THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF POWER AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

By: Stephen Charles Mott and Walter Tilleman

Presented at:
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ORGANIZING[1]

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A sharp critique of power is frequent in Christian writings. Several years ago Stephen responded to an article in <u>Transformation</u> magazine, the title of which stated its thesis: "Abandoning Power." Common is the sentiment in this statement: "Those farthest from the seeds of power are closest to the heart of things." Many of these critics are not in disagreement with the theology of power that we propose. They use the term, <u>power</u>, reductively to describe only one form of power. By <u>power</u> these writers often mean what we will be calling exploitive power. Herman Dooyeweerd described their position in this way:

> Many equate power with brute force. Today many Christians, misled by this identification, consider it unchristian to strive for the consolidation of power in organizations that aim at applying Christian principles to society. They believe that power may play no part among Christians . . . . A Christian may speak of love and

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1 This essay is a revision of chapter 1 of Stephen Charles Mott, <u>A Christian Perspective on Political Thought</u> (New York, Oxford U., 1993).

justice with an unburdened conscience, but as soon as power comes into his purview he has probably lent an ear to the devil.[2]

Like many disputes in political philosophy, some of the differences regarding power can be overcome through clearer understanding of how the terminology is being used.

Although it is not the only valid approach, power provides a helpful basic framework for a Christian political philosophy. From this perspective the political process is the shaping, distribution, and exercise of power.

The critics of power may possess moral insight into the destructive possibilities and realities of power but are imprecise in articulating the full dimensions of power. Identifying power with violence can lead to merely private solutions to social problems since the conception of non-lethal forms of power is undeveloped.[3]

Power is much more, however, and a moral repugnance about power and the resulting retreat from power in reality becomes a retreat from politics. There never is a power vacuum. Simply to reject power allows the pride of power and the concentration of power to go on unchecked. We need to understand power--its necessary and proper role, its dangers, and its checks. This understanding requires the perspective of the Christian Scriptures and Christian theology.

POWER IN SOCIETY

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2 Herman Dooyeweerd, <u>Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options</u> (Toronto, Wedge, 1979), 66-67.

3 Cf. D. Blix's review of <u>Slow Motion</u> by Lynn Segal, <u>Religious Studies Review</u> 19 (1990), 246.

Although power is denounced frequently in religious circles, James Luther Adams, has stated, "Religion cannot be adequately described without employing the conception of power; likewise, power cannot be properly described without employing religious concepts. Power is the basic category of being and the basic category of social action."[4] Power from this vantage point is impossible to abandon.   Power is not only essential for social action. It also is essential for the life in faith and society which precedes politics.

To summarize some of the sociology of power, as social action, power emerges out of the many factors in life which can give one person an advantage over another.[5]   Power is relational.[6] Power is determined by where a person is in relation to other persons in society and by what one can do with respect to others. So a biblical text to which we will return later states, "If members of your community become poor in that their power slips <u>with you</u>, you shall make them strong. . .that they may live <u>with you</u>" (Lev. 25.35-36).

4 James Luther Adams, "Theological Bases of Social Action," in Adams, <u>Taking Time Seriously</u> (Glencoe, IL, Free, 1957), 43 (originally in <u>Journal of Religious Thought</u> 8,1 [Autumn-Winter, 1950/51], 102-19; also reprinted in Adams, <u>On Being Human Religiously</u>, ed. Max L. Stackhouse [Boston, Beacon, 1976]); and Adams, <u>Voluntary Associations. Socio-cultural Analyses and Theological Interpretation</u>, ed. J. R. Engel [Chicago, Exploration, 1986]).

5 Robert Bierstedt, "An Analysis of Social Power," <u>American Sociological Review</u> 15 (1950), 735. Dennis Wrong, however, would limit power to *intentional* influence in distinction to "diffuse controls" while recognizing that unintentional influence is likely to follow (<u>Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses</u> [New York, Harper, Key Concepts in the Social Sciences, 1979], 4).

6 Richard M. Emerson, "Power-Dependence Relations," <u>American Sociological Review</u> 27 (1962), 32

The definition of power by Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociology, is that power is the chance to realize one's own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others.[7] Bierstedt presents the same conception in other terms: power, when manifested, reduces the options[8] for the recipient of power to do other than what the actor intends.[9]

Power is structural. One possesses power primarily by the institutional position that one occupies in society--where one is socially, what notch one fills, not by who one is as an individual. The biblical prophetic critique included powerful types of people: large landholders, government officials, leading priests.

THE THREE POWERS

Preservative and exploitive power.   The definition of power used by many otherwise helpful theological commentators on power is broader than that used by the sociologists whose conceptions we have been discussing. The significance of these theological studies for social philosophy will be enhanced if they can be reconciled to the sociological perspective. Similarly, the biblical language of power does not necessarily relate immediately to the same

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7 Max Weber, Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology, ed. G.

Roth and C. Wittick (New York, Bedminster, 1968[4]), 2.926. (This treatment of

power [pp. 926-40] appears also in From Max Weber,: Essays in Sociology, ed. H.

Gerth and C. W. Mills [New York, Oxford U., 1946] , 180-95.)

