Assessing such a situation is not an exact science, and readers will proceed according to their best lights. In my view, the fundamental Anabaptist analysis—drawing as it did on centuries of spiritual experience—was sound, but its application was deficient. If history is any judge, yielding to the living Spirit of Christ requires a lifetime of serious spiritual discipline. If cultivating the presence of the living Christ within were in fact our individual

and communal focus, would we find answers to questions of power and authority? I believe we would.

Notes

[1] Some of the themes and issues outlined here are more fully explored in C. Arnold Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004; distributed in North America by Orbis Books).
[2] H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, trans. and eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism,* Classics of the Radical Reformation, no. 5 (Kitchener, Ont., and Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1989), 84. Translation modified slightly. For relevant scripture passages used by the Anabaptists, and the Anabaptists' reflections on these texts, see C. Arnold Snyder and Galen A. Peters, eds., *Reading the Anabaptist Bible* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2002).
[3] "By 'the world' [the Anabaptists] did not mean the creation as such which, they affirmed with biblical backing, God had originally created good and could still be used for good. They meant to indicate by the phrase, that part of the good creation that had 'fallen' with Adam and Eve's disobedience, under Lucifer's prompting. 'The world' is all that pleases Satan and a fallen humanity, and displeases God; the world is all that has been corrupted by fallen, disobedient human nature; the world is the 'broad path' which will most certainly lead to perdition. The world and the flesh are the locus of self-will, pleasure, self-seeking, and sin." Snyder, *Following in the Footsteps*, 37–38.
[4] *Ausbund*, hymn 51, stanza 4; translation, with some modifications, taken from *Songs of the Ausbund*, vol. 1 (Millersburg, Ohio: Ohio Amish Library, 1999), 104.
[5] William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, trans. and eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck,* Classics of the Radical Reformation, no. 2 (Kitchener, Ont., and Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978), 510.
[6] *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 85. Dirk Philips wrote: "For what is the new birth other than the transforming and renewing of the person which God works in him through faith in Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit? . . . Where this takes place and is in process as a pregnancy, there is the genuine new birth; there is the new creature in Christ Jesus, John 3:3; Gal. 6[:15]." Cornelius J. Dyck, William E. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy, trans. and eds., *The Writings of Dirk Philips*, Classics of the Radical Reformation, no. 6 (Scottdale, Pa., and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1992), 79.
[7] Leonard Verduin, trans., and J. C. Wenger, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), 54.
[8] Ibid., 58.
[9] Cornelius J. Dyck, *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995), 219.
[10] "We believe and confess that there is a Christian baptism which must take place internally and externally, internally with the Holy Spirit and with fire . . . but externally with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Matt. 28:19" (*Writings of Dirk Philips*, 72).
[11] *Balthasar Hubmaier*, 127; my italics.
[12] *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons,* 444–45.

About the author

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From bishops to bureaucracy
Observations on the migration of authority

Steven M. Nolt

Bishops haven't been the most popular authority figures in Mennonite history.[1] In 1821, a Mennonite deacon was still grumbling about "that old man [Hans] Tschantz," one of the earliest bishops in colonial North America who, the deacon complained, had arrived with "a letter from the men in Germany in which they warned [Tschantz] that he was not to start up" anything new in the immigrant church. And at the end of the nineteenth century, well-known Indiana evangelist and editor John S. Coffman—himself the son of a Virginia bishop—labeled Lancaster, Pennsylvania, bishops the "Lancaster Sanhedrin" because he considered them an obstruction to progressive church work.[2] At the same time, other Mennonites carry warm memories of bishop leaders who were important mentors and gentle guides.[3]

Positive or negative, most current appraisals of bishops' authority draw on distant memories or secondhand accounts, because few Mennonites have any recent or direct encounters with an active bishop.[4] Only one district conference in Mennonite Church USA (and none in Mennonite Church Canada) recognizes the office in its polity.[5] Indeed, what is perhaps more intriguing than bishops' historical exercise of power is the rather sudden disappearance of the office after 1954 with remarkably little fanfare, surely one of the more significant—if unexplored—developments in twentieth-century Mennonite Church life. While examination of all the dynamics behind this demise stretches beyond the scope of this essay, the transformation of authority represented by the traditional bishop, and its migration elsewhere, is one place to begin considering some twentieth-century organi-

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zational and theological developments that continue to shape Mennonite understanding of power, authority, leadership, and identity.

Traditional office, relational authority

Traditionally, Mennonite Church leadership authority was lodged in established offices. Perhaps enhanced by personal charisma, authority was never defined by or dependent on such individual qualities.[6] Typically, through a process of drawing lots that was believed to reveal divine preference, congregations "made a bishop" (or minister or deacon) by placing someone in an office.

The office of bishop, in particular, held significant authority, but not because bishops held exclusive claims to independent power. (Mennonite history is strewn with silenced, defrocked, and excommunicated bishops.) Rather, the critical importance of bishops lay in their authority to baptize and preside at communion. The power to perform these rituals of initiation and reaffirmation of community—matched by the ability to withhold them—was essential to transform a collection of individuals into a visible, corporate body.[7] Thus, in ways less often recognized from a twenty-first century perspective, bishop authority was deeply relational in nature, because the church existed only through participation in rites that came through the hand of a particular person, in a context where both parties were known. Church could not be abstract or impersonal.

Bishops were important because the office corresponded with—indeed, called into being—a church that existed locally and across space through their ritual work and relationships.

Moreover, bishops' relationships with one another constituted the sum of the wider church. Members in one place were connected to those elsewhere to the degree that the bishop with whom they interacted maintained a positive relationship with other bishops. The structures known as district conferences were nothing more or less than gatherings of ordained leaders who met to reaffirm reciprocal recognition of one another's ritual work.[8] When the bishops returned home from conference, they carried that unity with them, distributing it as they shared communion and baptized. Thus, the bishop (and to a lesser extent, other ordained leaders)

represented the church as something larger than the local worshiping group and mediated that larger sense via face-to-face and highly personal ritual interaction with every local member. (Old Order Mennonites still describe this understanding and display this pattern of leadership.)

Bishops held other, auxiliary responsibilities that varied somewhat from place to place.[9] But in the end, bishops were important because the office corresponded with—indeed, called into being—a church that existed locally and across space through their ritual work and relationships. Polity served the sacramental needs of these notions even as it included elements of hierarchy and differentiation.

The priesthood of all believers and the critique of all leadership

At midcentury, new demographic and ideological currents began reshaping Mennonite understandings of leadership, polity, and authority. Certainly by the 1960s, some of this unsettledness was shared with a broader Western cultural suspicion of traditional authority that was peaking just then among politicians, students, and activists of various stripes. But the Mennonite variety also had clear indigenous roots that predated the popular drive to mistrust anyone over thirty.

First, the relational authority and polity embodied by bishops in older Mennonite communities lacked the flexibility to adapt to the new, more expansive post-war Mennonite world. Vigorous domestic mission work and the parallel movement of rurally reared Mennonites to urban areas produced a dramatic increase in the number of new, often isolated congregations outside traditional Mennonite orbits. Detractors decried nonresident bishops who popped into town for a semiannual communion service only to disappear again for six months.[10] Moreover, many of these congregations found themselves in a new sort of relational subordination: conference subsidies of salaries and rents for young churches produced dependency apart from any relationships their bishop might cultivate or neglect. A polity that at its best had been an expression of ritual reciprocity now became, at its most efficient, management from afar.

By themselves, such changes were significant enough, but they were seconded by a number of key theological developments.

Since the early 1940s, the so-called recovery of the Anabaptist vision had animated Mennonite intellectual life, and the quest to recapture the sixteenth century as a model for the twentieth soon took on a life of its own. Especially among the generation coming of age just after World War 2, and often focused in the publications of the so-called Concern movement, Mennonite academics argued that the faithful church needed to take the primitive New Testament church and first-generation Anabaptists as normative models. The movement's appeals were many, including its earnest desire for church renewal and its apparently homegrown character. Advocates sought to strip away the accretions of tradition and outer forms and restore the original "essence" of primitive Anabaptism (and, by extension, the New Testament church). Traditional structures adapted over time held dubious distinction in this scheme and were seen as necessary evils to be grudgingly endured or as marks of decline to be dismissed.[11]

For some Mennonite academics after World War 2, traditional structures adapted over time held dubious distinction and were seen as necessary evils to be endured or as marks of decline to be dismissed.

One of the ways such ideas gained broader academic and popular currency was through the language of the priesthood of all believers—a Reformation-era expression which Mennonites now began to use as shorthand for the notion that all church members possess ministerial gifts of equal significance. Especially in the writings of theologian John Howard Yoder, the priesthood of all believers became an important mark of the faithful church. The apostle Paul, Yoder argued, presented a vision of universal ministry. Every Christian was a minister, so there was little room for differentiated leadership roles that reserved certain ritual authority for a few.[12]

Toward new models—and some second thoughts

These demographic developments and intellectual interests converged in a major 1955 study conference on Church Organization and Administration. Sponsored by the Mennonite Church's Ministerial Committee, the gathering aimed at a "rethinking of our total ministerial organizational arrangement." An opening presentation on recent biblical scholarship concluded that no prescribed polity could be drawn from the apostolic church, an

observation that could have freed consultation attendees to focus on the particularities of their own tradition's historical development and social contexts—except for the fact that the gathered Mennonites wanted to emulate a first-generation movement.[13]

Making this case most strongly at the consultation was sociologist and Concern movement advocate Paul Peachey, who contrasted the "inner essence" of the church with its later "external form." This essence—which Peachey took to be egalitarian and democratic—was what the Anabaptists had realized. "Visible structures of authority which transcend the local group" may seem, in the short run, to hold some practical advantages, Peachey warned, but "practice must ever flow spontaneously," and the acceptance of any "temporal power structures" is always a sign of spiritual weakness.[14]

In this context, bishops clearly were problematic figures who represented specialized leadership and an authority that, while relational, was not egalitarian. In 1952, South Central Conference pioneered a restructuring plan that recognized this new way of thinking about church and implemented it two years later.[15] The bishop office was discontinued; all pastors (now to be hired on three-year contracts) could baptize and preside at the Lord's Supper, making each congregation a sacramentally self-sufficient unit. Now connection between congregations came not through the personal interaction of bishops with one another and with those they served but by grouping congregations into new geographic districts for more efficient administration.[16] Each district had a Regional Overseer who would "coordinate church programs," communicate conference business, and attend biannual meetings of the conference executive committee. Efforts were also underway to have the conference incorporated (1957) and to hire a general secretary (later termed conference minister) to handle administrative work (1959). Other MC area conferences soon imitated this pattern.[17]

Meanwhile, theological education was evolving in ways that downplayed the notion that authority resided in designated leadership offices.[18] By 1967, the Mennonite Church publicly went on record as wondering whether ordination should be abandoned, because it served only to introduce unhealthy differentiation into what should be an egalitarian church.[19] Either way,

"The image of the pastoral office is presently very fluid," the report concluded. Perhaps "for the sake of the larger [ecumenical] church unity, it seems wise to retain the word 'ordination,'" but then "ways will need to be found to shift its meaning to align with our beliefs"—beliefs that were, of course, of relatively recent vintage.[20]

But if "church" was now understood in more congregational and democratic terms, the work of the church seemed increasingly programmatic and bureaucratic.[21] Ironically, laicization often produced professionalization rather than egalitarianism, as special-purpose agencies and institutions assumed the task of embodying the church. Power and authority in such places was limited by charters, job descriptions, and even public law and licensure. Administrators were accountable to boards and constituencies, although such relationships were complicated by the demands of prudent public relations and determined development work. If these institutions knew that they were not exactly "the church," they often were expected to speak as or for the church, and their administrators became authoritative voices on churchly concerns.[22]

If "church" was now understood in more congregational and democratic terms, the work of the church seemed increasingly programmatic and bureaucratic. Laicization often produced professionalization rather than egalitarianism.

Perhaps it is not surprising that one who missed much of this churchly transformation was among the first to question some aspects of its wisdom. Living in Europe for most of the 1960s and early 1970s, theologian Marlin E. Miller returned to North America to play a leading role in Mennonite ministerial education, eventually heading Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. In a series of essays and public presentations, Miller argued for the importance of recognized "offices" of leadership that carry authority, in some sense, different from other "spiritual gifts" present in the local church.[23]

Miller also explored the history of the idea of the priesthood of all believers, discovering that it was a minor part of the Anabaptist repertory and referred only to the "moral quality" of the church's life. "Apparently neither Menno [Simons] nor other Anabaptists and Mennonites of the [sixteenth century] related the

question of Christian ministry or the appointment and ordination of ministers in the church to the priesthood of all believers," Miller concluded.[24] During the 1980s and early 1990s, Miller's influence—while not singular—was important in shaping the wording of Article 15, "Ministry and Leadership" in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.[25] That text balances general empowerment with the conviction that "God calls particular persons in the church to specific leadership ministries and offices." What long-term influence this statement may have remains to be seen, especially in a churchly and wider cultural context in which the midcentury critique of leadership remains rather resilient.

Contemporary considerations

The implications of the shifts and reactions noted above are complex enough to warrant more reflection than is possible here.[26] In lieu of systematic analysis, I offer observations on the challenges these changes have bequeathed us.

Challenges for current leaders. If banishing bishops empowered local pastors—and even laity, in some places—to perform all the church's sacred rites, that new authority may now take a more tenuous form. Greater latitude in baptizing and offering the Lord's Supper has often paralleled a more individual and subjective understanding of these rituals, which may not enhance the pastor's role as an instrument of God's grace and hardly communicates a sense of the ministry's representing the collective church. In 2003, one observer questioned whether "familiarity with pastors [has] gone too far."[27]

Challenges for church structures and bureaucracies. Conference ministers have become an important professional resource for pastors charting these newer courses, but conference ministers fill a role decidedly different from that of bishops. Conference ministers do not possess the sort of relational authority through which bishops embodied and mediated a wider church. Conference ministers' authority, defined in detailed job descriptions, is limited to specific tasks (although their workload may be enormous!). A sense of the church as something beyond the local congregation is borne less by relational rituals and more by constitutions, delegate assembly resolutions, incorporated agencies, and alumni loyalty. While these are hardly bad things, it

remains to be seen whether they possess both a transcendence and an immediacy that can bear churchly identity over time.

Challenges for Mennonite unity and identity. The changes of the past century have highlighted the increasing significance of money as a measure of Mennonite identity. If bishops focused church unity and accountability through their authority to cement sacramental relationships, Mennonites in a post-bishop world are more likely to express identity and mark accountability in ways that involve dollars. Which institutions do you or your congregation support financially? Where is giving directed? From whom can you withhold funds? Whom do you turn to for assistance with problems because it's in their salaried contract? One of the best ways to track contemporary Mennonite identity is to follow the money.

Bishops of earlier eras didn't have these instruments of power—no institutional budgets, no alumni associations, no paid staff, no church funds to forward as a sign of support or to withhold in protest. Instead, they had a set of face-to-face ceremonies that involved some water and some bread and wine. Nineteenth-century Mennonite and Amish discussion of church unity (sometimes contentious, to be sure) revolved around acceptance of one another's baptisms and mutual participation in the Lord's Supper. That late-twentieth-century Mennonites often assumed such ritual reciprocity and yet still needed to invest much energy in the process of denominational integration signals something of the changes that have marked Mennonite understandings of identity and the power and authority of relational rituals.

I trust these reflections are not a nostalgic paean to the days when more Mennonite bishops walked the earth. Nor do I want to disparage the important work of administration and church-related institutions. Instead, I want to highlight the contingent nature of the best of human efforts to direct the course of change, and underscore the fact that any democratization of churchly power is less cause for triumphal celebration than reason to notice that new rounds of discernment and refinement are as necessary as ever.

Notes

[1] The focus here is the former Mennonite Church (MC), an antecedent of Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. After 1897, the MC branch of

Mennonitism brought together most so-called Old Mennonites and progressive Amish Mennonites. However, the bishop office was recognized in other Mennonite branches; see the article "Elder" by Cornelius Krahn in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, on bishops in the "Russian Mennonite" tradition (in both South Russia and North America). Harold S. Bender, "Bishop," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, summarizes the terms used for this office and identifies North American groups that recognized it.

[2] David J. Rempel Smucker (introduction and transcription) and Noah G. Good (translator), "Church Practices of Lancaster Mennonites: Writings by Christian Nissley (1777–1831)," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 13 (July 1990): 7; John S. Coffman to Menno S. Steiner, 11 July 1894, John S. Coffman Papers, Hist. MSS 1–19, Archives of the Mennonite Church USA, Goshen, Ind.

