

Outline: Power Dynamics in a Reconciled Church

- 1) Introduction
 - a) Definition: The capacity of an agent (whether a spiritual being, a human person, a group or an institution) to act in the world and to influence the environment and the people around them.
 - b) Four Kinds of Power
 - i) Individual
 - ii) Interpersonal
 - iii) Institutional
 - iv) Spiritual
- 2) On the Nature of Power
 - a) Power is Derived
 - i) Doctrine of Creation
 - ii) Implication: Stewardship
 - b) Power is Relational
 - i) Doctrine of the Trinity
 - ii) Implication: Interdependence
 - c) Power is Generative
 - i) Doctrine of *Imago Dei*
 - ii) Implication: Sharing
 - d) Power is Ambiguous
 - i) Doctrine of Sin
 - ii) Implication: Chastening
- 3) Power in a Reconciled Church
 - a) A vigilant awareness of power (because it is inescapable)
 - b) A commitment to stewarding power (because it is derived)
 - c) A vision of interdependence as the goal of power (because it is relational)
 - d) Practices of sharing power (because it is generative)
 - e) A chastened posture toward power (because it is ambiguous)

Power Dynamics in a Reconciled Church

Interpersonal Power

- 1) Make a list of the different races or ethnic groups that are represented in your church.
- 2) Which of these groups would be perceived as having more power in an interpersonal, intercultural encounter? (Remember that men and women experience and perceive power differently.) Place them on a “Power Perception Spectrum” below:



Least Power

Most Power

- 3) Read the following and compare with your own reflections:

In reflecting on this sort of interpersonal power analysis, Eric Law reports his observations. He states that the people he has worked with indicate that the power position of white men and women of color tends to stay the same. White men are regularly perceived as powerful while women of color are regularly perceived as powerless. White women and men of color, however, experience a shift in power perception. White women are considered powerful when the interpersonal encounter is defined primarily around race or ethnicity because they are white. But as women, they are considered powerless when the encounter revolves more around gender. The men of color are more in the position of powerlessness in an interaction defined primarily by race or ethnicity, but they are considered powerful as men. Law writes:

“The point I want to make is that in a multicultural environment we need to be sensitive to where we are in the continuum of power perception, especially white women and men of color. Depending on the context, these two groups may be perceived as either powerful or powerless. Therefore, they need to learn to shift between practicing the spirituality of the cross when they are powerful and the spirituality of resurrection or liberation when they are powerless.”

Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*

Power Dynamics in a Reconciled Church

Institutional Power

- 1) Where does institutional power reside in your church (i.e., where do decisions get made?, who sets the agendas?, who frames the vision, teaching, direction, etc. of the church)?

- 2) Analyze the ethnic/racial background of those who hold this institutional power. Is power being shared and used relationally across differences?

- 3) Are all individuals within this empowered body given equal access in discussions, decisions, etc. If not, how can those with more power actively share power and live out interdependence in that body?

- 4) What concrete practices would result if those holding institutional power in your church:
 - 1) were more aware of their power,

 - 2) stewarded their power for the disempowered in your church

 - 3) disavowed independence and strived for interdependence within your church

 - 4) actively shared power believing in its generative nature and

 - 5) had a chastened and cautious view of their own use of power