8   Or power makes the options less attractive (Amitai Etzioni, The Active Society. A

Theory of Societal and Political Processes [New York, Free, 1968], 320).

9 Bierstedt, 733.

process to which power refers in sociological discussion.[10] The usefulness for social ethics of many writings about power in the Bible is limited by the failure to relate its language of power to a sociological theory of power or to unfold the understanding of social power in the biblical materials. The biblical cultures did have conceptions of social power; all cultures do.

For James Luther Adams and Paul Tillich power is the ability of a particular existence to act in accordance with its being. It is the capacity to live out its life in accordance with its true nature by creation. Accordingly, power is a gift from God, the Creator and Sustainer. Human power exists as the way we respond effectively to our possibilities of being. This being is not abstract, but the being which God presents as a particular gift designed for each life.[11]

An important contribution of this approach is that it establishes the goodness of power. Because it is an expression of divine being, power is good, not basically tainted. "Power

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10 Cf. Rudolf Schnackenburg's warning in "Macht, Gewalt und Friede nach dem Neuen

Testament," in Schnackenburg, Massstab des Glaubens (Freiberg, Herder, 1978),

232.

11 Adams, "Theological Bases of Social Action," esp. 42, 50; "Blessed are the

Powerful," Christian Century 86 (June 18, 1969), 838-41 (also in Adams, The

Prophethood of All Believers, ed. G. Beach [Boston, Beacon, 1986]). Paul Tillich,

Love, Power, and Justice. Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications (New

York, Oxford U., 1954), esp. 35-53; "Shadow and Substance: A Theory of Power"

(1965), in Tillich, Political Expectation, ed. J. L. Adams (New York, Harper, 1971),

115–24; Tillich's first essay on power (1931) has been as reprinted as "The Problem

of Power," in Tillich, The Interpretation of History (New York, Scribner's, 1936),

179-202. For a fine summary of Tillich's position, cf. Théo Junker, "Paul Tillich:

Une théorie du pouvoir pour le socialisme," Studies in Religion 12 (1983), 325-36.

belongs to God," states the Psalmist (Ps. 62.11, NRSV).[12] Conceptions which start with

power as a hindrance to the capacity to act have difficulty justifying power beyond the

principle of the lesser evil.

Theological treatments of power which describe power as the ability to act vary,

however, from the idea of power as overcoming resistance, so prominent in sociological

tradition of Max Weber, to realize one's will *even against the resistance of others.* They are

not as effective as they could be in justifying power which is exercised in situations of

conflict, such as political power. Such definitions do not bring the element of conflict to the

surface so that it can be subjected to ethical analysis, which is why we use the Weber

definition. Highlighting the conflict within the power relationship is important for the

Christian discussion of power because this approach exposes the controversial ethical

questions of coercion, loss of freedom, and physical force. This issue is significant because

how one defines power influences how one will deal with it.

Not all sociologists agree, to be sure, with the emphasis upon overcoming resistance in

the definition of Weber. In fact, as we will see, a strength of the approach of Adams is its

description of the mutuality in power which some sociological critics see missing in the

Weberian approach. Some also note the social justifications which disguise conflict from the

dependent member. For example, in situations of manipulation, one might resist if the intent

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12 Cyrillic H. Powell notes the open references to God's power in the great credos and

doxological statements and designations throughout Scripture, e.g. 1 Chron. 29.11-

12; 2 Chron. 20.6; Ps. 21.13; 68.34; 111.6; Matt. 6.13; Rev. 7.12; 4.11; 5.12; 19.1-2

(The Biblical Concept of Power [London, Epworth, Fernley-Hartley Lectures, 1963],

6, 71, 194-95).

were not concealed.[13] Low income youths might not enlist for military service in such

numbers if they saw that the career training advertised often does not become a reality. You

probably can suggest other examples.

In defense of the Weberian approach, however, conflict still is present in the power

relationship even though it is submerged. Further, power and social causation are not

interchangeable although many theological treatments seem to assume that they are in their

treatment. Roderick Martin notes that warning someone to get out of the way of a car

produces an effect, but it is not power over that person, such as occurred when someone was

drafted to patrol the Vietnamese jungle.[14]

Our proposal is that Adams' and Tillich's conception can be understood in terms of the

sociological definition of power. The ability to act in accordance with one's created being

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13 Wrong, Power, 28-30.