[3] Robert J. Baker, "My Good Bishop," *Gospel Herald*, 24 February 1987, 126–27. Baker paid tribute to David A. Yoder (1883–1980), longtime bishop in the Elkhart, Indiana, area. Moreover, in some other Christian traditions, bishops are regarded as liberators, not oppressors (e.g., Bishop Richard Allen [1760–1831] of the African Methodist Episcopal Church or Bishop C. H. Mason [1866–1961] of the Church of God in Christ). This is also the case in many of the African Instituted/Independent Churches (AICs) with which Mennonites have fruitfully partnered in recent decades.

[4] In 1996 (the last year for such published data), the former Mennonite Church (MC) had 125 living bishops, but most were inactive and almost 60 percent were over age 70. See *Mennonite Yearbook: 1997* (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1997), 214–16.

[5] Lancaster Conference. *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1996) recognizes oversight ministries, but these differ from the traditional bishop office.

[6] But an individual leader's tenure in an office was contingent on ethical behavior.

[7] This is not to say that nineteenth-century Mennonites defined church merely as the place where the sacraments are rightly rendered. However, it is clear that all the themes and elements they associated with being the people of God (proper personal and group ethics, church discipline, separation from the world, etc.) found their focus in preparation for and participation in these rituals that came only from the hand of a bishop—and through which one was connected to any other Mennonites whose bishop was in fellowship with one's own.

[8] Sometimes this agreement paralleled written agreements ("rules and discipline") that summarized certain understandings, but such documents were never comprehensive. Until the mid-twentieth century, conferences were understood to be comprised of ordained leaders, not congregations. To illustrate: A congregation, as such, could not be expelled from a conference, because it was not a member of a conference. Only an ordained leader could be expelled from a conference. (Congregational members could, however, by participating in communion with or receiving baptism from a bishop who was no longer in conference fellowship, in effect separate themselves from those whose relationships remained "in the conference.") Only in the 1950s were some MC area conferences beginning to talk about local congregations as members of the conference; see explicit statements in this regard in *Church Organization and Administration: Proceedings of the Study Conference . . . held at Chicago, Illinois, March 28–29, 1955* (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing house, 1955), 36–37.

[9] In some places, bishops performed other functions, such as collectively making up the conference executive committee. In certain cases, deference dictated that the longest-serving bishop was the conference moderator.

[10] *Church Organization and Administration*, 2.

[11] J. Lawrence Burkholder, "Concern Pamphlets Movement," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5.
[12] E.g., *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1987), much of which was taken from material in *Concern* pamphlet no. 17 (1969); and *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 22–26. See also a popularized version in Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978), 287–88.
[13] *Church Organization and Administration*, 1, 3–12.
[14] Ibid., 19–34. These ideas gained a wider hearing; Peachey's essay was cited with approval several months later at a similar General Conference Mennonite Church study conference. See *Proceedings of the Study Conference on the Believers' Church, held at . . . Chicago, Illinois, August 23–25, 1955* (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Press, 1955), 135–40.
[15] *Report of the South Central Mennonite Conference*, August 18–21, 1953 (Hutchinson, Kan.), 17–19; *Report of the South Central Mennonite Conference*, August 17–20, 1954 (Eldon, Mo.), 3–4, 25. The reorganization transpired smoothly except in Missouri, where the churches at first resisted the innovation. A majority of the new overseers were former bishops; see "1954–1955 Report of Actions of the Executive Committee for the South Central Mennonite Conference," II-14-2, 2/35, Archives of the Mennonite Church USA, Goshen, Ind.
[16] These administrative districts were different from the older districts that prevailed in eastern conferences such as Lancaster and Virginia. There, a district originally was the name for a sizeable congregation with multiple meeting places. In time, each meetinghouse began hosting weekly worship, and people began to think of each meetinghouse as a distinct church, although with the memory—conscious or not—that the entire district should operate in concert. The newer districts had quite the opposite origin: congregations without a specifically shared history were now grouped together.
[17] Indeed, at the 1955 MC study conference, the opening "Statement of the Problem" and concluding "Suggested Pattern as a Goal for the Mennonite Church" were both presented by South Central ministers, suggesting that the rest of the denomination was looking to them as a model.
[18] See Ross T. Bender, ed., *The People of God: A Mennonite Interpretation of the Free Church Tradition* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971), which summarizes the findings of the 1960s Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries Dean's Seminar on the shape of theological education. See esp. 153–56; here the document suggests that "the concept of ordination" may need to be "dropped altogether."
[19] *Proceedings of Mennonite General Conference*, 1967 (Lansdale, Pa.), 82–83; *Reports of Mennonite General Conference*, 1967 (Lansdale, Pa.), 108–109.
[20] The echoes of such sentiments were still present in the influential Mennonite Church General Assembly study document (1979) and Summary Statement (1981) *Leadership and Authority in the Life of the Church*. These pieces seem intent on upholding a notion of ministerial office, but the text often bears a reactionary tone that sounds more like the voices of the previous decades. Marlin E. Miller, recently returned to North American from Europe, was instrumental in drafting these two documents, and they may well illustrate a chapter in his evolving thought on these matters, discussed below. (Observation of Barbara and James Nelson Gingerich, who heard Miller present at Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., much of the material in the study document as Miller was working with it in the late 1970s.)
[21] The desire for efficiency—an impulse not surprising in the era of the 1950s "Organization Man"—comes through strongly in the documents and directives of the 1955

study conference and the 1954 South Central Conference reorganization scheme.
[22] See some of the challenges described in the July 1997 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* devoted to church-related institutions.
[23] See his autobiographical reflections in "Some Reflections on Pastoral Ministry and Pastoral Education," in *Theology for the Church: Writings by Marlin E. Miller*, ed. Richard A. Kauffman and Gayle Gerber Koontz (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1997), 121–24.
[24] *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5., s.v. "Priesthood of All Believers."
[25] A personal story from summer 1994 illustrates this. I was collating and summarizing responses to the draft proposal of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* for Miller. One afternoon, I met Miller, just off the plane from Africa and eager to hear the emerging shape of the response to the confession draft. I told him that a significant number of readers were upset about the article on leadership. He laughed and said, "Good!" Someone listening asked why he was happy that readers were upset. He replied, "Because that means they understand it and realize that this is pointing us in a new direction."
[26] Especially important to consider in this mix would be the influence of the charismatic movement on Mennonite notions of spiritual authority and power.
[27] Tim Schultz, "Should You Call your Pastor Joe?" *The Mennonite*, 21 October 2003, 14–15.

About the author

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Mennonites and power
Returning to a thwarted conversation

Brenda Hostetler Meyer

In 1944, the Mennonite press published Goshen College professor Guy F. Hershberger's *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*. This book defines *biblical nonresistance* and spells out its implications for life in the Mennonite community. Hershberger emphasizes suffering love and noncoercion, rooted in Jesus' command to "Resist not him that is evil."[1] The word *power* is not in the index and rarely appears in Hershberger's work. Where it does appear, it is usually something to be avoided, something needed by governments but not by Christians who follow the way of love.

Although Hershberger criticizes liberal Protestants for underestimating the "power of sin,"[2] he speaks guardedly of any power that might counter sin—even the power exercised by Jesus himself. In *The Way of the Cross*, published in 1958, Hershberger writes that "although [Jesus] was the divine Son of God, with the powers of heaven at His command, these powers were used only sparingly, and then only in ministering to the needs of others . . . never . . . to save himself or to withstand his opponents."[3]

Reflection on the issues raised by a frustrated fifty-year-old conversation between Guy F. Hershberger and J. Lawrence Burkholder is vital to the continuing health and witness of the Mennonite Church.

J. Lawrence Burkholder was Hershberger's persistent critic on the issue of power. In the tumultuous years after World War 2, he administered a United Nations relief program in China. In this position of power and responsibility, he came to feel that his Mennonite upbringing had not prepared him for the moral ambiguities he encountered. He lamented that his Mennonite "innocence" and "good conscience" had been tarnished by "tragic necessity" and said he had learned "the difference between the ethics of personal relations and corporate responsibilities."[4]

On his return from China, Burkholder joined Hershberger, his former teacher and mentor, on the faculty of Goshen College. He also began study at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he found a climate that welcomed his questions. His doctoral dissertation, *The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church,* was a direct challenge to Hershberger's views about nonresistance. Burkholder feared that Mennonites were avoiding responsibility for society and history by absolutizing nonresistance, which he claimed had never been intended to apply to the complexities of institutional and political life.[5]

Burkholder's views were not well received in Goshen. In written response to the dissertation, Hershberger acknowledged Burkholder's brilliant work (Burkholder had graduated *summa cum laude*), but was liberal with disapproving comments. In a private conversation initiated by Hershberger, Burkholder felt scolded. When Hershberger ended the conversation by saying something like, "This can't be," Burkholder asked, "Well, shall I leave?" (meaning, Should I leave Goshen College?). Hershberger left the room without responding.[6]

Historian Theron Schlabach reports that during this time the church press sponsored a public conversation on Burkholder's thesis. Burkholder prepared a presentation of his dissertation and Hershberger a critique. For some reason, Hershberger was invited to speak first, and "with only a slight apology for breach of protocol, he put Burkholder's paper under the surgeon's scalpel, refuting and quoting it freely even before Burkholder had delivered it. Burkholder was left to do the best he could."[7]

According to Burkholder's memory of this time, he was silenced. He does not remember whether he submitted his dissertation to the Mennonite press and never heard back,[8] or whether he did not submit it because of lack of support from colleagues and administration at Goshen.[9] After these initial conversations, there seemed to be no opening for further consideration of his views: "It was hush-hush for the sake of unity, and I decided I could keep quiet for awhile if I needed to."[10]

Burkholder remained at Goshen College for more than ten years and later returned to be its president. But he did not lose his anger and frustration about Mennonites' refusal to acknowledge or deal with power. In "The Limits of Perfection: Autobiographical

Reflections," Burkholder wrote, "Regarding power, no theoretical provision was made for its use in the Anabaptist-Mennonite lexicon. Everybody knows that power is used, but it was not acknowledged. Mennonites use power while exalting weakness."[11]

Years later, when asked about Burkholder's experience of being silenced, Hershberger said something like, "J. Lawrence? said that? No . . . I never would have kept him from publishing his thesis! . . . I discussed the thesis with Lawrence, but I don't have any authority to tell people they can't publish a thesis."[12]

I believe that reflection on the issues raised by this frustrated conversation between Hershberger and Burkholder is vital to the continuing health and witness of the Mennonite Church. In the fifty years since this conversation began, the Mennonite church in the U.S. has moved from fairly heavy-handed power structures (in the 1940s and 1950s), to an idealizing of egalitarianism (in the 1960s and 1970s), to a tendency in the last two decades to romanticize and seek a return to the good old days of leadership and authority. These swings have followed similar swings in U.S. society. The church has continued to be divided or ambivalent about how Christians exercise or influence power in the political realm. My hope is that reflection on our history and the scriptures can move us forward in this conversation and make us less inclined to reactionary swings in any direction.

The Mennonite church in the U.S. has moved from fairly heavy-handed power structures, to an idealizing of egalitarianism, to a tendency to seek a return to the good old days of leadership and authority.

What does the Bible say about power?

In a textbook on interpersonal conflict, William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker suggest three ways of understanding power in relationships: distributive, integrative, and designated.

Distributive power is power over. It is an either/or kind of power: when one person has more, another has less.[13] This characteristic of power was assumed by German sociologist Max Weber in a definition that has become classic in the West: "We understand by 'power' the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating [acted upon] in the action."[14] Hocker

and Wilmot suggest that this view of either/or power predominates and is usually assumed in our culture, whether in the context of interpersonal or international relations.[15]

Integrative power is both/and power. The assumption is that all parties in a relationship have and use power currencies of various types, and that power may actually be increased when it is shared.[16] Hocker and Wilmot suggest that this understanding of power is more common among women, and perhaps in cultures such as Japan, where conflict style tends to be less confrontational and more likely to build on mutual strengths.[17]

Designated power is Hocker and Wilmot's third way of understanding power relationships. They suggest that an individual often chooses to invest power in a relationship with another person, a family, workplace, or other institution. By designating power to a larger entity, one receives personal benefit or participates in a larger good. In some sense, designated power is an account that can be drawn on when individual power is perceived as insufficient. Someone who has designated power to another person or institution has not given their power away, because one always retains the option of rescinding one's designated power.[18]

The Bible speaks often of power, both divine and human, and usually does so in a positive rather than a negative light. The power of God liberates slaves from Egypt and provides for them in the wilderness; the power of the Holy Spirit brings miraculous understanding and unprecedented sharing at Pentecost. Power is also a human trait. The word used most often for power in the Hebrew Bible refers to human armies as well as to God's power in the Exodus, to the human capacity for economic production as well as to God's power to create and sustain life. One of the most frequent references to power in the New Testament is to Jesus' "works of power"; in Matthew 10 and Luke 9, Jesus explicitly passes these powers on to his disciples.[19]

The Hebrew scriptures warn repeatedly that the human power to sustain life (economic power) and to protect life (military power) must be relativized by dependence on the power of God. As the psalmist says, "A king is not saved by his great army [a word translated elsewhere as "power"]; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength [also translated elsewhere as "power"]. . . . Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who

hope in his steadfast love to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Ps. 33:16, 18). Moses instructs the people, "[When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you,] Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth" (Deut. 8:17-18).

In the passages where Jesus explicitly passes power on to his disciples, he too warns them not to rely on their own economic or military power but to depend for their provision and protection on God:[20] "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them" (Luke 9:3-5).

Jesus warns his disciples not to rely on their own economic or military power but to depend for their provision and protection on God. Paradoxically, those who recognize their weakness and depend on God are promised power.

Paradoxically, those who recognize their weakness and depend on God are promised power. The judge Gideon protests that he is the weakest in his clan, but he is commissioned by God as a powerful warrior with the promise, "I will be with you" (Judg. 6:12-16). In the New Testament, this paradox brings to mind God's words to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you. For power is made perfect in weakness," to which Paul responds, "So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. 12:9). But the central demonstration of this paradox of human weakness and God's power is the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Before Jesus' ministry begins, he faces temptations that focus on how he will choose to use power. Jesus rejects the temptation to mass-produce bread for the hungry (economic power). He rejects the temptation to accept the ultimate claims of empire (political power). He rejects the temptation to prove his legitimacy by miraculous demonstrations in the temple (religious power). Jesus goes on to undermine the power of world markets by giving thanks for God's provision of five loaves and two fish. He undermines the power of armies and empire by living freely in

the face of their death threats, trusting God's protection. He undermines the power of the temple by inviting all to experience forgiveness and communion with God. Finally, Jesus exposes the lie of these powers by willingly facing death at their hand, and God's power as ultimate provider and protector is gloriously displayed in the resurrection.

So, what is power as understood by the biblical writers? I suggest that it is the God-given capacity for life, and the power to sustain that life through economic production and some kind of protection and security. Human institutions (families, markets, churches, communities, governments) are part of God's plan to give humans the power needed for sustaining and securing human life.

But throughout the Bible, a struggle surfaces when human institutions (and the spiritual powers they embody) try to take over the place of God. In fact, these institutions and powers take on the aspect of evil when—in their pretensions to be the ultimate source of provision and security—they destroy what they purport to create. I understand the Bible to say that the power for life and shalom (provision and protection) comes only from God. All other powers are pretenders when they claim to have the power to protect us and provide for us.

Using the language of Hocker and Wilmot: (1) The biblical story is an attempt to persuade God's people to designate their power to God rather than to humans or human institutions. (2) The biblical paradox of weakness and strength means that when human power is designated to God, the result is increased rather than diminished power for humans; in other words, God's power is integrative rather than distributive. (3) The Bible warns against distributive understandings and uses of power, and it gives hints for organizing institutions in ways that are consistent with God's integrative power, where power increases as it is shared between the least and the greatest.[21]

Reclaiming our power

What does it mean to designate power to God? John Howard Yoder suggests that the church since World War 2 has too often let itself believe that the real power for change in the world lies with the armies and the markets.[22] We so assume the necessity of

protection and provision by armies and markets that we designate our power to them before we even realize that it is ours to give away. Walter Wink graphically suggests that the gesture of obeisance to the powers is a shrug: I did what I had to do. What choice did I have? I was obeying orders. I don't enjoy the violence in these films, but it is what the public wants.[23] When we fail to recognize our power to choose, we designate power not to God but to whatever powers happen to be at hand.

I believe that Burkholder fell into this trap when he accepted the "tragic necessities" of working in a powerful institution:[24] "There were times when my staff and I were required to accept military escort. This bothered me, but I had to go along with it."[25] "I sometimes felt sad and guilty even though one could do nothing about it. One could bend policy only so far and get away with it.'[26] "A U.N. administrator could question policies, but s/he had to function within them until they were revised or rescinded."[27]

We so assume the necessity of protection and provision by armies and markets that we designate our power to them before we even realize that it is ours to give away.

Choosing to designate power to God (and thereby removing our investment from another person or institution) may be costly. It may involve speaking the truth in a situation where we have a lot to lose: our safe spot in an unjust system, a spouse, a job, our church standing. It will often make other people uncomfortable or angry.[28] It will mean placing our trust in God's power and the resources God has made available. These choices are complex and never either/or. They demand thoughtful consideration over time and in the company of others committed to the way of Jesus. But we must begin by recognizing and claiming our power: we do have choices to make, choices for life, choices for death.

If it is important to remember that we have the option of taking back power that we have designated to others, it is equally important to recognize and be responsible stewards of the power that others have designated to us. Here I would challenge Hershberger. He believed, as I do, in the "way of the cross" as a model for human relations. But instead of acknowledging the power he carried as Burkholder's senior colleague and shaper of Mennonite thought, his theology made him unaware of his own

power. When he used his position and influence to undermine and silence Burkholder, he didn't see what he was doing.

Neither Burkholder nor Hershberger grew up in a time or a culture that gave them tools for this kind of interpersonal analysis and reflection. Burkholder's formative experiences at least pushed him to ask the questions. As North American Mennonites, we are growing increasingly powerful. All of us are recipients of designated power because of our country of birth, and many of us because of skin color, gender, role in an institution, education, or personal charisma, among others. All of us must face the challenge of acknowledging the power we have and deciding on faithful ways to designate that power to God and God's purposes.

Those calling for a return to leadership and authority in the church are correct in asking for clear recognition of individual and institutional power, and for affirming the calling we each have to exercise that power for good in the church and the world. "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). If we are part of the biblical story, however, the choices we make about that power will fly in the face of our cultural training and assumptions. They may also look very different, depending on where we stand. Regina Shands Stoltzfus contrasts the rich young man, who was confronted with the power of his wealth, and the marginalized woman with hemorrhages. Both recognized their power: one needed to walk away to reflect; one needed to find the courage to speak.[29] We must work together to reclaim our power of choice in situations that tempt us to feel powerless, and to make choices for God's integrative power when we are powerful. For God's is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen.

If it is important to remember that we have the option of taking back power that we have designated to others, it is equally important to be responsible stewards of the power that others have designated to us.

Notes

[1] Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944), 203.
[2] Ibid., 209.
[3] Guy F. Hershberger, *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1958), 23.

[4] Quoted in Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994), 92.
[5] Ibid., 93.
[6] Theron F. Schlabach, "Guy F. Hershberger vis-à-vis J. Lawrence Burkholder: Irreconcilable Approaches to Christian Ethics?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (January 1999): 24.
[7] Ibid., 25.
[8] Burkholder's dissertation was published by Institute for Mennonite Studies in 1989, thirty-one years after it was written.
[9] Schlabach, "Guy F. Hershberger vis-à-vis J. Lawrence Burkholder," 28.
[10] Driedger and Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking,* 94.
[11] In *Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder*, ed. Rodney J. Sawatsky and Scott Holland (Waterloo, Ont.: Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1993), 37.
[12] Schlabach, "Guy F. Hershberger vis-à-vis J. Lawrence Burkholder," 26.
[13] William Wilmot and Joyce Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 96.
[14] *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 180; quoted in Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, eds., *Power, Authority and the Anabaptist Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 175.
[15] Wilmot and Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict,* 98.
[16] Ibid., 96.
[17] Ibid., 100.
[18] Ibid., 102.
[19] These conclusions based on my own word searches of the Hebrew, Greek, and New Revised Standard Version Bible using Bible Windows 4.05 (Silver Mountain Software, 1995) are corroborated by James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).
[20] I was first introduced to the twin themes of provision and protection in Alan Kreider's book *Journey Towards Holiness: A Way of Living for God's Nation* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987). Kreider gives a convincing overview of the centrality of God's protection and provision throughout the biblical story. I was fascinated to find these themes so closely linked to the biblical concept of power.
[21] Examples include Jubilee debt relief, direct address, and the church as a body with Jesus as the head.
[22] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 156.
[23] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 99.
[24] Sawatsky and Holland, *Limits of Perfection*, 12.
[25] Ibid., 17.
[26] Ibid., 15.
[27] Ibid., 14.
[28] Although we sometimes mistakenly confuse the two, trying to control the behavior of a person or institution by threat or force is different from making a choice about our investment in that person or institution that results in their anger or discomfort.
[29] See her sermon,"Mother, may I?" in this issue.

About the author

Brenda Hostetler Meyer is a pastor of Benton Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana.

Mother, may I?
A Pastors Week sermon

Regina Shands Stoltzfus

I am not an athlete by any stretch of the imagination. I tried hard as a child: no one wants to be the last person picked for a dodge ball or kickball team. Eventually I gave up. Now as an adult in a family full of people who love sports, I pretend that I don't get it: "What's the big deal? One team wins, the other loses. The people who lose feel bad. That's terrible." I know. I've been in that position.

But I do get it. I understand the appeal of winning. I understand what it means to be able to say, "I am better than you are at this." I know, because there were some games that I liked to play as a child. One game I liked was "Mother, may I?" I enjoyed being in the position of all-powerful Mother, facing the row of players and deciding how far each one would get to advance. I would say, "Susie, take three giant steps." Susie would respond, as the game prescribes, "Mother, may I?" And I would answer, "Why yes, you may." Susie would advance her three steps. Then I would say, "Billy, take ten giant steps forward." And Billy, all excited, would be lured into taking those ten giant steps. But he would have to go back because in his excitement he'd forgotten to ask, "Mother, may I?" The pleasure of playing was the chance to be the one to say, "Yes, you may" or "No, you may not." I liked being in a position to bestow favors on my friends and exact vengeance on the kids who chose me last for their kickball team. Games give us the thrill of being in charge, of being the one who knows what's going on, of being in control.

As we get older and begin to understand power's varied faces, we begin to feel some discomfort with it, to perceive its ambiguities. We may still hunger for it, but we sense that we're not supposed to want it.

We are all familiar with the thrill of power. As we get older and begin to understand its varied faces, we begin to feel some dis-

comfort with it, to perceive its ambiguities. We may still hunger for it, but we sense that we're not supposed to want it, so we deny that we do. But something in us still wants to be important, to be listened to, to have influence, to be loved, to know and be known.

In Matthew 4:1-11, the devil comes to Jesus and tempts him with familiar wants and needs. We need to be filled. We need to be free from hunger. We need to be free from harm. We need to have a sense that some things are ours. We think we need to be in charge. These are the things the tempter offers Jesus: You'll never be hungry again. You'll never be harmed. All these things I'll give you.

But didn't Jesus already have all these things? "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus had all the kingdoms of the world, yet in his life, ministry, and death, he turned around the way we think about having and using power, about having and using things. The story of his birth, a bit before our text in Matthew, alludes to this leveling of our understanding of power. John announces Jesus' coming, quoting Isaiah 40, which says, "Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low." Things that are up high will be brought low. The low places and the high places will be leveled, evened out.

Now, I've talked about our discomfort with power. But I want to say that power often gets a bad rap. We hear the word *power*, and we think: "That's bad. I'm not supposed to want it, so I'm going to act like I don't." We have seen how power corrupts, and we know the saying about absolute power corrupting absolutely, but we forget that God promises to give us power. So we dare not just throw it out the window. God spoke, and by the power of God's words the world came into being. Jesus told his followers to wait for the Holy Spirit; he assured them that when the Spirit came, they would receive power. We're told that Jesus and the disciples did mighty works of power. Power can be a good thing. Denying power to those who need it is not good. Power can be used in the leveling that God is bringing about.

Some of us are granted power because of who we are or what we have, where we were born, the degrees we've earned, the titles

we have, the education we've received, our skin color, our gender, the part of town we live in—many things we have little control over. Some of this power comes to us automatically because of the circles we move in. I live in a part of town where my street will be plowed soon after it snows. I don't do anything to deserve that; it just happens because of where I live. People only need to know about us that "she's a pastor" or "he's a professor," and our power and status are assumed. When we speak, people listen.

Some of us are denied power because of who we are, where we were born, where we live in town, because we have the wrong skin color, poor education, went to the wrong seminary. Because of these things, some of them within our control and some outside it, others will assume that we don't know what we're talking about, and we will have little influence. All of us sometimes find ourselves in a relatively powerless position. There are times when we, the powerless, need to stand up and demand the right to speak.

Power often gets a bad rap. We forget that God promises to give us power. Jesus assured his followers that they would receive power.

Because we move in and out of both of these circles, we need to understand how to move, when to step aside because our sister or brother needs to be brought forward. However well we handle power and use it for the good of others, sometimes we need to sit down and be quiet. We need to get out of the way. We need to learn when to step back because too much attention is focused on us and it is distracting attention from what God wants us to do, from the places God wants us to go. A rich young man came to Jesus and asked him, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Sell all that you own, and distribute the money to the poor" (Luke 18:22). And the young man went away sad because he was very wealthy.

A woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for years, outcast from her community, separated from her people, with no place to go and little power, heard that Jesus was coming. She summoned up the last bit of her strength and touched the hem of his clothes. Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me" (Luke 8:46). Our limitations and the things we have do not completely define us. God uses every bit of us—who we are, where we are, what we are. Even Jesus

moved in and out of these spheres, depending on who he was around and where he was and what he was doing. In one setting, someone would ask, "Isn't that Joseph's son?" In another time and place, someone would protest, "Lord, you will not wash my feet."

God wants us here and now to use our power to announce the reign of God, bringing all that we are, all that we are part of. Neither our abundance nor our lack of abundance, neither our influence nor our lack of influence, defines us entirely. The whole of what defines us is that we are sons and daughters of the living God. I believe that at the core of our desire for power is the desire to know and be known by God, to love and be loved by God. I think that impulse is what masquerades as a desire to be in charge, to have power, to have stuff.

As Pascal said, we have a God-shaped hole in us, which only God can fill. The beauty of this God-given desire—for power, for love, to be filled—is that God promises to satisfy it. It is our birthright. God says, "All these things I give you." Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." More audibly than the voice of the tempter may we hear in our ear God's whisper, God's promise to give us all things.

Jesus responds to the tempter, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" If we follow Jesus' example, we will orient ourselves to the things that God has in store for us. We will drown out the noise of the world. We will serve God only. We will approach God: "Mother, may I?" "Father, may I?" "Lord God, may I?" And we will hear the resounding answer, "Yes, you may." Amen.

About the author

Regina Shands Stoltzfus preached this sermon during Pastors Week at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, in January 2004. She is director of admissions and financial aid at AMBS. She also serves on the MCC Great Lakes Executive Board and as a Damascus Road trainer.

The paradox of pastoral power

Joseph J. Kotva Jr.

Pastor Inqvist and his wife, Judy, were supposed to be on their way to the Rural Clergy Conference in Orlando. They had looked forward to the event and to spending a few days away from the ever-peering eyes of his Lake Wobegon parishioners. Judy especially had anticipated the free afternoons and evenings they would spend together: she had planned every place they would visit and every ride they would try.

The expenditure had narrowly passed the deacons board. Ever since, parishioners (especially those who had been critical of his ministry all along) had let Pastor Inqvist know that they disapproved of the expense and resented his having this opportunity. The pressure was usually indirect: whenever the topic of weather came up, folks would comment on their cold Minnesota winter, and then they would add, "But of course, you have that sunny Orlando trip to look forward to."

Despite their often-justified sense of powerlessness, contemporary pastors have significant power—influence on others and the ability to make things happen—that they frequently overlook.

At a church meeting just days before the conference, a deacon brought up the subject of world hunger and remarked that he wished that they could do more to alleviate this suffering. He suggested that they revisit the budget to look for nonessential spending, travel and the like, that could be redirected to address hunger. Under pressure, Pastor Inqvist offered to cancel the Orlando trip. He hoped that someone would speak up in his behalf—affirming the congregation's need for the pastor and emphasizing the pastor's need to get away. But no advocate appeared. Judy was understandably angry that he had made this concession without talking to her. In an act of commiseration, the local Catholic priest visited the Inqvist home and brought a bottle of French cognac to share.

I was a seminary student when I first heard Garrison Keillor describe Pastor Inqvist's missed trip,[1] but even then it struck me as capturing the sense of powerlessness that so many pastors experience. Inqvist's inability to negotiate the power struggle is so pronounced that he feels ill. The exertion of power by the pastor's critics leaves Mrs. Inqvist feeling angry and betrayed by her spouse and the church.

The critics often seem to have more power than the pastor. And rare indeed is the pastor who hasn't felt powerless when he fails to get a raise, when distorted budget priorities are passed, or when the congregation resists even modest changes in the worship service. Whatever the authority and power pastors had in other times and places, pastors in contemporary North America often feel powerless.

The reality of pastoral power

Despite this often-justified sense of powerlessness, contemporary pastors have significant power—influence on others and the ability to make things happen—that they frequently overlook. This power has many sources and is manifest in various ways.[2] For example, a kind of power is conferred by institutional appointment. Licensing, ordination, and the call of the congregation grant pastors a level of authority they would not otherwise have. Because of these institutional forms of affirmation, most congregation members will listen to a new pastor's ideas with a deference she has not yet earned through direct, sustained interaction with those members. As the pastor's tenure continues, this institutionally conferred, member-granted deference grows stronger or weaker for various reasons, but it is seldom entirely lost, except through clergy misconduct. Institutional appointment also gives power, by granting the pastor a voice in congregational committees and informal gatherings, and conferring the unique privilege of regularly addressing the entire congregation in the sermon.

The pastor's role as symbolic representative of the church and of God is another source of power. The reality of symbolic representation is especially palpable when pastors conduct hospital visits or funerals. In these settings, the church and even God are often recognized as present when and because the pastor is present. Such symbolic representation is usually active at some

level, even in contexts where we may not expect it. Consider how folks at the gym or coffeeshop become careful about their speech when they discover that you are a pastor. This change in behavior is not simply an effort to avoid offending you personally, something they do not rigorously avoid with others. Rather, the change in behavior is an implicit acknowledgment that the pastor's presence symbolically represents the presence of God and the church. This symbolic representation is a form of power, and despite the ambivalence that Anabaptists sometimes feel about setting pastors apart, the pastor's role as symbolic representative is present at some level in most church-related encounters with most congregation members.

At moments of vulnerability, words and actions that signal the pastor's solidarity or distance, affirmation or judgment, moral expectation or indifference, are incredibly powerful, for good or ill.

The mention of hospital rooms and funerals suggests another aspect of pastoral power: access to people's lives when they are most vulnerable. Pastors are admitted into the intimate corners of people's lives during major illness, death, job loss, and family crises, but also during life-affirming transitions such as weddings and baptisms. At these moments, words and actions that signal the pastor's solidarity or distance, affirmation or judgment, moral expectation or indifference, are incredibly powerful, for good or ill. The rituals and interpretive framework the pastor offers for understanding these events are equally powerful in assisting or obstructing the integration of these moments into members' life stories.

Competence and expertise furnish yet another aspect of pastoral power. In various areas of our lives, we grant power to those with relevant expertise. As we make choices about matters as varied as health care, car maintenance, and hairstyle, we listen to the considered opinions of our physicians, mechanics, and stylists. We may or may not follow their advice, but we generally recognize that in their areas of expertise, their voices should carry more weight than do other well-intended but less informed voices.

When Anabaptist-related communities recognize the importance of well-trained clergy, they are acknowledging the need for a certain kind of expertise and granting a corresponding power. The sustained study of Scripture, pastoral care and counseling,

homiletics, church history, theology, and Christian ethics provides pastors with expertise relevant to vital areas of Christian life. Without claiming that pastors are saints to be singled out, we grant that well-trained pastors bring expertise that is uniquely relevant to Christian life and thought. This expertise is a form of authority and power, whether or not members follow the "expert's" advice.

Less tangible than expertise, but more important as a source of power, is pastors' authenticity in their Christian walk. The Christian life well led is remarkably compelling. The lives of the martyrs and saints such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa exhibit an undeniable power to influence others; so do the lives of everyday Christians who know themselves to be loved by God and who in turn love God and their neighbors. Several years ago, I performed a funeral for a man who had always lived within a few blocks of the church, had a high school education, and whose most prestigious employment was as a tire salesman. Our church was filled beyond capacity at his funeral. Every space—pew, aisle, foyer, hallway—was occupied by those who wanted to testify to the way this simple man's life had influenced them. Such is the power of a grace-filled Christian life.

Pastors are not unique in their potential for this type of power, except that the life of the pastor is uniquely visible and almost always on display. Pastors who are genuinely grateful for God's grace and who love the members of their church and the neighbors down the street will influence others, often in ways that are indirect and serendipitous. The force of an authentic Christian life defies our attempts to grasp and manipulate it but is all the more powerful for its elusive character.