14 Roderick Martin, The Sociology of Power (London, Routledge, International Library

    of Sociology, 1977), 35. To express this perspective on power in another non-

    Weberian way, one can refer to Simplicius' sixth century A. D. Commentary on

    Aristotle's Categories, 58a19-20, which also reflects Stoic usage: power not only

    causes many events, it also "controls the activities subordinate to it" (Commentaria

    in Aristotelem Graeca 8, ed. K. Kalbfleisch [Berlin, Reimer, 1907], 224 [SVF 3.203]

    [emphasis added], cf. Brad Inwood, Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism

    [Oxford, Oxford U., 1985], 31). Cf. the helpful distinction between influence and

    power by Bierstedt ("Analysis of Social Power," 731) and Etzioni: Influence

    changes the recipient's preferences, but power does not. In power "resistance is

    overcome not because the actor subjected to the use of power changes his 'will' but

    because resistance has been made more expensive, prohibitive, or impossible"

    (Active Society, 359-60).

easily leads to the idea of others who would thwart the Creator's intention. In the actual

human situation, the intention of the Creator is perverted by sinful actions against others,

against us. The gift of power is fallen with the race, and in all communities power is used

overtly and covertly to the disadvantage of the weaker neighbor. In the life of any individual

or society, preserving its essential unity requires resisting tendencies which oppose it.[15]

Tillich describes "the continuous struggle of power of being with power of being" that has

various results ranging between the extremes of assimilating the other power and absorption

by it.[16]

     With this perception, the definition of power as the potential to carry out one's will over

the resistance of others applies to Adams' and Tillich's conception. The power of being is the

potential to defend one's divinely created being from the contrary intentions of others. *Our*

will is to maintain the integrity of our own being. *Their* will in this situation has the effect of

thwarting it. The pressure of a gang upon a youth to join a form of street life is resisted by the

youth's values, courage, and support within home and church. The power of being is a

legitimate preservative power with the potential of carrying out one's will to be in a communal

situation despite the resistance of others. Our first form of power is preservative power. Our

personal resources and our ability to act in accordance with our beliefs are power as we reduce

interference with our course, which is to be the creature that we perceive God has created us

to be.

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15 Tillich, "The Problem of Power," 193. Similarly, in The Socialist Decision (New

    York, Harper, 1977 [1933], 98), Tillich speaks of inner power with which an object

    "resists total absorption into the technological system."

16 Tillich, Love, Power, and Justice, 41-42.

Attributes which by themselves would appear to be but resources thus can be seen to be effective forms of power. Knowledge, competence, character, endurance, hope, faith, and our ability to organize and to work in cooperation with others aid one in following one's personal purpose in life despite severe forces of power that oppose it.[17] Such elements of power are good as gifts of God essential for human life in society.

The consequence of power in this conception prevents action, rather than produces action. Describing power as producing the intended results on others, Dennis Wrong notes that inaction may be the effect of power. Issues are not raised in the community in anticipation of the reaction of powerful persons whose goals and interests would be affected by them.[18] State legislatures may turn down more progressive forms of taxation for fear that businesses will leave the state.   This dimension of power can be missed when one has only an operational view of power, treating it simply as behavior. Power then is understood primarily politically, as influencing decision making in a conscious attempt to manipulate.[19] The expression of power in producing inaction is an institutional way by which an elite is served

17 Aaron Antonovsky (Health, Stress, and Coping [San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1979], 99-122) analyzes the diverse resources which are characteristic of those who have been healthy in dealing with and overcoming significant stresses in their lives. A African American grandmother related to Robert Coles: "We've had God; and He's something to have--Someone. And I'll tell you: we've had each other to turn to. I'd go down the road in Strawberry and sit with a friend and we'd feel a lot better by the time we'd had a cup of coffee" (Robert Coles, Children of Crisis, Vol. 3: The South Goes North [Boston, Little, Brown, 1971], 129).

18 Wrong, Power, 2, 129.

19 Lyle E. Schaller, The Change Agent (Nashville, TN, Abingdon, 1972), 146.

while having a low degree of visibility. But the power of being also may prevent the exploitation of oneself or one's group that would otherwise occur.

Preservative power includes material necessities, which also are given by God. Significant struggles of men and women in the Bible relate to economic survival. Well-being includes being able to "eat the fruit of the labor of [one's] hands" (Ps. 128.2). God gives us power over[20] wealth and property for enjoyment (Eccles. 5.19). In contrast is the situation where this preservative power of self-sufficiency is lacking and our wealth and property are in the power[21] of a stranger–a "grievous evil" (Eccles. 6.2).[22]

The special attention which Scripture gives to the plight of the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the resident alien reflects the awareness in Scripture of the potential for evil in powerlessness. In the center of Job's declaration of the injustices to these groups–exacting pledges, withholding water and food, widows sent away empty-handed, orphans crushed–is the statement: "The powerful possess the land" (Job 22.8, <u>NRSV</u>). Poverty is more than a matter of material goods; it is also a matter of power.

> Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed--with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power--with no one to comfort them. (Eccles. 4.1 <u>NRSV</u>)[23]

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20 s=a\lat in the Hiph'il conjugation.

21 s=a\lat in the Hiph'il conjugation.

22 Cf. Isa. 65.22; Ps. 128.2

23 Cf. Job 35.9

So the poor person is defined[24] as one "whose power is insufficient" [Lev. 14.21]). The text

literally states, "his hand does not reach." The word we translate as power here is <u>hand</u> (ya\d).

A key to our biblical work on power is the recognition that <u>hand</u> used metaphorically usually

means power.[25] Oppression is to be "subdued under" someone else's "power" (ya\d)

according to Psalm 106.42 (cf. Exod. 3.7-8 where slavery, a paradigm of oppression, is being

in the power of another). A rule of thumb is that when one sees "hand" in an English

translation of a biblical passage ask if "power" would fit the context. The same is true for

"arm" when used metaphorically.

From the biblical perspective the fallen sinful condition which challenges our

preservative power is crisscrossed with exploitation by the advantages which one person has

over another. Another form of power is at play: <u>exploitive power</u>. The power of being

becomes the servant of someone else's self-assertion versus our ability to assert ourselves as

God wants us to be. Tillich speaks of this aspect of power as preventing those who are

dominated from acting spontaneously; instead they are treated as an object. Part of their

personhood and ability to enter into community is lost.[26]

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24 By wa\w explicativum.

25 Hans Walter Wolff, <u>Anthropology of the Old Testament</u> (Philadelphia, Fortress,

   1974), 68; cf. Gen. 39.21-22; Deut. 8.17-18; Ps. 89.13. Used in this way, ya\d

   expresses several aspects of power, as seen in the following examples: oppression,

   often regarding deliverance from it (Judg. 6.9 [frequent]); total domination (Deut.

   3.3); control, authority (Gen. 39. 6); agency (Gen. 39.22); capacity (Num. 6.21);

   possession (Num. 21.26); having at one's disposal (Gen. 9.2).

26 Tillich, "Shadow and Substance," 121.

Power increases sin, universally present in the human race, by allowing lust to work its will.[27]

> Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds upon their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. They covet. . . They oppress. . . (Mic. 2.1-2, NRSV)

Aristotle stated that all people do what they wish if they have the power.[28] Thus the structure of unequal power leads to exploitation. A host of injustices exists (Ezek. 22.7, 9, 12) when the princes of Israel act "every one according to his power" (Ezek. 22.6).[29]

The power of being, our preservative power, stands against such exploitive power. James Cone has stated, "The only limit to our oppression is our power against it."[30] As a fifteen year old African American youth in Boston told Robert Coles, "They'll just keep on walking all over us. They always have. They still do. Why should they stop, unless we make them stop, *make them stop*?"[31]

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27 Will and power work in tandem, cf. Acts 4.28.

28 Aristotle, Pol. 1312b3, cf. 1313b32.

29 Cf. Eccles. 5.8-9.

30 James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York, Seabury, 1975), 228.

31 Coles, South Goes North, 55. An African American mother and maid found
     preservative power in her job and her attitude toward it:
     "My daddy used to tell us: be a fighter, be like Joe Louis--hit back, hit back.
        Well, I've never hit anyone back in my whole life, but I can tell you, I
        try to hit back by getting up and down my work and not setting back
        and saying Oh, my gosh, and Oh, my gosh, until I'm just so low in my

The absence of preservative power is a source of corruption. A twenty-year old woman, a survivor of the 1982 Shatila Camp massacre in Lebanon, said, "Whoever they were, we know our revolution was the only security for us. When our fighters left our camp, anyone could kill us. And they succeeded."[32] Turning around the famous dictum of Lord Acton that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," Adams states that powerlessness tends to corrupt.[33] The diminishment of power of being which the powerless often have--apathy, proneness to immediate gratification, use of drugs, carrying out violence against themselves and their own group--cannot be explained only in terms of the inward

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spirits that I'm no good to anyone and no good to myself either....My

husband is sick in the hospital with bad lung, tuberculosis. How could

I live if I didn't work? How could my children eat? How could I pay

the rent? How could I get us clothes?" (Coles, 102, 110).

32 "An Eye-Witness Account--Shatila Camp," Palestine Human Rights Campaign.

  Special Report (September/October, 1982), 4.

33 Adams, "Blessed are the Powerful," 838, 840. Edgar Z. Friedenberg earlier was more

  explicit: "All weakness tends to corrupt, and impotence corrupts absolutely"

  (Coming of Age in America. Growth and Acquiescence [New York, Vintage, 1965],

  pp. 47-48). The term absolutely in either form is an overstatement. Cf. May, Power

  and Innocence, 25: "...a common characteristic of all mental patients is their

  powerlessness." The statement of Lord Acton, a Roman Catholic liberal, is found in

  a letter by him to Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887 (Lord John E. Acton, Essays on

  Freedom and Power, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb [Gloucester, MA, Peter Smith, 1948],

  335).

conditions of sin. Reference must also be made to the external factors of power of which they

and their communities are victims.[34]

Neglect of the pervasiveness of exploitive power perceived so forcefully in Scripture

contributes to an advocacy of merely individualistic solutions or reliance upon natural

harmonies. An important political implication of this approach through power is that conflict

and exploitation must be taken seriously in devising public policy.

Trickle-down theories and supply side economic approaches seek to help the poor by

putting more material resources in the hands of wealthy investors, such as through changes in

the distribution of taxes. The assumption is that the extra resources for the wealthy will be

invested in industries that will provide more jobs for the poor. Wealth indeed is not a fixed

quantity. The concern for the expansion of production is appropriate and usually should be a

broadly supported public policy, but economic expansion does not necessarily mean an

improvement in the situation of the poor. The weaker elements may even decline.[35] The

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34 Tex S. Sample, "Toward a Christian Understanding of Power," in Toward a

   Discipline of Social Ethics, Walter Muelder Fest., ed. P. Deats (Boston, Boston U.,

   1972), 122.