Directing pastoral power

With justification, pastors often feel powerless, yet they have many sources of power. It is dangerous to allow the first half of this paradox to overwhelm our awareness of the second half. As pastors, we must acknowledge that we are often in a position of great power even when we feel completely powerless. Failing this acknowledgment, we risk burnout, and we risk abusing the very power we fail to acknowledge. Burnout is likely because it is difficult to continue meaningful ministry when we constantly feel

helpless. And the shortest route to clergy misconduct is the one that turns a blind eye to the inequality of power we often have vis-à-vis congregation members or people in need. Among other things, truth telling in our preaching, sexual fidelity, counseling that empowers others, confidentiality, and honest accounting practices are put at risk when we deny that we hold power that can be abused.

Much could be said about the appropriate restraint and use of such power. Here I suggest two broad principles and two practices that can help guide pastors. First is a basic norm that the "greater burden of moral responsibility falls on the one with the greater power"—that is, on the pastor.[3] This principle remains true even while we honor the contribution and dignity of everyone in the community, "the evangelical equality of all,"[4] and while we hold all parties accountable for their behavior, including those who try to manipulate the situation. The fact remains that enormous responsibility comes with pastoral power.

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Richard Gula suggests that the clergy/parish relationship is a covenantal relationship that can be informed by God's covenantal relationship with Israel.[5] In covenantal relationships of unequal power, the one with greater power (God, the pastor, various professionals) has the greater responsibility to protect the boundaries of the relationship and to work in the other's behalf (that of Israel, congregation members, patients or clients). Israel's prophets apply this principle when they call on leaders to act with justice and to judge fairly; Jesus assumes this principle in his often-caustic denunciation of the religious leaders of his time. In covenantal relationships, power brings responsibility, and however fleeting it sometimes seems, pastoral power places disproportionate responsibility on clergy to protect relationship boundaries.

A second, related principle is that pastoral power is judged by whether it aids the well-being of others. Many words can express this well-being—healing, liberation, empowerment, among others—and all of them have certain limitations. Still, the direction of the power used by Jesus, the disciples, and early church leaders

is relatively clear: the offer of healing and hope, moral accountability directed at reconciliation, justice, good news to the poor, and release to the captives.[6]

While the general direction is clear, the actual use of pastoral power to foster people's well-being requires discernment in the given situation. What constitutes liberation in one context might mean coercion in another or enabling un-Christian behavior in still another. Discernment is needed, and in that discernment, special attention must be paid to the perspective of those who are most vulnerable because of economic, emotional, or other circumstances. Most often, those in positions of vulnerability are best situated to judge whether they are being oppressed or set free.[7] But even privileging the perspective of the vulnerable requires discernment, because good news can be met as judgment, liberating accountability can be experienced as oppression, and the "blind" do not always want to see.

Two practices are essential in discerning the direction of pastoral power: friendship and prayer. We need good friends in all matters of discernment, not least in discerning the direction of pastoral power.[8] After all, we are most likely to seek advice and to expose our judgments to correction among our friends.[9] Even when we seek advice from others, it is the counsel of those friends whom we have come to love and trust (among other things, we trust that they love us) that usually influences us most.

Good friends, especially others in ministry, are uniquely positioned to offer advice and correction. To start, good friends are close enough to us to understand how a question or event looks and feels to us; yet because they are distinct individuals, they can also understand how that same incident looks and feels from a different vantage point. The advice that arises from this bifocal perspective is invaluable in discernment. Moreover, because we trust that our friends both understand our situation and seek our well-being, we are more likely to hear and heed their correction. In addition, good friends are sometimes so attuned to each other that they perceive that something is amiss before their friend is able to explicitly acknowledge the issue. A change in humor, tone of voice, or body posture is sometimes enough for a friend to realize that we are contemplating an illicit act, struggling with guilt, or unsure of our next step.

Friends also offer a listening ear. Sometimes what our moral discernment most needs is to voice the issue with which we are struggling. At such times, friends do not offer advice or criticism; they listen. By listening, they provide a forum that enables us to gain some distance from the issue and think it through.

Of course, good friends do more than listen, advise, and correct. When we feel powerless, good friends can see what we cannot and can point out ways our ministry exhibits constructive power; they can highlight the uplifting and liberating use of pastoral power. Good friends also remind us of ministry's power by modeling it in their own lives. Sometimes when we despair about our ministry's powerlessness, we discover hope when we glimpse God's power at work in our friend's work of challenging Christians to renewed discipleship and offering healing, hope, and liberation.

The role of friends in moral discernment has analogs in prayer.[10] In prayers of discernment, we seek the Holy Spirit's prompting.[11] We listen for the correction or leading of the one we most trust; we listen for the voice of God.[12] Even more than a good friend can, God understands our temptations or choices before we can articulate them. And like friendship, prayer provides a forum to think through issues. Often enough, the issue comes into focus for us simply in the act of our bringing it to God.[13] And what friendship does indirectly, prayer does directly, reminding us of ministry's constructive power by putting us in touch with the source and destination of that power.

Prayer also forms us in virtues, such as humility, that are essential for pastoral power's proper direction.[14] Humility is the virtue that enables a fitting and truthful self-appraisal in relationship to God and others. Learning to pray well requires growth in this virtue. To pray is to attend to God, but if we are attending to God, we are not absorbed with ourselves, with our accomplishments or our problems. When we focus on God, we cease to be the center of reflection and thereby begin to acquire the virtue of humility. In attending to God, we also approach God not as God's equals but as God's cherished, loved, and sinful creation. This too is a lesson in humility.

Specific forms of prayer require growth in humility. In prayers of petition, for instance, we are reminded of our dependence on God and others. Likewise, in prayers of confession, we acknowl-

edge our guilt and learn to take responsibility for our limitations and failures. Confession is particularly important for developing a sense of how often we act wrongly, even when we desire otherwise, and for understanding how badly things go when we assert our freedom from God and others.

Prayer reminds us of our limitations but also of our value. After all, Jesus taught us to ask for things—food, forgiveness, safety—which implies that we are worthy of receiving good things from God. Moreover, in prayer we meet a loving parent who created us good, who values us and sacrifices for us. And we meet a God who desires our company. These too are lessons in humility, lessons in proper self-appraisal.

Humility or proper self-understanding, an estimate of ourselves that is neither too high nor too low, frees pastors to see their power honestly and clearly.

Humility is likely the most important virtue for keeping pastoral power rightly directed. Proper self-understanding, an estimate of ourselves that is neither too high nor too low, frees pastors to see their power honestly and clearly. Because we know that we are capable of terrible things, we are less likely to be scornful of members' failings and less likely to impose our personal agenda on them. Conversely, because humility involves proper self-respect, there is less danger that we will use parishioners to boost our sagging egos.

More positively, proper self-understanding helps us remember pastoral ministry's power even as we recognize our powerlessness. It takes humility to recognize simultaneously that we lack power and that we have it. Humility as proper self-understanding similarly allows us to truthfully remember our call to ministry and to recognize the limitations and possibilities entailed in that call. Most importantly, humility knows that ministry's constructive power to move people toward discipleship, reconciliation, and justice comes from God, and God is never without such power.

Notes

[1] Garrison Keillor, *Gospel Birds and Other Stories of Lake Wobegon*, audiocassette ([St. Paul, Minn.]: Highbridge Audio, 1986).

[2] Many ideas in this section were initiated by the chapter on "Power in the Pastoral Relationship" in Richard M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 65–90.

[3] Ibid., 76.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 14–21.
[6] Luke 4:18; also e.g., Luke 13:10-17; Matthew 18:12-20; Acts 3.
[7] Cf. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, 86.
[8] For my somewhat fuller account of friendship, see James F. Keenan and Joseph Kotva Jr., eds., *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations* (Franklin, Wis.: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 71–80.
[9] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 363; Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1989), 139.
[10] I always thought it instructive that John Wright's chapter on discernment immediately follows his chapter on friendship with Christ. See John H. Wright, *A Theology of Christian Prayer* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1979).
[11] See Mark O'Keefe, *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 118–19.
[12] See the descriptions of decision making and wandering prayer in David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 53–55.
[13] See Karen Lebacqz, *Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1985), 105.
[14] For my somewhat fuller account of prayer, see Keenan and Kotva, *Practice What You Preach*, 147–56.

About the author

Joseph J. Kotva Jr. is director of the Anabaptist Center for Healthcare Ethics, Elkhart, Indiana.

A letter to readers of *Vision*

Arlo Frech

Dear People of Vision,

My sister Dora Frech told me about your magazine. Dora's our pastor at Christ Church, Stemming. That's in North Dakota, in case you don't know. The Mrs. and I—her name is Emma—we live on a farm out here north of town, right on the Manitoba border. In fact, our barn is *in* Manitoba. That used to didn't matter much, but a couple years ago the Americans put up a booth right between our house and the barn, so of course the Canadians put one up right the other side of it. They've got guys sitting in them booths all day. Now every time I go to milk our cows, I have to clear customs. The Canadian guy asks me where I'm headed in Canada. "To the barn," I always say. And when I walk back to the house, the American guy asks if I'm bringing any alcoholic beverages across the border. "Nope," I say, "them cows gave nothing but milk today."

As I was saying, Dora told me about your *Vision*. She said you were going to be writing up some things about power and leadership, what with your two groups of churches having merged, or whatever you call it. That got my interest up, because our church here was something of a merger. My grandpa Marcellus Frech founded the church, and he named it the Ex–Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming. Grandpa Marcellus was Pentecostal Holiness, but when he moved up here from Tennessee, he said that North Dakota was too cold for a hot religion. After studying on the matter some, he decided that the Mennonite religion was best suited to our climate. But he couldn't decide whether to be Old Mennonite or General Conference. Other people in Stemming, those who weren't Catholic and started coming to Grandpa's church, they didn't seem to care one way or the other. So, finally, Grandpa Marcellus just decided that the church would be Old Mennonite. This brought about no end

of turmoil, with people in the congregation saying things about Grandpa Marcellus like, "Who elected him pope?" All of those folk now wanted the church to be General Conference, so Grandpa Marcellus yielded. That's how our church came to be the Ex–Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming.

My sister Dora never liked the name. She went to St. Julian's seminary down in Grand Forks. That's Baptist or Episcopalian, I think—not Grand Forks, but St. Julian's. Anyhow, Dora changed a lot of things when she got to be our pastor here. For one, she took to wearing kind of a dark red robe every Sunday. Folks thought that was pretty odd. But nobody said anything to Dora, not wanting to hurt her feelings and all. She made some other changes, too, that everybody grumbled about but just went along with. Then one Sunday we looked at our bulletins, and they said "Christ Church, Stemming." Emma and I looked around, thinking we'd stumbled into the wrong building or something. There was quite a ruckus, with some old folks remembering that name-change thing back with Grandpa Marcellus. Chet Vanderbork, our choir director—we don't have a choir, but Chet got elected director at a church business meeting—Chet said, right out loud, "Now she's gone too far!" Well, we finally all sat down and hashed things out—"discernment," Dora called it. It turned out Dora could keep wearing the robe or change the name of the church, but not both. She went with the name, so now we're Christ Church, Stemming.

When my neighbor Gus Dobrinski heard about it—Gus is Catholic, by the way—he said we were now the Ex–Ex–Old Mennonite Church, General Conference, of Stemming. Speaking of Gus, he has a bunch of Brown Swiss dairy cows. Emma's and mine are Holstein-Friesian. We go back and forth about which breed is better, but the milk tastes pretty much the same. Emma says we should mix the herds, so they'd be black and white and brown. We'll see.

Faithfully yours,
Arlo Frech

P.S. The Mrs. says "hello."

Power, authority, and worship leadership

Rebecca Slough

The smiling pastor in the advertisement boasted, "My AV system can bring them to their knees." I gaped at this expression of hubris. What idolatry! Then I read the smaller print: "Now they can hear the Good Word." If Christians cannot hear, Christ's body cannot act in concert to glorify God. But this advertisement hints at a not-so-benign power active in congregational worship. Who is speaking and acting? By what authority? By whose power? For what purpose? What is being said?

In my experience, sustained discussion among Mennonites about power in leading worship has been rare, although fears about abusing power abound. Many Mennonites seem to believe that the power issue (and its companion issue, authority) has been resolved simply by our claim to be a priesthood of all believers. But this slogan does not remove the power and authority issues; it obscures them.

The Anabaptists believed that all Christians have the authority to serve as priests by virtue of their baptism; all Christians mediate the presence of God to one another. But a priestly function for leading people in worship remains.

We do not practice our priestly vocation fervently enough inside and outside the congregation. A priest is always at the edge of a community's spiritual, social, and physical realities. A Christian priest stands as an incarnated presence of the Holy Spirit, who aids Jesus' priestly work of connecting people with God. The priest reveals the hidden yet present character of God in Christ,[1] using the gifts, skills, wisdom, imagination, and dexterity she has been blessed with, in order to help people encounter the presence and power of God. She offers herself as a servant for God to the congregation. She opens space in which Christ's empowering words of truth can be spoken, and she leads the body's response to this word. She is a mediator who senses the Spirit's movement and

guides the body to catch its empowering energy. Her ministry models the character of priestliness by which all Christians are called to serve each other and the world.

A priest works in particular places with specific people. They give him authority to minister to and lead them. The priest's role is defined and recognized by the congregation. He accepts the authority and uses the power granted by the Holy Spirit for leadership. The priest is accountable to the body.

The Anabaptists' understandings of worship, the church, and believers' free access to God through Christ constituted a rejection of some priestly practices of the medieval Roman church. The Anabaptists believed that all Christians have the authority to serve as priests in the congregation and in the world by virtue of their baptism; all Christians mediate the presence of God to one another. But a priestly function for leading people in worship remains. And every congregation has particular people whose spiritual gifts have been given for the particular priestly work of leading worship.

By the late twentieth century, some North American Mennonites understood the Reformation concept of the priesthood of all believers to mean that anyone could fulfill any of the priestly functions required in the church. Some of the practical consequences of this interpretation have been unfortunate.[2] One of my colleagues tells of the Lenten season when a child of elementary school age was asked to lead a congregation's prayer of confession. The pastors seemed oblivious to the priestly presence needed for leading this prayer. Confession is a delicate worship act that requires pastoral discernment and authority. The congregation must trust the one who leads them in this action that evokes our resistance and requires our vulnerability.

The priestly role is not trivial or inconsequential. We should not ask a child to do an adult's job! The discipline to cultivate the gifts of leadership requires commitment and perseverance. I suggest that taking the priestly function of leading worship with appropriate seriousness requires more discernment and discipling than occurs in many congregations.

The haphazard way worship leadership is exercised may seem to diminish the power and authority issues. In fact, these issues are distorted, not eliminated. Without a clear sense of leadership

purpose or a sense of authority for the task, worship leaders (particularly inexperienced ones) become self-conscious, drawing attention to themselves. Rather than helping the congregation connect with God, they become a distraction, hindering the congregation's full response to God.

Priests perform. And we distrust performance in a worship context. Perhaps this is a reason why we are reluctant to talk about priestly functions of worship. We associate performance with entertainment, glitziness, even insincerity and hypocrisy. Performances are rehearsed, canned, not spontaneous, in some ways unreal. Yet to perform is simply to do something. Doctors perform surgery. Scouts perform good deeds. A good Samaritan performs a needed service. Machines perform when they do what we expect. We are pleased when doctors, scouts, Samaritans, and machines perform well.

We distrust performance in a worship context. We associate it with entertainment, even insincerity. Yet to perform is simply to do something. Good worship leaders perform with great integrity.

Good worship leaders perform with great integrity. Often their best performances happen when they let go of their self-consciousness and get out of the way. Clayton Schmidt calls this quality of leadership *transparence*. It is as if the congregation can see through the action of the leader the hidden but active presence of God.[3] All worship leaders, whether they are reading scripture, telling the story, or leading music or prayer or a congregational response, should strive to get out of the way. Not that they abandon their priestly role: with confidence they stand at the spiritual, social, and physical edges of the worship event, pointing the congregation toward God, present in Christ and active in his body by the power of the Spirit. This willingness to get out of the way demonstrates the paradox of power in leading worship. Leaders in whatever capacity are granted the authority to perform. They are granted power to use their spiritual gifts to serve the congregation. And through this service they give up their personal power to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We have all experienced worship leaders who performed badly. Self-consciousness sometimes diverts the leader's attention to his own actions, words, or mistakes, and he becomes hypersensitive about his movements. Sometimes a leader becomes preoccupied

with appearances or strives for a particular effect, and he begins to try to manipulate the congregation's responses to bend toward his vision of worship. When a worship leader is elevated to celebrity status because of special gifts, the purpose and intent of his priestly work can be compromised. God as the subject and object of worship can be displaced.