35 Examples of the poor becoming poorer during economic expansion are Brazil during

   the 1960's (cf. Celso Furtado, Economic Development of Latin America. Historical

   Background and Contemporary Problems [Cambridge U., Cambridge Latin

   American Studies 8, 1976[2]] , 87-88) and the United States in the unusually long

   economic recovery in the 1980's in which the top income quintile (fifth) had very

   significant income growth while the lowest fifth significantly declined, measured in

   constant dollars.   The richest 1 percent of all families (those who made about

   $500,000 a year and up in 1990) more than doubled their after-tax income between

   1977 and 1990; meanwhile, the average income of the poorest fifth of all families

expansion of wealth may not be significant enough to offset injustice in the conflict in society over its distribution, or its increase may even add to the injustice. The approach of relying on strengthening the economic hand of the wealthy to help the needy appears to be opposite to the biblical realism about power. It misses the genuine conflict between the powerful and the weak, and the destructive relationship of lust and power.

Exploitation of others, however, is not the only way in which power is perverted by sin. The perversion of preservative power has not only an active form but also a passive form in which one assents to forces and circumstances which divert God's creative purposes for one's life. Preservative power is then perverted into its opposite, the ability to resist God's intentions *for oneself*, to retain an evil course of life which misuses God's original gifts and further rejects God's special provisions of intervention. Feminist theology and Black power and pride have helped us see that.

Much of the New Testament terminology of power has the character of restoring preservative power through God's grace. "To them gave he power[36] to become children of God" (John 1.12) describes a resource which resists the sin, death, and demonic forces which would thwart the divine intent for those who trust in Christ as their own savior. "The gates of hell shall not have power over[37]" them (Matt. 16.18).[38]

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fell by about 6 percent. Real wages also declined in this period (cf. David Fasenfast

and Stephen Rose, "A Growing Gap: Income Distribution in The 80's," Blueprint for

Social Justice 42, 10 [June, 1989], 2; Interfaith Action for Economic Justice,

Networker [July/August, 1990]). This was probably the situation in Israel in the time

of the eighth century (B.C.) prophets.

36 exousia

37 katischuein

Although we have discussed preservative power as an attribute of groups as well as individuals, to this point the concept remains too individualistic and particularistic. Life does not consist of isolated individuals, or groups, maintaining the integrity of their created being over against hostile forces and hostile people. The conception of preservative power has need of expansion through a separate tradition about power.

A philosophical concept which goes back to Plato describes power as having both active and passive forms.[39] They provide a *mutuality* of exercising influence and being influenced.

With passive "powers" one has the "power to hear." Part of one's power of being is the capacity to receive, be influenced by, and to participate in the creative powers of life. One needs a capacity to appreciate a great work of music, to be influenced by a great political leader, to hear concerns of others in the social community. So Paul boasted of his weakness because through it he participated in the power of Christ (2 Cor. 12.9-10). By participating in the power received from the Creator and Redeemer, we also are capable of not participating in a different power that would abuse us.

Active and passive "powers" are resources for mutuality in power, in which one participates with others in social life in order to achieve consensus and then to implement that consensus. Power indeed should be carried out in a framework which has more than merely unilateral responsive actions which seek to dominate, control, and manipulate those using exploitive power, rather than seeking reconciliation in a higher form of community.[40]

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38 Cf. John 10.29; Col. 1.11, 13.

39 Plato, Soph. 247d-e (dynamin eit¯ eis to poiein . . . eit¯¯ eis to pathein); cf. Adams, "Theological Bases of Social Action," 44.

40 Cf. Peter J. Paris, The Social Teachings of the Black Churches (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1985), 113, 121-23.

Preservative power is incomplete if its possessors do not obtain effective participative power. The ultimate goal is "power with" instead of "power over." Management by command is replaced by management by negotiation. As creatures created to live in community, and who represent God with God's image, "to share power and to share in power is to be fully human."[41]

We must use our receptive resources to be healthy community beings. Being healthy in society involves not only affecting others positively. It also involves the ability to be affected by the strengths of others. Knowing the prevailing concerns of the community is an essential resource for community change.

Communal power is conscious and active participation in the decision-making processes of the society.[42] This aspect of power can be defined as the capacity to participate in shaping of social decisions.[43] This is true of all power, but attention must be given to who gets to do it. A concern for democracy was central to the thinking of Saul Alinsky, the founder of the community organizing movement. The growth of democracy depends on extensions of power.[44] The ability to participate in making social decisions is expanded.

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41 Allan Aubrey Boesak, <u>Farewell to Innocence. A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power</u> (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1977), 51.

42 The Zagorsk Consultation in preparation for the World Council Assembly in Uppsala, cited in Adams, "Blessed are the Powerful," 840.

43 James Luther Adams, "The Creative Thrust of Conflict," in Adams, <u>James Luther Adams Papers</u>, ed. H. Vetter (<u>Unitarian Universalist Christian</u> 48, 3-4 [Fall-Winter, 1993], 34.

44 Adams, "Creative Thrust," 35.

Community organizing involves this expansion of the decision making of communities. Its goal is bring that about particularly for low-income communities which have been excluded. It seeks to draw out resources for communal power, some of which are receptive resources. They include the ability to research, to dialogue, to negotiate, to confront, and to come to agreements.

Crucial to the receptive aspect of power is the capacity to listen in order to respond creatively to others and their needs. This is central to the methodology of community organizing. At its heart is the process of one to one conversations in order to discern the concerns that relate to one's community. Receiving the prevailing concerns is essential and powerful for community change.

We could consider this communal power as a third form of power; for our present purposes we are treating it as a form of preservative power.[45] Its counterpart could be a fourth

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45 Bernard Loomer describes "the ability to produce an effect and undergo an effect" as

"relational power" ("Two Kinds of Power," Criterion 15,1 (Winter, 1976), 20-28). It

"takes physical and psychic strength to endure an effect" (p. 20). We mutually make

claims and permit others to make claims for sake of the enhancement of the

relationships of all participating members, rather than focus on a particular side of

the relationship (pp. 23-24, 26). Preferable is the term "communal power," supplied

by Paris (Social Teachings of the Black Churches, 107-27), who applies Loomer's

relational power to the tradition of power in the African American churches. Paris'

and Adams' treatments are helpful in that they do not see an either/or choice between

"unilateral power" and "relational power." Intervening power, a unilateral power,

often is necessary to create the relationship and is included within the broader

context of communal power. Rollo May calls relational power, "integrative power."

form, exclusionary power, in which, unlike exploitive power, there is not a direct intervention in the lives of others, yet their preservative power is diminished through exclusion from essential processes of power in the community. It is part of the general flow of the structures of society, yet whether intentional or not it overwhelms those who are on the edge of the community, who are not in the center of power and decision making. Job openings may be known only by relatives of those already employed. An Office of Economic Opportunity workbook once said, "One of the problems of the poor is that they are not in a position to influence the policies and procedures of the organizations responsible for their welfare." We can take that broadly. As the result of this passive perversion, the community and its institutions fail to out their obligations.

Against this structural neglect, an essential aspect of the preservative power of the weak is their ability to work together in resistance to exploitive power. Various weak individuals form a coalition to work as one for a social purpose to overcome their dependency. With numbers and organization they offset an imbalance in economic resources held by the more powerful party.[46] Historically, workers, too weak as individuals to negotiate effectively with powerful companies, have built unions to procure better wages or working conditions. The community organizing movement is an outstanding example of a strategy which empowers by helping low income people realize their united capacity to negotiate their interests.

Intervening power. Power is needed as a barrier to sin. The *preservative* power of individuals and their communities, including networks of mutuality, often is insufficient

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"My power abets my neighbor's power" (Power and Innocence. A Search for the Sources of Violence [New York, Norton, 1972], 100).

46 Emerson, "Power-Dependence Relations," 36-38.

against the magnitude of *exploitive* power. An *intervening* power, our third major form of

power, is also necessary to limit exploitive power. Karl Rahner correctly sees this use of

power as justified as the consequence of the sin to which it answers.[47] When power resources

are broadly distributed, exploitive power is limited sufficiently by the power of being. When

they are grossly maldistributed, those who are weakest--whether peasant or refugee--are

subject to injustice and violence. Where the inner resources of preservative power are

distributed more evenly than the material resources, the psychological and spiritual intrusion

might be thwarted, yet not necessarily with a lessening of the physical assault.

   We have noted that from the biblical perspective human life is one of community.

Power of being includes a supportive network of relationships,[48] a power of mutuality. We

share power with others in establishing and maintaining a community which is just. Through

just community, preservative power overlaps with this third form of power, intervening

power. Intervening power is an inherent part of social living, supplementing the inadequacies

of the preservative power of individual and groups. It could be called "substitute preservative

power"[49] with Christ on the cross as the great exemplar, as Christ defended helpless humanity

47 Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Power," in Rahner, <u>Theological Investigations</u>

   (Baltimore, Helicon, 1966), 4.395

48 Cf. Antonovsky , <u>Health, Stress, and Coping</u>, 116, on the health producing effects in

   resisting stress of networks of stable social relationships and belonging to coherent

   and relatively integrated subculture.

49 This term was the suggestion of a former student, Richard O. Funk. The problem we

   have with our term "intervening" and with "substitute" is that they might imply that

   this form of power is not inherent in human life. The term which we used in earlier

   writings on this topic was "creative power." While creative power related well with

   the concept of "creative justice" and the creational aspects of God's Reign, it did not

from sin, death, and Satanic power. Intervening power stands in the gap between oppressor and oppressed.

Intervening power is creative as it reestablishes power of being by thwarting exploitive power. *Preservative power* is the ability to retain one's created nature and purpose. *Exploitive power* which defeats preservative power is thus evil and an assault upon God's creation. *Intervening power* restores preservative power by defeating or limiting exploitive power.