Worship leaders can abuse power and authority in countless ways. The following list notes several of the most obvious.

Controlling affectations. Sometimes worship leaders try to pump up the congregation by being overly dramatic and emotionally excessive, acting coy, joking or teasing, seeking to cajole worshipers to reach desired levels of enthusiasm, receptivity, or vulnerability. But no worship leader can control how worshipers feel at a particular moment. And feelings are notoriously unreliable indicators of change in people's minds and hearts.

Pursuit of the meaningful. Worship leaders are tempted to anticipate what will be deeply felt in the congregation. Sometimes what leaders deem meaningful is cheap sentiment. No one can predict precisely what will be meaningful in an experience. It is the Holy Spirit who brings authentic meaning out of the congregation's action.

Pursuit of creativity. Pursuit of novelty for its own sake is an abuse of power, particularly when the quest to be creative displaces what has been authentic to the congregation's expression. The presence of Christ in the midst of the body and the movement of the Holy Spirit make things new.

Pursuit of specific desired outcomes. Worship leaders abuse their power when they predetermine what they want the congregation to get out of a service or how they want people to respond. They set up circumstances to yield ends they desire. Abuses around the practice of the altar call illustrate this temptation.

Tight control of all worship elements. Worship leaders who cannot graciously respond to the unpredictable limit the range of congregational response; those who are overly invested in how things ought to go abuse their power. The desire to control worship or—more precisely—to control the worshipers is the primary power issue that must be confronted continually.

Amplifications. Sound projection, a legitimate need in many worship spaces, has significant potential for abuse. The amplifica-

tion of worship leaders' voices over those of the congregation opens the way for power imbalance and distortion. The advertisement for a sound system that can bring people to their knees points exactly to this potential abuse.[4] Hearing their voices amplified can be a head-swelling experience for worship leaders. When sound engineers can simply turn down the volume of a singer or speaker at will, power issues are also present.

Sound projection has significant potential for abuse. The amplification of worship leaders' voices over those of the congregation opens the way for power imbalance and distortion.

Lighting that focuses attention on the worship leader or preacher, dramatizing the difference between the enlightened and the unenlightened, can be abused. Larger-than-life projections of worship leaders can also create distortions. The impact of celebrity worship leaders and singers is heightened by large projections of their soulful singing. The power issues may seem insignificant to the worship leader who sees the congregation in its actual size, but the super-human images the congregation sees can magnify the authority and power they attribute to the leader.

Spiritual massage. The worship leader singing into a microphone with eyes closed, as if the congregation did not exist, is massaging her own spirit and has lost sight of her true leadership responsibilities.

Abdicating responsibility. Unprepared leaders may believe they are acting humbly, but their behavior reflects arrogance. Lack of preparation draws attention to itself. To disregard their priestly responsibility is an abuse of the authority that the congregation has entrusted to them and which they have accepted.

A first step toward exercising power responsibly is recognizing that worship leadership is not about leaders' desires, reputations, or anxieties. It is not about the power of their personalities or piety; the power of their words or actions, insights or knowledge; the power of their equipment or their building. It is not about any power they possess. The power of priestly leadership comes from the Holy Spirit, who gives the spiritual gifts required for the congregation's worship.

A second step in exercising power responsibly is acknowledging that worship leadership is about serving God by serving the

congregation; it is not about controlling the worshipers. The Holy Spirit moves in the hearts, minds, souls, and bodies of worshipers, revealing the presence of Christ in his body. That movement appropriately brings people to their knees.

Notes

[1] Clayton Schmit, *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 39, 66–77.

[2] The "priesthood of all believers" slogan has inspired a number of unfortunate distortions. One is a misunderstanding of the idea of participation. In some congregations, participation is understood to mean actively providing leadership, speaking or singing. Listening and silence are not valued as forms of participation. A second distortion arose when the need for pastoral leadership came into question: if everyone in the congregation is a priest charged with ministry to all in the community, then why have pastors? Fortunately this distortion is being reexamined. A third distortion seems to have arisen in the breach between more formal leadership of the pastor and more casual leadership of congregational members. The inexperience of many new worship leaders, coupled with a somewhat magical theology of the work of the Holy Spirit, provided an excuse for poor preparation. Many inexperienced worship leaders would "wing it," not realizing that the capacity to improvise effectively itself takes deep cultivation and disciplined preparation. A fourth distortion arose, I think, from an inadequate understanding of the priestly function of leading worship. Lacking a clear understanding of what they were to do, many worship leaders developed an "aw shucks!" worship style. Highly self-conscious, embarrassed, homey, and chummy, this small-group style of leadership has been used in large-group settings. And under the influence of a misunderstanding of the priesthood of all believers, congregations have endured much worship leadership that was inappropriate to the specific situation.

[3] Schmidt, *Too Deep for Words*, 66. F. Russell Mitman takes exception to use of the term *transparent* for what worship leaders should strive to be. Borrowing from Paul Wilson, Mitman makes the case for *translucence* as the guiding metaphor. He believes that transparence drains the human leader of his or her unique personality and character. Arguing from an incarnational perspective, he notes that worship leaders should strive to let the light of God/Christ shine through their ministry rather than hoping to become invisible. See *Worship in the Shape of Scripture* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 86–87. I believe both concepts have merit.

[4] Congregations are slowly realizing the tremendous power that sound and media engineers have as they control the various projection systems needed in some worship spaces. While not exercising the same responsibilities as worship leaders, these ministers must also be taken into account.

About the author

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Power and congregational discernment

Sally Weaver Glick

First Mennonite of Anywhere is in the midst of discernment about a major decision. Some members are sure that the appropriate solution is A, while others are convinced the best response is Z. Each group is trying to influence the other and those who are undecided. Congregational leaders have begun to hear murmurings about how much power some members have and about the way they are using it. They have even gotten a few questions about their own power.

How do we understand power? What is our attitude toward the role of power in congregational discernment?

The power of the cross

The body of Christ is diverse, as Paul captures so vividly with his 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 metaphor. We are not all feet, or ears, or eyes. We bring different gifts and different perspectives, and the body needs them all. This diversity is both a gift and a challenge. In congregational discernment, we seek to discern what God desires and where God is already at work, so that we can make decisions that are in tune with God. As we meet together, we inevitably discover that we do not all see things the same way. Disagreement and even conflict are a natural, healthy part of congregational discernment.

God's power is defined by love. It bursts forth with new life, creating, transforming, healing, and reconciling. This face of power helps us work through disagreement, resolve conflict, and come to unity.

Our goal is not to cover up disagreement but to work through our differences to a more complete understanding. By the grace of God, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, we may come to unity, our different perspectives blending like the notes of a chord into new insight and action.

Reaching this unity comes through our use of power. That statement may sound odd. Power carries negative connotations for most of us. We are aware of ways it has been misused and abused, and we are suspicious of it. Our attitude toward power may be like that of Paul Lacey's students. In a book on Quaker attitudes toward power, Lacey describes a classroom discussion on power and authority.

> *I threw my book into the middle of the room and asked my students to imagine that it represented the power to do whatever one wanted with the college. All anyone would have to do would be to pick up the book, in order to have power to affect whatever he or she wanted. How the power was to be used would depend on the ethical standards of whoever picked up the book. My students were rather sobered at the prospect I was offering them, and for a time no one moved. Then an older student—a former career navy man now a pacifist—tentatively made a motion to stand up. Immediately another student, who had insisted there was not enough support for individualism in American society, leaped from his chair, rushed to the center of the class, and stood on the book!*[1]

We are skeptical about power. We understand it as the use of force or coercion—something to be set aside by good Mennonites. After all, it is the meek who will inherit the earth, isn't it? And so, like the students in the class, we stay in our seats, hesitant to pick up the symbol of power and authority. Or we stand on the book, reluctant to allow others access to power they might abuse, ignoring our own use of power in doing so. Or perhaps we pick up the book and hide it behind our backs, denying that we use power.

We have been overly influenced by one face of power. Power can indeed be a negative force, used to destroy, dominate, or subtly manipulate. But we see another face of power in the crucified and risen Christ.

We have been overly influenced by one face of power. Power can indeed be a negative force, used to destroy, dominate, or subtly manipulate. But we see another face of power in the crucified and risen Christ. In Jesus, we encounter one who used power

to heal and reconcile and bring transformation. We encounter one who met the onslaught of this world's powers and principalities with vulnerability, accepting death on the cross rather than resorting to the power of the sword or calling in angel armies. As Peter proclaimed on Pentecost, "God raised him up . . . because it was impossible for him to be held in [death's] power" (Acts 2:24).

The crucified and risen Christ turns our assumptions about power upside down. In *The Power of the Cross*, Sally Purvis suggests that understanding the power of the cross calls us to unlearn old thought patterns, coming to a radical reinterpretation of the nature and function of power.[2] As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the power of the cross is foolishness to the wise of this world. This "foolishness" only appears to be folly—to those who have not learned to see through resurrection eyes:

> *What is the understanding of power against which the power of the cross would appear to be folly? It is, of course, a conception of power as control, of force, of efficacy over others. The cross represented for Paul and represents for us utter lack of control, the inversion of force, a deep and astounding failure to achieve one's own ends, if we understand success to be characterized by victory even at the price of violence. If one understands power as control, the cross represents victimization, loss of power, defeat. However, that is precisely the interpretation that Paul rejects. For him the cross is the central symbol of the power of God, a power that no one could seriously characterize as weakness or folly. . . .*
>
> *The power of God in the cross is not the power to die but the power to live. It is power that does not try to control events to affect one's will but rather power that brings forth life even from the desolation of defeat and death. The power of the cross is not the crucifixion but the resurrection—surprising, astonishing, utterly unpredictable.*[3]

Power as the world understands it is based in fear. It dominates and controls, and it has violence as a close companion. In contrast, God's power is defined first and foremost by love. God is not

enslaved by fear and so can risk compassion and vulnerability. This power bursts forth with new life, creating, transforming, healing, and reconciling. This face of power helps us work through disagreement, resolve conflict, and come to congregational unity.

A dynamic understanding of power

The field of conflict transformation has also helped expand our view of power. I have found the dynamic understanding of power presented in *Interpersonal Conflict*, by Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot, a fruitful one for reflecting on congregational discernment.

Power is present in all social exchanges. Social power is the ability to achieve particular ends, to affect results, or to prevent change. It is present in all human interactions. As we communicate and interact with others, we are always influencing and being influenced. Whenever we interact with others—whether we speak with passion, ignore, threaten, or calmly reason—we exercise some degree of power. This power is not inherently positive or negative. For well-being and proper human development, we all need the ability to meaningfully influence important events around us. Abuse of power happens when we manipulate events to our advantage at the expense of others.

Power is a product of the interpersonal relationship, not the individual. In my current congregational system, I have a lot of power. I facilitate congregational meetings, chair the worship committee, work in the church office, and am known and trusted by many people. I have power currencies of role, skill, information, contacts, and long-term experience in the congregation. But it would be absurd to try to create a test that would somehow measure these currencies and come up with a "power quotient" for me. Each of these currencies carries a certain amount of weight for some in the congregation and a different amount for others. Some of the currencies would transfer to another congregational system; others would not. Our power resources or currencies have meaning in the context of a relationship. How much power I have in a system depends on how others value or are influenced by those resources.

Power is not static or finite. Because power is located in the matrix of social relationships, it is not fixed or measurable. Lacey's

use of a book to symbolize power can be misleading. It gives the impression that power is something static and finite. If I am standing on the book, you can't pick it up. If I have it, you don't. A lot of the tension around power issues comes from the assumption that power is limited in nature, like a pie that can only be sliced into so many pieces. The more you have of it, the less there is for me. This image is inadequate. If I use my power to enhance others' power, my power is not diminished, but the total amount of power increases. A better metaphor for power is the friendship sourdough starter that people pass around. You use some starter to make bread, you keep some for your next batch of bread, and you pass some along to a friend. Properly handled, there is more than enough starter—and power—to go around.

In conflict, generally each person firmly believes that the other person has more power. Many misuses of power result from fear of the power the other party has and of how they intend to use it.

Power is complex and elusive. Power is notoriously difficult to assess. Because it resides in the relationship rather than in individuals, it is always changing. Our feelings about our place in the balance of power are often inaccurate, especially in the midst of conflict. Hocker and Wilmot note that in conflict, generally each person firmly believes that the other person has more power. Many misuses of power result from fear of the power the other party has and of how they intend to use it.

People attempt to balance power, either productively or destructively. In relationships that work over time, a continual realignment of power occurs. For productive conflict management and for congregational discernment, the best scenario is a relative balance of power. When imbalances of power are not addressed, power is likely to be misused and abused in ways that work devastation in our congregations and relationships. Like a weed sending shoots underground, it sprouts up in noxious forms where least expected or wanted: in factions, behind-the-scene maneuvers, passive-aggressive behavior, the breaking of relationships, or violence.

These destructive attempts at balance are not the only option. We can instead attempt to balance power more productively, through open discussion of power issues, by high power parties

intentionally limiting their own power or empowering low power parties, by low power parties becoming aware of their own power resources, and by all parties concerned working to preserve the relationship.

Implications for congregational discernment

Expanding our understanding of power has implications for our congregational discernment. As followers of Christ, we want our decisions to be in line with what God desires for the world. Both the decisions we make and the process we use to reach those decisions should be consistent with the face of power that Christ shows us. When we use the power inherent in social interactions, we want to do so in a Christ-like manner.

To do so, we need to set aside the impression that we shouldn't be talking about power dynamics in the congregational setting. Doing so may be uncomfortable, but it is necessary. We can celebrate the good, evaluating and making changes where necessary to increase the productive use of power and to decrease destructive practices. We can work at the following suggestions:

Our congregational discernment is richer when we recognize and draw on a wide range of power currencies contributed by many people.

Strengthen relationships, especially across differences. The call to love God and one another is the foundation for all of congregational life. Discernment is grounded in our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Investing in those relationships helps the relative balance of power and makes discernment possible.

Become aware of and develop many power currencies. Hocker and Wilmot observe that often those with low power are not aware of the resources they have and of the options for productive use of power. Possible power currencies include special knowledge and skills, control of tangible and intangible resources, interpersonal connections, communication and listening skills. Our congregational discernment is richer when we recognize and draw on a wide range of power currencies contributed by many people.

Check perceptions about possible power imbalances. When we feel the power balance is out of kilter, we tend to focus on

others' resources and lose sight of our own. Jim feels he has less power than Carmen in the decision, because he knows that with her education and verbal skills, she can talk circles around him. Carmen feels Jim has more power because he is a long-term member of the congregation, with many contacts and relationships. Exploring our perceptions in a safe setting (one-on-one, in a small group, or under the care of a third party) can open our eyes to resources we have discounted and help us to use those resources wisely.

When power imbalances do exist, find ways to bring balance. When we are part of an imbalanced power situation, we may need to experience some conflict and tension before we recognize that fact. When aware, high power holders can limit their use of resources or use their power to empower others. Lower power people can gain power through persistence and by presenting small, manageable moves based on thoughtful analysis of the problem. Discernment processes should provide space for stating differences and for working through disagreements. Creative solutions are more likely to be found when we recognize there are a number of perspectives and frameworks for understanding a given situation.

Authorize leaders to use power well. Don't stand on the book as a congregation. Provide leaders with clear expectations about the authority and responsibilities you give them, freeing them to exercise power in behalf of well-being and justice for individuals and for the congregation as a whole. Develop systematic ways of evaluating and holding leaders accountable for their productive use of power. Recognize that there are different styles of leadership: male and female leaders may have different approaches to leading and using power, and different personality types may find different modes most fitting.

Be aware of structural power and use it well. Both leaders and congregation should be aware that some power resources come with a leadership position. Recognize the following as resources to be used productively, and find ways to maintain a relative balance of power with the rest of the congregation.

Role. The congregation often grants a certain amount of authority and good will to a leadership role. This power is not absolute, but it is a resource others don't have in the same way.

Structure. Leaders have the privilege and responsibility of defining problems, framing issues, and setting priorities about what the congregation will spend time discerning. "Deciding who gets to decide is one of the best indicators of the current balance of power in any relationship."[4]

Knowledge. Because of their position, leaders will usually have more information than others in the congregation. They often will have worked in depth with an issue or question that the rest of the congregation is looking at for the first time.

Use your own power well and be open to evaluation. Whether we are leaders or other members of the congregation, we are all to grow into the fullness of Christ. We should all be open to conversation and reflection on our use of power. Questions we may want to reflect on as we evaluate this power include: Does it build up the body, both individuals and the congregation? Is it truthful rather than manipulative? Does it enhance others' power rather than block it? Does it reconcile and strengthen relationships? Does it contribute to well-being and justice for all?

Conclusion

The use of power in congregational discernment is an inevitable aspect of our life together. With awareness and care, we can draw on the creative, life-giving power modeled by Christ to work through our differences and find unity, discerning what God is calling us to in this place and time.

Notes

[1] Paul A. Lacey, *Quakers and the Use of Power* (Lebanon, Pa.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1982), 17–18.
[2] Sally B. Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1993).
[3] Ibid., 74–75.
[4] Joyce L. Hocker and William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 4th ed. (Madison, Wis.: Brown and Benchmark, 1995), 91.

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The wisdom of knowing nothing
Pauline perspectives on leadership, ministry, and power

Christopher D. Marshall

The subject of leadership attracts a good deal of attention these days, in secular and in Christian circles. It's not hard to feel cynical about all the leadership gurus whose books and seminars promote their keys to success. The assumption seems to be that leadership can be procured like any other commodity. Just pay the money and learn the routine, and you too can be a leader. As with so much in our technocratic and manipulative age, leadership gets reduced to image and technique.

Good leadership is not only about having sound managerial skills or a commanding personal presence. Nor is it principally about the exercise of power and control. The heart of true leadership has to do with values and virtues.

Also of concern is the prevailing appetite for "strong" leaders, those who offer swift and clean solutions to popular grievances or collective neuroses. In a security-conscious age, leaders who blindly project strength as a virtue can be positively dangerous. Hitler, it is said, won democratic support because he got the trains to run on time.

So there is good reason to be cautious about the leadership craze. And yet experience shows that good leadership is vitally important for most groups or communities, including the community of faith. Without competent leadership, groups tend to limp along, struggling for a sense of direction or motivation and easily distracted by trivial concerns. For intentional communities such as churches to flourish, effective leadership is critical.

Good leadership, however, is not only about having sound managerial skills or a commanding personal presence, helpful though these may be. Nor is it principally about the exercise of power and control. The heart of true leadership has to do with values and virtues. The best leaders—those who inspire others with the confidence to follow their lead—are ones who model or

embody in their own persons and practices the values and goals they want others to espouse. But leaders don't have to be superhuman. In fact, awareness of one's own human fallibility and alertness to the dangers of self-deception are indispensable attributes in any trustworthy leader. Yet leaders still need to be a little further down the track than others in understanding and living out the larger vision of their community or group, albeit imperfectly. They need to walk the talk, not just talk the walk.

This modelling was undoubtedly one key to Paul's effectiveness in leadership. In a telling autobiographical passage at the beginning of 1 Corinthians (1:18–2:16), Paul reflects on the circumstances that accompanied the birth and development of the church in Corinth. He begins by underscoring the outrageous nature of the gospel he proclaimed to his hearers. "For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. . . . For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1:18, 22-23). He then recounts how this scandalous message manifested itself empirically to the Corinthians in two main ways—in the way Paul conducted his ministry among them, and in the way God chose them, a motley bunch of nobodies devoid of any human claim to greatness, to be recipients of divine power and wisdom (1:26–2:5).

From this remarkable text, several lessons can be drawn about the nature of Christian ministry in general and the task of Christian leadership in particular. The first lesson has to do with the inappropriateness of self-reliance.

Radical dependency

Paul was a man of immense ability, a constructive genius of massive proportions. After Jesus, he has been the single greatest influence on the life and thought of the Christian church, and through the church, on Western civilisation. Yet in spite of his tremendous intellect, his extensive education, his rich life experience, and his profound spiritual and mystical experiences, when Paul arrived in Corinth, he was overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy and fear: "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you

except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (2:2-3).

Paul's anxiety was probably fuelled by a sense of the manifest oddities of the new Christian "philosophy" he was propounding. It centred on claims about its founder, a crucified Jewish carpenter, that were calculated to offend rather than attract people, especially those of Paul's superior class and tastes. Paul realised that the educated elite in Corinth, who valued the pursuit of human wisdom above all else, would find his message utterly absurd. Paul anticipated ridicule and rejection, and it filled him with trepidation.

But he forged on, determining "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified." In other words, Paul chose to interpret his experience of rejection as an opportunity to participate in the suffering and rejection that Christ had experienced. Paul decided to rest his confidence, not in his own intellectual acumen, nor in his rhetorical skill, nor in the winsomeness of his own personality, but in what he calls "the wisdom of God" and the "power of God," by which he means the capacity of the Christian gospel to confirm its own truthfulness through its impact on those who respond to it. "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (2:4-5).

In spite of his tremendous intellect, his extensive education, his rich life experience, and his profound spiritual experiences, when Paul arrived in Corinth, he was overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy and fear.

If someone of Paul's stature felt nervous at the task God had given him, and in response consciously chose to repose his confidence not in himself but in the sustaining power and Spirit of God, there is reassurance here for us all. Christian leaders are normally individuals of above-average gifts and abilities, often honed through years of seminary training. Yet even the most gifted and well-prepared leaders will struggle at times with feelings of inadequacy and discouragement. These feelings are no cause for alarm; the great apostle felt the same in Corinth. Self-assurance must give way to something deeper.

Confidence in truth

The only reason Paul could rise above his fear and trembling in Corinth is because he really did believe that the message he proclaimed, absurd as it appeared, was true, an utterly reliable account of God's surprising work in recent events.

Running throughout the passage is a repeated emphasis on what God has done. God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise and thwarted the discernment of the discerning (1:19); God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1:20) and saved those who believe (1:21); God has chosen to shame the wise and the strong, "to reduce to nothing things that are" (1:27-28); God has become the source of our life in Jesus Christ (1:30) and has demonstrated his Spirit and his power (2:4). Throughout, God is the active agent. God has done something extraordinary. God has played his trump card in the crucifixion of Jesus, and Paul sees his own role as simply bearing witness to what has happened, so that people encounter the power and truth of God, not the personality and persuasiveness of Paul.

This is the raison d'être of all Christian ministry. The Christian community exists to bear witness to the "word of the cross" and its radical implications for human experience. Part of the task of leadership is to help the community discover the most appropriate ways to do this in the particular social or cultural contexts it finds itself in. But there is no point even in attempting to do so if the message itself isn't true. Ultimately, the only thing Christians have to offer the world that is different from what anyone else can offer is the truth of the Christian story itself.

It is our stewardship of the Jesus story that differentiates the Christian church from all other groups in society. It is not our piety or our sincerity or our morality that distinguishes us—Christians have no monopoly on virtue! What sets us apart is the story we gather around, the story we tell and retell, the story from which we derive our identity and our values and our understanding of the world. And it would be a horrible mistake for us to do so if it were not a true story, *the* true story, a story that exposes the lies and deceptions and half-truths that human beings so often stake their lot on.

Of course, to speak of the Christian gospel as the true story, something that stands over against us and demands our response,

is extremely unfashionable in the contemporary world. The catchword of our day is that truth is entirely relative, something people must find or make for themselves. At the same time (and in contradiction to this), a pervasive scepticism is abroad in Western society about whether Christianity has any truth value at all. One critic has likened Christian theology to "searching in a dark cellar, at midnight, for a black cat, which isn't there!"

The Christian community exists to bear witness to the "word of the cross" and its radical implications for human experience. Ultimately, the only thing Christians have to offer the world is the truth of the Christian story.

In face of such scepticism, the call to bear witness to Christ as the truth, the power, and the wisdom of God, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians, is arguably much harder for us than it was in his day. Or is it? The extraordinary nature of Paul's language—his repeated contrast between the wisdom of the world and what he dares to call "the foolishness and weakness of God" (1:25)—suggests that Paul found his marketing job extremely difficult as well. Pondering why it was so difficult brings us to a third lesson.

Swimming upstream

Paul's unrelenting attack on human wisdom and his characterisation of the Christian message as foolishness have often been used in Christian circles to justify anti-intellectualism: "There's no good trying to explain or defend Christianity philosophically, because it is 'through the foolishness of preaching that God chooses to save the lost.' So don't think about it, just preach it!"

But this misunderstanding of Paul's words conveniently spares us the hard work of disciplined thinking and open-minded dialogue with troublesome unbelievers. The reason why God's wisdom deconstructs human wisdom is not because it by-passes the intellect or fails to make rational sense but because it subverts human pride and upends conventional values.

The élite in Corinth, both Jewish and Greek, were tempted to dismiss the gospel, not because it was philosophically incoherent, but because it asserted that God had acted in a way that no self-respecting god ought to act. According to Paul, instead of coming in a blaze of glory to accomplish the deliverance of the world,

God had demonstrated saving power in the impotent torments of a crucifixion victim, a man rejected by the religious establishment as a blasphemer and by the political establishment as a revolutionary upstart.

It is hard for us to appreciate the feelings of sheer disgust that crucifixion engendered in the ancient world. This severe penalty was reserved for the bastard scum of society. A source of unparalleled shame and pain, it was never mentioned in polite company. Reserved for criminals, rebels, and insubordinate slaves, it expressed the loathing that those in ruling circles felt toward those who committed acts of defiance. Such was the symbolic power of crucifixion that some Jews apparently concluded that those who died in this way had been finally repudiated by God as well as by the state (cf. Gal. 3:13).

In view of this repugnance for crucifixion, the Christian claim that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth the creator God had willingly submitted to death on a cross in order to liberate the world from the grip of evil constituted an absurdity precisely because it represented a total inversion of existing standards of greatness and power. In becoming the epitome of human weakness, in the last gasps of a torture victim finally expiring under duress, God has actually shown himself to be most strong. For the power of God is not finally the power of coercion but the power of sacrificial love, a love that endured the agonies of crucifixion without retaliation in order to restore humanity to wholeness.

All value systems that associate greatness with the power of coercion—be that power physical, intellectual, moral, military, or economic—are cut off at the knees by the story of the cross. They are deprived of that divine approval or self-evident validity they claim for themselves. For "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1:27-28).

This claim has obvious implications for Christian ministry in the world. The apparent absurdity of the Christian story is no excuse for neglecting intellectual engagement with critics of the faith. Christian belief is by no means irrational or intellectually incoherent; that is not why Paul calls it foolish. It is foolish in the

eyes of the world because it gives a lie to human status systems based on strength, wealth, intellect, or class, and invites people to find God where one would least expect God to be found—among the dregs of society. It is not intellect that the gospel challenges, but intellectual arrogance. It is not the search for wisdom that it decries, but definitions of wisdom that mask human prejudice and egotism. It is not the power of reason that it condemns, but the use of reason to justify systems of domination and oppression. But to understand this truth, Paul insists, actually requires a special kind of insight, one enabled by the Holy Spirit. This is the fourth lesson to be learned.

Spiritual discernment

At the beginning of our passage, Paul says that God has "destroyed the discernment of the discerning" (1:19), and at the end of the passage he states that it is only "those who are spiritual [who] discern all things" (2:15). In speaking of discernment, Paul is not thinking primarily of mystical or intuitive insight into divine mysteries, or of getting guidance for personal decision making. He is thinking more concretely of the ability to detect the work of God in the world, to discern where God is present in the mundane realities of everyday life. It was the lack of such discernment, Paul says, that led the rulers of this world to crucify the Lord of glory (2:8). And it is to enable true discernment that the Spirit of God has been given to the church (2:10-13).

How does the Spirit work? In what way does the Spirit help us discern God's presence in the world? Spiritual discernment comes by working outward from the central reality of Christ crucified. Christian faith asserts that God is nowhere more truly God than in the dying of Jesus. In the cross, as the Gospel writers put it, the veil of the temple is torn in two, and God stands revealed. When, by God's Spirit, we are able to recognise and embrace this fact, we are given, at the same time, a fundamental principle of spiritual discernment: God is always to be found at the extremities of human pain and need. God is to be found where worldly strength gives out; God is to be found among the nobodies of society; God's presence is to be discerned where no self-respecting god would be caught dead, but where the God and Father of Jesus Christ chooses to make his home.

This is a truth of immense importance for pastoral ministry. When we encounter people in pain and despair, when we sit with those who struggle and fail, where sin and brokenness appear to have the final word, we can still have the confidence that somewhere, in the very depths of their turmoil, Christ's presence can be discerned, sharing their pain and offering them hope, if only they can receive it.

Conclusion

Somebody once asked Mark Twain: "Mr. Twain, do you believe in infant baptism?" "Believe in it?" Twain retorted. "Hell, I've *seen* it!" The same applies to Christian leadership and to all forms of Christian ministry. It is not what we believe that counts but what people see that we believe. The calling of the Christian community is to visibly bear witness to the foolishness of the cross in all the ways it lives and acts and speaks in the world. The task of leadership is to encourage the community in this vocation, and to do so by example.

Like Paul, we as Christian leaders will place confidence not in our innate abilities or powers of persuasion but in the power and wisdom of God. We will dare to believe that the story of the cross is true, that the Christian gospel has unique power to uncover darkness, expose deception, and transform human lives. We will embrace a value system that runs counter to conventional standards of greatness, that contradicts worldly status systems and confronts human pride with the reality of a God who chooses what is weak and low and despised in the world's eyes to reveal himself most fully. Finally, we will recognise in God's modus operandi in the cross of Christ a principle for discerning God's ongoing involvement in human affairs, enabling us to discover God at the centre of human pain and sin, and empowering those overwhelmed by need to find Christ as friend and helper.

All this seems a daunting commission. But perhaps it is not really that tricky. In the end, the role of Christian leaders, as those caught up in the drama and mystery of God's saving work in the world, is simply to be true to themselves and to let God be God.

About the author

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Where two or three are gathered
Power in Christian community

Irma Fast Dueck

A CEO sits in his office on the top floor of a high rise on Bay Street in Toronto. He went to the best schools, earns a six-figure income, owns a luxury home. By most standards, he has it made. He epitomises what it means to have power in our culture. Yet he feels powerless, victimised by bureaucratic structures that keep him in his place. At the same time, he fears the loss of his position: shifts in the global economy beyond his control could lead to a sudden downturn in corporate profits and his abrupt ouster.

On the sidewalk below his office is a motley group of activists who are protesting the business practices of multinational corporations with offices in the building. Some of the protesters live in poverty, and others are their advocates. Seen from the executive suite high above, they look miniscule, yet as they demonstrate in front of the building entrance, chanting and carrying their signs, they have a sense of power.

If we regard power as domination, we will idealize powerlessness. Seeing power instead as an energy and a quality of relationships will have positive implications for our theology and practice.

When we speak of power, what do we mean? British philosopher Bertrand Russell noted that power is a slippery concept. Generally, we associate it with the ability to get what we want, whether through physical force, military strength, or influence associated with particular positions and roles. Power so conceived has a competitive aspect; we envision vying for it as if it were a limited—even scarce—resource. We also think of power as seductive and potentially corrupting. We assume that having some often leads to craving more. Seldom do people or nations believe they have enough power.

Our customary association of power with competition, violence, and corruption makes it difficult for Christians to see power positively. And our negative conceptions of power have not led

us to constructive theological thought or practice of power in the church. More recently, philosophers have been considering new ways of thinking about power that are consistent with our scriptures and that may help us think more creatively about power and help us use it more constructively in Christian community.[1]

A brief history of power

The classical notion of power connected it to position in a hierarchy. According to this understanding, the amount of power you have depends on where you are in the hierarchy in question: a king has more power than a prince, who has more power than a duke, who has much more power than a peasant. This view of power is exemplified in our scriptures. King David, for example, believed his position entitled him to take whatever he desired, including his neighbour's wife. Many structures of government, business, and the church perpetuate classical hierarchical structures and understandings of power. In the Mennonite church, discussions about ordination often reflect the hierarchical structures that have been part of our tradition, even as they reveal some of our discomfort with those patterns.

In the modern period, this understanding of power based on position shifted to a conception of power rooted in individual autonomy. The powerful person has freedom of choice and is not subject to the coercive power of others. This freedom of choice is intimately connected with reason and the acquisition of knowledge. Knowing began to dominate other ways of participating in reality, such as feeling or believing. According to the wisdom of modernity, knowledge is power, and increased knowledge leads to increased control. Using science, people could begin to predict and control their environment. Greater control, it was assumed, would lead to greater freedom. Central to power, in this view, is freedom of choice, which depends on reason, knowledge, and being in control. Strangely, a century that linked power with rationality and control saw massive outbreaks of irrationality—including genocide and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

In the modern period, the classical understanding of power based on position shifted to a conception of power rooted in individual autonomy. The powerful person has freedom of choice.

Like the classical view, this concept of power also persists. The variety in our supermarkets and department stores testifies to our preoccupation with freedom of choice. Our culture emphasises being in control and fears unpredictability, and we regard as threatening anything outside our control, including strangers, people with mental illness, the unknown, mystery. The idea of power as control militates against the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, which always involve risk and unknowing.

For some postmodern philosophers, power is not so much a thing possessed by the individual as an energy that characterises a group. If power is an energy, it exists only in relationship.