Intervening power is creative in that its model and source is God.   God in general grace and in special grace reestablishes power of being by overcoming the forces which pervert the creation. God's role as creator continues in the present and is not restricted to the beginnings. God did not grant powers of being and then abandon the creation. God is forming new life and recreating destroyed life. God's role as creator continues in resisting the fallen forces which assail God's creation. God's redemptive acts ultimately are creative as they restore all things so that the glory of God will be known upon the earth.

The center of God's restoration is in the self-giving of God through Christ upon the cross; yet power is not excluded from that process. At the cross, Christ "disarmed the powers and principalities" of the rebellious cosmos which God is overcoming, and Christ reigns until they are destroyed (Col. 2.15; 1 Cor. 15.23-25).

God's creative love is expressed in acts of justice. God is working in history to overcome injustice and all other evil and unbelief, to order to bring in God's final reign where love and justice dwell. In the middle of a passage which celebrates God's creative power in

help the reader recall other distinctions of this form of power. It also was confusing

with the creational foundations of preservative power (which we earlier called

"defensive power").

the earth, mention is made of God's care which is present in the destruction of the power of the wicked.

> Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment. *Light is withheld from the wicked, and their uplifted arm is broken*. Have you entered into springs of the sea....(Job 38.12-16, NRSV).

God's power provides deliverance by shattering the destructive power of the enemy. Yahweh delivered Israel from the power (ya\d) of the Egyptians" (Exod. 14.30-31).[50] Yahweh exerts power as the defender of the poor. God does "justice for the orphan and the oppressed" (Ps. 10.18, NRSV) by "break[ing] the arm [i.e. power] of the wicked" (v. 15) "so that those from earth may strike terror no more" (v. 18). Intervening power provides justice by overcoming exploitive power.   Yahweh empowers the needy to resist this power. Yahweh "stands at the right hand of the needy, to save them from those who would condemn them to death" (Ps. 109.31, NRSV).

God's normal way of exerting power is through human creatures, who are God's lieutenants on the earth. The created being of the man and the woman possessed the power to subdue[51] (v. 28) the earth, thus as God's vicegerent bearing God's image in their power (Gen.

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50 Cf. Exod. 15.6, 9

51 kibs=uha\

1.26-30).[52] This mandate is clarified in the following chapter to be one of service[53] and care[54]

(Gen. 2.15).[55] Carrying out power faithfully is to share in one's human heritage and destiny

received from God.[56] As Jesus taught in his sayings about the greatest being the servant of

all, and as Jesus and Paul demonstrated in their lives, the purpose of power is to serve

others.[57]

    Power is thus a charge of God to use.   The earth to subdue is now the world of the fall.

It is when human justice fails and there is "no one to intervene" that God acts in more direct

and extraordinary ways (Isa. 59.15-18). The proper situation is when the government and

other human institutions are faithful channels of God's intervening power. This was the role

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52 Wolff, Anthropology of Old Testament, 163: kibs=uha\--to apply force so as to have

    something at one's disposal. Tillich indicates that the "struggle of power of being

    with power of being" involves "*all* relations of *all* beings" [italics added]--not

    necessarily out of hostility or neurosis, but as inherent in the structure of being

    (Love, Power, and Justice, 42-43). A nonromantic presentation of frontier life, such

    as O. E. Rölvaag's, Giants in the Earth, makes understandable this conception of

    struggle with power of being in nature, even without personifying it as happened in

    the neurosis described in this striking novel.

53 'a\bad

54   s=a\mar

55 William J. Dumbrell, "Genesis 1-3, Ecology, and the Dominion of Man." Crux 21,4

    (December, 1985), 21.

56 James E. Wood, Jr. "A Theology of Power," Journal of Church and State 14 (1972),

    111.

57 Matt. 23.8-11; Luke 22.24-30; 2 Cor. 4.5, 7; 12.9-10; Jan Lambrecht, "Dienende

    Macht," Erbe und Auftrag 60 (1984), 434-41.

of the judges, by whose "power" God delivered Israel (Judg. 6.36f.).[58] The monarch receives

God's justice to defend the poor by crushing the oppressor (Ps. 72.1-4; cf. Rom 13.1, 4, 6).

The criticism of the rulers in Ezekiel 34 is that they have not strengthened the weak (v. 4).

God will do this through the promised new David (vv. 16, 23).

Power exists not only for the defense of our own being, but also for actions on behalf of

the being of others. In Leviticus 25.35 a person who is poor is one whose "power slips"

(literally, whose "hand trembles") in relation to the rest of the community ("with you").   The

divine mandate is to empower that person (literally, "cause him to be strong" [h≥a\zaq in the

Hiph'il]). In the context the way of carrying out this responsibility is institutionalized as a

proscription on exploitive power: "You must not charge [them] interest on a loan, either by

deducting it in advance from the capital sum, or by adding it on repayment" (v. 36, Revised

English Bible). The purpose is that the needy may regain their preservative power as mutually

participating members of the community ("that your brother or sister may live with you") (v.

36). Sodom was condemned for not carrying out this empowerment of the poor, showing the

universality of this mandate beyond the Mosaic covenantal community or theocracy. The

terminology used is that of Leviticus 25:35: Sodom "did not make strong" (h≥a\zaq in the

Hiph'il) the power (ya\d) of the poor and needy when it had the power to do it (Ezek. 16.49).