Postmodern thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Michael Foucault have questioned the adequacy of notions of power based on position or knowledge and control. For these postmodern philosophers, power is not so much a thing possessed by the individual as a kind of energy that characterises a group. For Foucault, if power is an energy, it exists only in relationship. Imagine a circle of people bound together by a web of string, moving back and forth across the circle, connecting each person in the circle. Power is like the web that binds people together. Rather than being an individual's possession, it exists as a network of relationships, like the web of string. Violent action can destroy the network and result in the alienation and subsequent powerlessness of persons. If someone in the circle lets go of her part of the string, the web is destroyed. Similarly, when people or groups are alienated, they experience powerlessness. This understanding of power explains—in a way that older understandings of power cannot—the CEO's experience of powerlessness and the protesters' sense of power.

Consider another example. A woman has recently been separated from her husband, who has announced that he is gay. Her world is reeling; everything she thought was trustworthy has turned out to be a lie, and her sense of betrayal is profound. She feels utterly alone and powerless to stop the apparently inevitable break-up of her marriage. She wonders when she should remove her wedding ring. She recalls that it was placed on her finger in a wedding ceremony in the context of Christian community. The pastor of her church suggests that she also remove the ring in the context of community, and she agrees. Members of her congrega-

tion gather around her in a service of worship. They sing, read scripture, and pray together. Then she kneels in the centre of the group and removes the ring. Tears, silence, and more prayers follow. She places a new ring on her hand, a ring with a playful design that she has bought to remind herself of new beginnings, of hope and new life. She rises from the centre and joins the others around the circle. Her loneliness, despair, and powerlessness give way to a sense of empowerment, strength, and readiness to move on with her life. Her community has reminded her of her identity as a child of God and a member of the Christian community. The story of the Christian faith embodied by her community surrounds her, and she is able to move forward from her loss.

Biblical perspectives

As Christians, this postmodern view of power offers us a more relational way to think about power. Although I have labelled as postmodern this perspective on power, in many ways it is not a new way of thinking about power. We find this understanding of power throughout our scriptures. For example, Matthew 18:15-20 outlines a way of dealing with brokenness in the community of faith. In this text, Jesus characterises the community as a family and instructs his followers that when people in the faith community confront each other, they do so not as a prosecutor would prosecute an offence but as sisters and brothers seeking whole relationships with each member of the family. After describing the various steps to be used in resolving conflict, he addresses the question of the church's authority. What gives the church its authority to act in the way described? According to verse 18, the power to bind and loose is bestowed by Jesus on the community of believers. Furthermore, when the community gathers in Christ's name, seeks his will, and reaches consensus, Jesus is present among them, guiding their deliberations and empowering them to act: "If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Jesus is the presence of God in the gathered community.

This passage helps us understand how God's power is mediated in community. It also reminds us that not only are God and grace and forgiveness found in the relationships of Christian community

but that sin also resides there. As power for good is a corporate reality, so sin is not merely personal but affects all in its range. Those who work with abuse know how that sin infiltrates the lives of the family and the church, and extends to future generations in what we label "cycles of violence." Abuse is never just between husband and wife or parent and child; its effects run throughout the community. Power understood as relational energy can be positive or negative. We can all attest to power in communities that is life giving and transformative and to power in communities that is destructive.

A second, perhaps more obvious biblical example of power as relational energy is the story of the birth of the church in Acts. On the day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit breaks in and the church is born. This power is hardly characterised by control. On the contrary, the power unleashed on the community brings bewilderment as it breaks apart ordinary rational understandings and expectations. The power of the Holy Spirit is profoundly unsettling, a threat to those who desire a world in which humans are fully in control. For those who think that the Spirit is an exotic phenomenon of mainly interior and purely personal significance, the story of the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost also offers a rebuke. Luke goes to great pains to insist that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit creates relationship; a profoundly relational energy, it binds people together even in their differences. But the collective the Spirit creates is not a withdrawn sect; the Spirit empowers the church to go public with its good news. This power of the Spirit is a gift of God to the church.

Luke goes to great pains to insist that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost creates relationship; a profoundly relational energy, it binds people together even in their differences.

Implications for the church

If we regard power primarily as domination and control, we will view power negatively and tend to idealise powerlessness. If, on the other hand, we see power as an energy and a quality of relationships, that understanding will have implications for the theology and practice of the church. What are some dimensions of this change in perspective?

First, more relational understandings of power as energy remind us that power is not a limited resource. The Spirit offers the church an abundance of power. If we think about power as an "it," we either begin fighting for power, as if there were not enough for everyone, or we claim powerlessness. Either way, we fail to recognise that power is something that lies between us. The empowerment of some need not entail the disempowerment of others. Mary Jo Leddy in *Radical Gratitude* suggests that we imagine power as electricity, as light and heat arcing between two poles, or as the energy that exists within atoms and between molecules. Everything in the world pulsates with immeasurable energy. The challenge, then, is not how to allocate a scarce resource to one or another person but how to activate vast stores of potential energy among us.

What this analogy makes clear is that power is activated through interaction. Just as a solitary pole cannot conduct energy, so power ceases to exist where people are isolated or alienated, whether they are rich or poor, women or men. Power emerges through interaction between people, when they pray, discuss, debate, and even disagree. However, when people are not allowed to participate, to interact, to be part of the discourse, the power of the church is sapped. The challenge for the church is not how to get more power, or even how to give power away, but how to claim, activate, and use this abundance of power that is available when two or three of us gather in Christ's name.

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Second, the church needs to face problems associated with our history of idealising a kind of powerlessness. When we understand power as domination and control, which, simply put, is bad and makes us do bad things, we are inclined to claim a kind of powerlessness. This idealisation of powerlessness has reinforced the subjugation of women in the church throughout the centuries. It has deprived people oppressed by unjust social structures of resources that could have helped them move toward liberation. Because of our idealisation of powerlessness we have failed to claim and tap into the power available among us.

Psychologist Michael Lerner has written about *Surplus Powerlessness*, which he describes as a set of beliefs and feelings we have about ourselves that leads us to feel that we will lose, that we will be isolated, that other people won't listen to us. These beliefs lead us to act in ways that make these fears come true. This variety of powerlessness becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: I don't believe that anyone will take me seriously, so I speak and act in ways that ensure that no one will listen to me. Surplus powerlessness can paralyse persons and groups, preventing them from speaking meaningfully and acting decisively. This sense of powerlessness becomes internalised and leads to feelings of worthlessness and of never being good enough.[2]

Power is activated through interaction. Just as a solitary pole cannot conduct energy, so power ceases to exist where people are isolated or alienated.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to develop an adequate theology of Christian powerlessness. However, a clue to understanding Christian powerlessness is found in our claim that all life is a gift of God. We don't earn our lives, nor are we fully in control of them, of our world, or the future, but we dare to acknowledge that all life is received from God. We live by grace, a grace that we cannot control or earn but which is given to us. This awareness has profound implications for how we live our lives with gratitude, in non-controlling ways, and how we relate to others.

Finally, if power is relational energy, healthy power depends on healthy relationships. This relational understanding of power is both hopeful and problematic. It is promising in that it recognises the potential power in community, particularly the power of even a small group to bring about change. Feminist thinkers have for some time recognised that power may have less to do with economic or physical strength, weapons, or positions of authority, and more to do with the quality of relationships developed between people. But it would be naïve to think that human interaction is always good and is always better than isolation. Power that grows out of human interaction can be good or bad, depending on the nature of the relationships.

For example, we have believed that accountability is a necessary and important part of being a member of the church commu-

nity. As members of one body, we hold each other accountable to the faith commitments we have made. We keep this accountability going through a kind of surveillance, watching each other in order to keep each other in check. Our watching each other embodies a kind of relational power that can be positive or negative. Many of us are aware of times when this surveillance has become oppressive, when our communal idea of right and wrong is so pressed on members of the community that it becomes repressive, and a kind of silencing occurs. Power that is born out of human interaction can be for the better or for the worse. Healthy relationships and good discourse are critical to the healthy use of power.

God invites us into relationship and calls us to build relationships with one another based not on domination and control but rooted in the compassionate love and vulnerability we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A renewed understanding of power, conceived relationally, may help us better understand the nature of God's power, and it may aid us in building our life together as Christian community.

Notes

[1] Many of the ideas in this essay have their source in a course on theologies of power that I took with Mary Jo Leddy at the Toronto School of Theology. Leddy develops this relational understanding of power in her book *Radical Gratitude* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).

[2] Michael Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness: The Psychodynamics of Everyday Life—And the Psychology of Individual and Social Transformation* (Oakland, Calif.: Institute for Labor & Mental Health, 1986).

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Resurrection
The nonviolent politics of God

Ray Gingerich

Power is at the center of who we are as a church, a nation, and a global humanity. Our perceptions of power—what it is and how it functions—shape how we structure institutions and organize work, how we train leaders, and how they exercise authority. Our understanding of power also molds the ethos of our communities and the personalities of their members.

What, then, is the nature of power? Mennonite views of power have tended to be dualistic: power is nonviolence for the specially called, and it is coercion and violence for those who run the state. But power—whether ecclesial, national, or transnational; whether personal, vocational, or institutional—is ultimately of one nature and essence. It is not both violence and nonviolence.

My aim is to challenge our belief that those who hold weapons of violence are "in power" and to commend the practice of the politics of nonviolence in church and world, on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus.

How would our understanding of the church, its structures, and its leadership be altered if our most fundamental understanding of power were all-encompassing nonviolence? How could our understanding of the resurrection—the central tenet of Christian faith—inform our individual and collective perception of power?

This article is structured around four theses: (1) Violence as a political instrument is a dead-end pursuit. (2) Power is nonviolence;[1] to speak of nonviolent power is redundant.[2] (3) The resurrection of Jesus is a historical epiphany of nonviolence countering the politics of empire. (4) The church and its leadership must reclaim authentic power (i.e., nonviolence) if we would be representatives of the Jesus way in our present empire.[3]

These theses are too sweeping to defend in the scope of this brief essay. My aim is more modest: to challenge our predisposi-

tion to believe that those who hold weapons of violence are "in power," and to commend the practice of the politics of nonviolence in both church and world, on the basis of the early church's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus.

Violence as a political instrument is a dead-end pursuit. Jonathan Schell notes that "in a steadily and irreversibly widening sphere, violence, always a mark of human failure and the bringer of sorrow, has now also become dysfunctional as a political instrument. Increasingly it destroys the ends for which it is employed, killing the user as well as the victim. It has become the path to hell on earth and the end of the earth."[4] Pursuing domination through the instrumentality of violence will lead to the destruction of the human species and our host, planet earth. This outcome is the definitive evidence that violence is not power but the loss of power, not courage but the demonstration of fear, not the expression of strength but of human desperation and weakness. As Hannah Arendt notes, "Power and violence are opposites; where one rules absolutely, the other is absent."[5]

Violence is not power but the loss of power, not courage but the demonstration of fear, not the expression of strength but of human desperation and weakness.

In its war on Iraq, the United States holds the military capacity to defeat a nation, maim its people, and destroy its infrastructure. But that strategy has stripped us of the power to win Iraq's people over and to build a nation. In Arendt's words, "Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it."[6] This statement may evoke disbelief in those who assume that violence is power and that systemic, sustained, legalized, state-sponsored violence—war—is the ultimate form of power.

Yet the prospect of nuclear annihilation has led many who had believed in the necessity of war to the commonsense conclusion that war in the twenty-first century is obsolete. Having traced the rise and fall of the war system, Jonathan Schell concludes that "never has a single technical invention had a more sudden or profound effect on an entrenched human institution than nuclear weapons have had on war. . . . The logic of total war had carried its practitioners to the brink of a destination, the far side of human existence, to which the logic of politics could not follow.

For politics was a human activity, and in the post-nuclear landscape there might be no human beings."[7]

War is better understood as religion than as a science; it requires a political momentum that is sustained by an ethos of fear and ethnocentrism rather than by the logic of analysis. Its religious character is evident in rituals, strict codes of group behavior and identity, a threatening enemy that constitutes the reality against which the group's identity is formed, a belief in a transcendent power or cause, and an ethos that clothes these conceptions with an aura of facticity.[8] "The conviction that force was always the final arbiter was not in truth so much an intellectual conclusion as a tacit assumption on all sides—the product not of a question asked and answered but of one unasked."[9] Those who can free their minds of the myth of constructive violence will conclude with Jacques Ellul that "violence begets violence—nothing else."[10]

Whether it is implemented by the state or supported through the religious practices and theological systems of the church, violence destroys what it claims to preserve. Yet even the pacifist church has borrowed from the empire much of its logic, many of its patterns of thought and theological assumptions. The church, like the world (the peoples and powers that have not submitted themselves to a nonviolent God and the way of Jesus), takes for granted that violence is power. It is the coercion that some people must exercise if society is to have peace and Christians are to have freedom of worship. Citing Romans 13:1-7, many Christian pacifists assume that worldly leaders (politicians) know best how to run the world, that some Christians have a special calling to follow Jesus, and that non-Christians and Christians who do not have this special calling have been given authority to exercise violence.[11]

This wisdom leads peace-loving Christians to presume that as we move into positions of leadership in society, we will need to become more responsibly engaged in the rhetoric and the practice of warfare. Augustine made this assumption in constructing what we now call just war theory. Reinhold Niebuhr shared this outlook as he developed his political theology of responsibility. Significant numbers of Mennonite leaders today, those who are pro-Niebuhr and those who are anti-Niebuhr, struggle with this point of view. For some, the code words are *ambiguity*, *compromise*, and *responsi-*

bility. For those with a more traditional *Stillen im Lande* stance, the code words are *separation* and *withdrawal*. Both groups assume—unlike Jesus—that God wills that some people exercise violence some of the time.

Nonviolence is power.

If the twentieth century demonstrated the failure of violence, movements in that century have also demonstrated persuasively that there is a political force more powerful: nonviolence. Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela come quickly to mind, but dozens of other people and movements have also established the successes of nonviolence.[12] But despite the successes of nonviolence and the conspicuously dismal failures of violence, our culture continues to accept as true the myth that violence is the midwife that will deliver a peaceful and orderly society.

Peace church theology, like the cultural worldview that leads us to believe that violence is power and therefore a societal necessity, is riddled with anomalies and contradictions.[13] We are called to hold to the simple claim that to be a follower of Jesus is to take up our cross in our day in our empire—the United States and its allies—even as Jesus took up his cross in the empire of his day. As *The Politics of Jesus,* John Howard Yoder's seminal contribution to biblical studies, expresses it, "Only at one point, only on one subject—but then consistently, universally—is Jesus our example: in his cross."[14]

Were we to adhere to this conviction, we would eliminate the double-talk in much contemporary Mennonite theology. We would reject the assertion that God "paradoxically" calls some Christians to be violent so that others may be nonviolent. This dualistic theology is doubly dangerous: it legitimates our society's violence (including its wars), and every theology that legitimates violence turns to stab those who underwrite it. Consoled beneath this theology's sacred shroud, we are oblivious to the violence to which we cling.

Gandhi noted that violence has many forms; he claimed that passivity is a greater evil than overt violence. As North American Mennonites move from the passivity and withdrawal characteristic of our agrarian background, we are increasingly caught up in the

covert structural violence that is supported by the theology emerging out of our cultural milieu. But the God of Jesus does not now need violence, in any form, nor has God ever needed violence to protect the nonviolent way of life Jesus taught and practiced.

Despite all theological arguments for its political necessity, violence has failed the church even as it has failed the world. Jesus understood the way of nonviolence to be in the design of the universe, to be life-giving power. The nonviolent way of Jesus represents the character of the new world, the reign of God that is coming now but awaits the fuller realization which has been anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus.

In Jesus' resurrection, nonviolent power counters the politics of empire.

We not only have a body of political science that supports the thesis that power is nonviolence, we also have a biblical heritage and parts of an Anabaptist theology that undergird this conviction. What Schell demonstrates historically and Arendt argues philosophically, the early church through the Gospel writers and Paul states in "narrative theology" by describing the Jesus event that culminates in the resurrection and exaltation. For the early church, the resurrection account is the theological narrative that substantiates the political viability of nonviolence.

The resurrection affords us a glimpse of the nonviolent power[15] of God and the universe that is ordinarily obscured by the pervasive myth of redemptive violence. We need a theology that views Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as epiphany, as proleptic manifestation of the power of the universe.

Resurrection for the first Christian believers was the defeat of violence through exposing its illusory and deceptive character. As Richard Hays has aptly written, "Jesus of Nazareth died on a cross. Those who follow him can hardly expect better treatment from the world. Insofar as the community of faith follows the path of the Jesus of history, it should expect suffering as its lot."[16] Resurrection, then, was the triumph of nonviolence, of God's life-giving power to those and for those who had followed Jesus to the cross.