As stated in the international wisdom of Proverbs, we are not to "hold back good from those

who are entitled to it, when [we] possess the power to do it" (3.27). Creative power intervenes

in two ways: by limiting exploitive power or by enhancing the preservative power of the

weak.

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58 Exploitive power is overcome by intervening power: Judg. 8.6; 9.16f.

The three dimensions of power are seen in Nehemiah 5, a chapter which provides a specific example of topics which are interrelated in Leviticus 25: loss of land, weakness, interest, slavery. The people, in their plight at having lost control of their lands to creditors, were selling their children into slavery. "We are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others" (v. 5, NRSV). The diminution of their preservative power in the land had led to further exploitive power being exercised against them. Nehemiah as governor interfered on their behalf. He filed charges against those exacting interest, which had led to the loss of lands; and he restored the lands. The government as the intervening power acted against exploitive power to reestablish preservative power.

Resources which are available to community organizing to force changes in the community include the ballot and organizing, which is political power. James Luther Adams has said that the history of achieving freedom is largely the history of effective organization.[59] In addition, honor and prestige are derived from the powerful being able to give what people want.

Intervening power often itself becomes an exploitive power. It must be limited and kept instrumental for creating better distribution of preservative power. Preservative powers themselves, however, when present in excess can be used to dominate others and become exploitive.[60]

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59 James Luther Adams, "The Creative Thrust of Conflict," in Adams, James Luther Adams Papers, ed. H. Vetter

(Unitarian Unirversalist Christian 48, 3-4 [Fall-Winter 1993]), 35.

60 Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness. A

Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defence (New York,

Intervening power, therefore, must be guided and restrained by the principles of justice, to which the Scriptures continually call the followers of God.   Tillich states that justice is but the structure of power. Without justice, power becomes destructive.[61] Justice determines the proper limits and applications of power.   Yet it is these activities which give form to justice so that there is no justice without the exercise of power. "My power [ya\d] takes hold on justice [mis=pat≥]" (Deut. 32.41). "I put on justice. . . . I championed the cause of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made them drop their prey from their teeth" (Job 29.14, 16-17).

Tillich also states that justice is power performing the work of love.[62] Love, as our desire to uphold the defensive being of others, conflicts with exploitive power, so that love requires resistance in the form of power. Biblical justice is not merely a mitigation of suffering but a deliverance from the power that causes it. Moses "saw to it that justice was carried out to the oppressed by striking the Egyptian." God was "providing deliverance" to the Israelites "through his [Moses'] power ['hand' (cheir)\]" (Acts 7.24f.).[63]

Because of its view of human nature, Scripture sees a peril in the lack of power (the lack of preservative power) and in the excess of power (the occasion of exploitive power). Reinhold Niebuhr rightly argued that since social injustice is supported by the self-interests of

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Scribner's, 1972), 113 . Every form of power is "both defensive and offensive; and

no sharp line can be drawn between its two functions" (p. 109).

61 Tillich, "Shadow and Substance," 118.

62 Tillich, 123-24.

63 Cf. 1 Sam. 24.15; 2 Sam. 18.31.

the powerful, it cannot be overcome by appeals of reason.[64] Power is never completely under

the control of reason and conscience. Replacing regulation, inspection, and sanctions against

industrial evils with self-regulation, dialogue, and negotiation is ineffective. Successful

resistance includes power challenging power. Justice must be political as well as rational.

Intervening power, however, must move beyond itself and prepare for participatory

forms of preservative power. An exercise of power must be identified and evaluated by its

purpose, as Adams argues. Such an end is to bring the marginal person into systems of power.

As God brings people into relationship with God and with others in covenantal community, so

intervening power must give way to mutuality, as it brings mutuality into being. The goal is

to bring the powerless into roles of participation in the direction of their lives and

community.[65]

Community organizing can be a very effective strategy for this work of just inclusion.

Philanthropy, welfare payments, even forms of community development while essential are

not sufficient. Power is still in the hands of the giver. Community organizing is a form of

justice to the degree that it brings people into community, or keeps them there. It combines

intervening power and communal power to promote greater communal and other preservative

powers. The result is a creative, innovative relationship between those who have a vision of

the possibility of just community and the social skills and knowledge to implement their

vision, and those who do not but desperately need it but who have a commitment to justice.

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[64] Reinhold Niebuhr, <u>Moral Man and Immoral Society</u> (New York, Scribner's, 1960),

xii, xiv-xv, 21.

[65] Adams, "Blessed Are the Powerful," 840-41.

This type of relationship begins in the church. There preservative power and communal power are enhanced, and then they are brought into the community for change.

Politics needs the church in other ways, however. Politics is limited in its ability to provide solutions to human evils. It can restrain the effects of exploitive power. For the self-willed twistings of preservative power which reject God's purposes for ourselves, politics can do even less; it can only create conditions which are conducive to the power of being. The perversions of power require a transformation of the inner being of both victims and perpetrators of injustice through God's transcendent redemptive power in Jesus Christ. Of this the church is the only receptive human agency.