We gain a better understanding of what resurrection meant for those early followers of Jesus from Philippians 2, the Bible's semi-

nal christological passage for those who claim an Anabaptist heritage. Paul speaks not of Jesus' death and resurrection but of his death and exaltation. As N. T. Wright notes, Paul does so with the clear assumption that Jesus was raised from the dead. Why then, asks Wright, did Paul use the language of exaltation?[17] He suggests that Paul "was consciously modelling the poem and its portrait of Jesus, not simply on Adam and Israel . . . but also on Caesar (or rather perhaps on the whole tradition of arrogant emperors going back at least to Alexander the Great, with the Roman emperors as the current embodiment of the type). Jesus . . . is the reality of which Caesar is the parody."[18]

"The poem," continues Wright, "follows quite closely the narrative sequence of imperial propaganda, and thereby stresses the point for which Paul of Acts was accused: of saying that there is 'another king named Jesus.' He, not Caesar, is the world's true lord."[19] Jesus is Lord and Savior. And by direct implication, Caesar is not. This is more than a creedal or dogmatic declaration. It is a claim based on the kind of life Jesus lived, which is the very reason for Jesus' exaltation. Unlike Caesar, Jesus did not use violence to defend either his status or an empire.

The resurrection was a political event of revolutionary magnitude. But we have tamed this passage and the Gospel accounts of the resurrection by spiritualizing them. The church's theology has brought the resurrection narratives under control by stripping them of their political import, by unlinking them from Jesus' life. These passages may now be used in insipid sermons, which cite these scriptures while failing to grasp their revolutionary significance—a failure so momentous that the effect is to deny the resurrection!

A dramatic shift in the understanding of power was within the purview of the earliest followers of Jesus, including Paul. But the prophetic understanding of power, and of economics,[20] failed to be sustained as the core of the message. Resurrection took on sacral or magical meaning, and by the end of the fourth century, its original meaning as the failure of violence (the crucifixion), and divine validation for the power of the Jesus event, had been structured out of "Christian" existence.[21]

The Jesus event—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—had barely been registered on the map of history, much less fully

grasped by those who knew of Jesus, when it was packaged in the theological framework of the day. That repackaging continued not simply and not primarily through the experiences of the prophetic and the early apostolic community but largely through the intelligentsia who mirrored the wisdom of the pagans more than the carpenter of Nazareth. Early on, they became more concerned that the "faith" of the Messiah be communicated in respectable, nonrevolutionary terms than that the daily life of its adherents be transformed by it.

Sacralized as a miracle story, the resurrection narrative could be shared and the event celebrated. But what adherents believed was not the politics of nonviolence in the midst of empire. To outsiders, the resurrection was a nonthreatening fable; to church leaders, it was a creedal statement to be repeated by bishop and emperor alike. The resurrection was something Christians believed in; no longer was it an event demonstrating the revolutionary nonviolent power of the reign of God.

The church and its leadership must reclaim the power of nonviolence in order to represent the Jesus way in our present empire.

That God's power is nonviolence may feel wildly out of sync with our everyday reality. Yet we should be psychologically and spiritually attuned to this alternative worldview, if our perceptions have been transformed by our Anabaptist heritage. Mennonites and other pacifist communities should be prepared culturally and politically to embrace this reality, to be the harbingers of nonviolence in a world dominated by the fear of violence.[22]

The resurrection, although theoretically indispensable to salvation, has not served as theological bedrock for the practice of nonviolence. In much Mennonite theology, salvation and ethics, being and doing, have been presented as sequential—not as warp and woof of a single fabric. Our traditional theologies contain explicit or implicit dualisms regarding violence: the violence of a God of justice versus the nonviolence of Jesus the Son of God, the end-times violence that initiates the kingdom of God versus the nonviolence of the kingdom, the violence of the state ordained by God versus the nonviolence of those called to follow the way of Jesus, the covert violence required to carry out the job

to which God has called me versus the nonviolence of my life in family and fellowship, the necessary violence of the atoning death of Jesus versus the nonviolence of the atoned one. Each of these dualistic theologies constitutes a denial of the resurrection of Jesus. They not only leave room for violence but draw violence into the arena of God's work.[23]

We may respond by saying that the world will not accept resurrection leadership. But we need to start by asking, Will the church? Will the Mennonite Church embrace resurrection nonviolence? How would our church be transformed if the Jesus event, climaxing in the vindication of nonviolence, constituted the power in our day-to-day vocations? With what new authority would we speak, if as leaders and as a people we embodied this power? How would the theology in our seminaries change if "power is nonviolence" became self-evident to us? How would leadership structures be altered if we lived as Jesus did and anticipated the real possibility of dying as Jesus did? Can the church trust its future to the God of nonviolent power?

Our traditional theologies contain dualisms regarding violence that constitute a denial of Jesus' resurrection. They draw violence into the arena of God's work.

I pray for the day when the church will reject evil by saying No to violence—both political and theological. I long for a day when we as a people among the nations will perceive that power is, and always has been, nonviolent. I look for a day when the church, living in the power of the resurrection, will be characterized by the nonviolent politics of God, as the resurrected Jesus promised those who stood in the shadow of the cross (Matt. 28:19-20).

Notes

[1] By *nonviolence* I mean the power of action without violence, cooperation rather than coercion, akin to Gandhi's *satyagraha* ("truth force"). The term *nonviolence*, which seeks to express a positive concept by stating what it is not, reflects the poverty of language (see Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003], 350–51).

[2] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969, 1970), 56.

[3] *Empire* here refers to a dominating authority, mythically conceived as sovereign, whose officials are widely presumed to represent a worthy transcendent power. This authority dictates the thought and action of large groups, thereby enhancing the interests of a few to the detriment of many. Politically, the early church and the church of today, particularly within the U.S., share a common political phenomenon: both exist in the midst of empire.

[4] Schell, *The Unconquerable World*, 7.
[5] Arendt, *On Violence*, 56.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Schell, *The Unconquerable World*, 46.
[8] For a more complete description of characteristics of religion, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90–91.
[9] Schell, *The Unconquerable World*, 105.
[10] *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 100.
[11] For a reading of the later Paul that supports a more thoroughgoing pacifist position than that reflected in Romans, see Richard J. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001).
[12] See Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). A set of documentary films (with the same title) accompanies this unusually insightful account.
[13] For my use of *worldview*, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), especially chapters 5–8.
[14] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 95. This theme is repeated throughout *The Politics of Jesus* (see, e.g., 52–53).
[15] Although I agree with Arendt's statement that "nonviolent power is a redundancy" (*On Violence*, 56), as a bridge in communicating I at times use *nonviolence* and *nonviolent power* as synonyms for what Arendt calls *power*.
[16] *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 167.
[17] N. T. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 225.
[18] Ibid., 228.
[19] Ibid.
[20] See Acts 2:46-47; 4:32.
[21] Robert Doran's *Birth of a Worldview: Early Christianity in Its Jewish and Pagan Context* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999) includes a helpful chapter on "the source of power" (85–114). Doran discusses the realm of the divine and the various trinitarian and christological formulations leading up to Chalcedon in 451. The discussion differentiates power along the lines of the divine/human, the spiritual/material, and the temporal/eternal. But his treatment only alludes to whether power (and hence the nature of the divine) is coercive or persuasive, determined or free, destructive or life-giving.
[22] See also my essay, "Reimaging Power: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence," in *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible: Essays in Honor of Millard Lind*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Loren L. Johns (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press, U.S., 1999), 192–216.
[23] For a schema of dualisms found in Mennonite theologies, see appendix 2 in "Resurrection: God's Nonviolence Made Known," an unpublished paper presented at "Teaching Peace Conference: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts Curriculum," Bluffton College, 26–28 May 2004.

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Book review

Keith Harder

Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition, edited by Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

It took me a long time to recognize and accept that to be a pastor is to be in a position of power. I suspect that my experience is not unique. I still encounter pastors who deny their power—perhaps because of an ideological commitment to servant leadership that would seem to preclude power, perhaps because of the ways we've all seen power abused, or perhaps because of a simple lack of awareness. But more and more I find pastors and others talking openly about the power and authority that inheres in position and education. We are realizing that sometimes a denial of power actually leads more swiftly (and perhaps soundlessly) to its abuse, and we as pastors are exploring how to be accountable with power and how to use it constructively.

We are realizing that sometimes a denial of power actually leads more swiftly (and perhaps soundlessly) to its abuse, and we as pastors are exploring how to be accountable with power and how to use it constructively.

Part of what contributed to this openness about power and authority inherent in the role and position of the pastor was a recovery of the concept of office of ministry. In 1991, Jackson Carroll developed this theme in *As One With Authority*. In Mennonite circles, the concept of ministerial office began to take root again and was given official sanction with the writing and adoption of *A Mennonite Polity of Ministerial Leadership* in 1995.

A number of Mennonite scholars and leaders helped pave the way for changes in our view of power, authority, and ministerial leadership. From his position in the former General Conference Ministerial Leadership Office, John Esau challenged a purely

functionalist view of ministry and led an effort to reclaim the notion of office, in a collection of essays he edited on *Understanding Ministerial Leadership*. From their vantage point as college presidents, Rodney Sawatsky and Lawrence Burkholder challenged the church to face up to and embrace the power that is embedded in leadership and institutions. Additionally, seminary president Marlin Miller debunked the twentieth-century Mennonite misreading of the Reformation concept of the priesthood of all believers, used by some to minimize ministerial leadership. Calvin Redekop, speaking as an academic and as one with active ties with the business community, insisted that the denial of power is dangerous and foolish.

Now in his retirement, Redekop and his son Benjamin have revisited this topic in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, a collection of ten varied and provocative essays. The Redekops believe that for too long Mennonites have avoided the often messy and ambiguous issues surrounding power, especially the exercise of power in the life of the church. The writers in this volume examine these issues from a variety of perspectives. The book includes erudite philosophy, accounts of abusive power, theories of why it has been so hard for Mennonites to look at power in the church, feminist critique of power in Mennonite ecclesiology, and warnings about the consequences of avoiding facing power dynamics in the church.

In the introduction, the editors suggest that one reason Anabaptist-Mennonites have been ambivalent and naïve about power is that their rejection of the state's power to regulate the church led them to assume that they were done with power, even in managing their own affairs. "The restricted focus on the nonresistant position has led to an evasion of full consideration of the centrality of power and its misuse in all human affairs" (xii). This evasion has meant that the power endemic in human affairs has not been acknowledged and held accountable, a dynamic that has opened the door to the abuse of power. The editors say that this book is their attempt to put this "paradox of Anabaptism and power" in focus.

The book begins with an essay by J. Lawrence Burkholder, former president of Goshen College. Burkholder chides the church for its naïveté regarding power and encourages Menno-

nites to more forthrightly and honestly acknowledge and use power for positive ends.

In an essay on "Power and Religion in the Western Intellectual Tradition," Benjamin Redekop takes an instructive tour of the intellectual landscape on the idea of power. While maintaining that the "critique of the abuse of religious, priestly power has been a defining feature of modern theories of power, and the Protestant Reformation (with its radical Anabaptist wing) . . . ," he calls Mennonites to "re-moralize" their exercise of power (49).

In a review of this book in the *Canadian Mennonite* (9 September 2002), Rodney Sawatsky wonders why Redekop highlights the abuse of pastoral power. Sawatsky wryly contends that "at least within the largest Mennonite denomination in North America today, the problem of pastoral power is more in its absence than its abuse." Sawatsky wishes for a less ambivalent embrace of power than he finds in this volume. In his view, Mennonites need to make the transition "from demoralization to remoralization, from abuse to accountability, and from demonization to the legitimation of power and authority" (10).

The book includes erudite philosophy, accounts of abusive power, . . . feminist critique of power in Mennonite ecclesiology, and warnings about the consequences of avoiding facing power dynamics in the church.

In the closing essay, Cal Redekop concludes with a call to embrace power and authority that is "pro-humana," which he defines as authority that "maximizes the subjective and social worth of each person" (177). To ensure that power is used to this end, Redekop insists on clear accountability and structural limitations. Interestingly, this concern for accountability is a prominent feature of the aforementioned *A Mennonite Polity of Ministerial Leadership*, which unfortunately is not recognized in this book.

While many pastors are better able to acknowledge the power that goes with their position, role, and education, and may be more comfortable in using that power for pro-humana ends, there are also reasons for caution. For one, we will find it hard to agree on what is pro-humana and what it means to use power to that end. Depending on our social location, the exercise of power may look different, even if it has pro-humana intentions.

Reflecting this concern are several cautionary voices in this collection, most notably the essay by Dorothy Yoder Nyce and Linda Nyce. While acknowledging "that power is inherent in all social relationships," they reject the practice of ordination and the *Macht* (power over) it seems to give those in ministerial offices. They would rather have us find ways to implement *Kraft* (power to) in our church practices. A chapter by Jacob Loewen and Wesley Prieb describes the abuse of authority by Mennonite church leaders in South Russia in the nineteenth century. Joel Hartman describes what most people would call the abuse of ministerial authority in a community of "plain" Mennonites. These essays show us how easy it is for those who embrace the power of their office to misuse their power. While it may be true that acknowledged power will more likely be held accountable, accountability does not come easily or naturally for most of us. Self-delusion is never far away.

We also do well to recognize that setting the terms for how we talk about power and how we decide how it may be used are potentially loaded with prejudice born of privilege and status. In other words, we need to be mindful about who is participating in this discussion. Of note is that all of the authors in this book are highly educated Anglos. Finally, it is one thing to come to the point where one can openly acknowledge the power inherent in one's position and role; it is quite another to say that we should then seek to maximize the use of that power, even if it is toward pro-humana ends.

These concerns should not detract from the primary message of this book. We owe Calvin and Benjamin Redekop our gratitude for a helpful contribution to the discussion about power and authority in the life of the church.

About the reviewer

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Book review

April Yamasaki

The Heart of the Matter: Pastoral Ministry in Anabaptist Perspective, ed. Erick Sawatzky. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2004.

In chapter 14 of this excellent volume, Rebecca Slough relates the story of a seminary student who always seemed to be looking for the how-to manual of pastoral ministry. Only later, in his first congregation, did he finally realize that there could never be a comprehensive set of instructions. Instead, like good jazz music, pastoral ministry requires improvisation.

In chapter 12, Arthur Paul Boers offers the image of pastor as "spiritual orienteer"—one who helps orient people toward God. In his pastoral theology approach, leading worship, preaching, praying, pastoral care, administration, and other tasks of ministry are meant to orient and reorient people toward God.

This is not a how-to book; instead it provides an Anabaptist orientation to pastoral ministry with plenty of room for improvisation.

These two ways of understanding pastoral ministry are just two of the many reasons that I highly recommend this book to pastors and to anyone interested in pastoral ministry and education. Written by the faculty of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, this collection of seventeen essays is clearly grounded in the AMBS experience, particularly as it has developed since the late 1960s. The concern for theological education is evident throughout and is underscored by two appendixes of AMBS documents on theological education and curriculum design.

But this book is not only for educators or for those who have studied at AMBS. In fact, perhaps it's because I did not receive my pastoral training there that I find this book so valuable. The historical essays give me a sense of how pastoral ministry has

developed in the wider Anabaptist church and help me reflect on how ministry has developed in the particular congregation that I serve. The biblical and theological essays help ground and shape my ministry practice in the context of scripture. The discussion of pastoral identity, function, and office helps me think about my wide range of ministry tasks and relationships in a more integrated way. This is not a how-to book; instead, using the terms supplied by Slough and Boers, it provides an Anabaptist orientation to pastoral ministry with plenty of room for improvisation.

To make the most of the book, I recommend that you read it the way I did. Start with the introduction, written by AMBS dean and New Testament professor Loren L. Johns, which provides an overview of all seventeen essays. Then read the last essay by editor Erick Sawatzky, who taught pastoral ministry at AMBS, for his understanding of "the heart of the matter." Then read the rest of the essays in the order most relevant for your current ministry. For me, that meant turning next to Rebecca Slough's essay on "Pastoral Ministry as Improvisatory Art," then "Paying Attention" by June Alliman Yoder, followed by "The Pastor as Healer" by Willard M. Swartley.

I read the entire book in this way, over the course of several weeks filled with leading worship and sermon preparation, working with our church council and committees, making hospital visits, hosting a guest speaker, supervising a pastoral intern and other staff, hearing the painful story of a member with a difficult past, praying with someone who is new to our church. Reading this book as I practiced ministry was an exercise in praxis as Erick Sawatzky describes it in his preface: "Practical experience in ministry and formal thought need each other in education for ministry. Without careful reflection, the church loses its vision, its focus. Without experiences of life in the church, formal theological thought loses its context, its locus." I have found that kind of praxis vital for ongoing ministry, and this book makes a valuable contribution to that end.

About the reviewer

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