

POWER, THE POWERS AND A HIGHER POWER

Quaeritur:

Put the bars on the windows and watch out. But who will guard us against those who stand watch over us?

Juvenal VI, 347

Respondendum:

Unless the Lord keeps watch over a city, in vain the watchman stands on guard

..... Psalm 127

I begin by juxtaposing the classical question raised by Juvenal, following Plato, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* and the answer from Psalm 127 which suggests that the transcendent God is the only reliable and sovereign power worthy of ultimate trust. The question of Juvenal proposes a hermeneutic of suspicion about the necessary but almost impossible to achieve limits on and control over power. It operates with a realistic anticipation of an inevitable *abuse* of power by the powerful. The answer by the psalmist implies a cautious affirmation of the possibility of exercising power creatively in human history so long as it is done under God's law and in accord with his purposes.

It will be my contention that varying definitions of power entail differing views of the human person, the social and God. Similarly, I will argue that a purely political, non-religious, understanding of power fails completely to give a satisfactory answer to the classic suspicions contained in the question, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* As James Luther Adams has remarked, "When power is not considered in its proper theological character but only in its political, it becomes demonic or empty, separated from its end. Here power in the end achieves little but its own creation and destruction and thus virtually denies itself as creative."¹ It struts its little hour on the stage of human history in puffery and bellowing, ultimately signifying nothing. It circulates among elites, classes, groups or nations but eventuates in a last state caught in the cynical judgment, *plus c'a change*. Power is never its own justification! A definition of power divorced from theological anthropology and an understanding of the purposes of God, the all-powerful one, is intellectually misleading as a description of the actual exercise of power and gives rise to a praxis of power which is, humanly, destructive.

Since my talk is only the first presentation in a series of addresses dealing with Power as an Issue in Theology and, moreover, an address delivered at night, I have no pretensions about trying to develop a fully-rounded theology of power. In fact, at present no such fully-rounded theology of power exists anywhere. As we will see in a moment, none can in the abstract. Conspicuously missing from my presentation will be the dimensions of Christology which I leave to Brian McDermott's plenary address, of pneumatology which I give over to my colleagues Mary Ann Donovan and Donald Gelpi or ecclesiology which will be dealt with in various sessions by John Galvin, Richard McBrien, and David Power. My own emphasis will be on theological anthropology and the doctrine of God.

¹James Luther Adams, "The Theological Bases of Social Action," in *Being Human Religiously* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 43.

The title of my talk, "Power, the Powers and a Higher Power," implies a similar dialectic to that of Juvenal and the psalmist, a hermeneutic of suspicion and a subsequent but very cautious positive re-evaluation of the place of power in human history. The title also suggests a division of my remarks into three major sections. The first and longest section deals with the issues of defining, locating and evaluating power. In this section I will develop an argument that: 1) power can not be defined substantively; (2) power is an essentially contested notion; and (3) only in God is power as an attribute of all-relatedness (which I take it is the actual meaning of *omnipotens*) unambiguous.

In a second section of my remarks I will try to return to the biblical notion of the principalities and powers as a useful myth for approaching a Christian praxis of power. Finally, in a third section on God as a Higher Power I will contrast God as a candidate for the grounding of a justification and limitation of power with an alternative.

In a sense, as we will see in a moment, my task is inevitably very frustrating. Purely abstract, non-contextual definitions or treatments of power will seem flat and uninteresting. Since power is essentially a relational and contextual reality, it can only be addressed—as Robert Bellah will do for us tomorrow morning—in very concrete contextual analyses of particular societies. For, as Michel Foucault reminds us, power is not a substantive notion. It is always exercised rather than expressed. It is no one's possession. As Foucault states it, "Power in the substantive sense," "*le pouvoir*, does not exist . . . The idea that there is either located at—or emanating from—a given point something which is a "power" seems to me to be based on a misguided analysis, one which at all events fails to account for a considerable number of phenomena. In reality, power means relations, a more or less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations."² In that sense, a full theory of power seems impossible. In its place, we need an analytic of the actual exercise of power in particular contexts.

In the concrete, power is never neutral, abstract or, as Talcott Parsons would have it, a mere means, a "medium of exchange" like money.³ Power, to be sure, like money depends on credit. Power depends no less on creed and credence. Parsons is also correct to see that there is no essence to power. It is a medium that, sometimes, circulates. However, unlike money, power is a medium always directly and concretely tied to human relationships. Thus, it is never morally neutral since no genuinely human relationship ever is.

In the concrete, as Karl Rahner has put it, "Power exists either as the embodiment of sin, egoism, rebellion against God and the worldly impatience of unbelief which refuses to accept the promised glory simply as eschatological gift of the power of God but uses its own might—and hence inevitably brutality and cruelty—to try to force that glory down into this aeon itself and bring it under its laws; or it exists as the effort of faith which knows that power is always unreliable and unrewarding but accepts it obediently as a task from God, as long as he wills."⁴ In the concrete, then, any exercise of power is either a step toward the path of sin and perdition or the embodiment of grace.

²Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

³Talcott Parson, "On the Concept of Political Power," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107 (1963), 232–62.

⁴Karl Rahner, "The Theology of Power," *Theological Investigations* Vol. 4 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 409.

Power is never—except in abstract formal definitions such as that of Talcott Parsons—a merely neutral medium of the social circulation of elites, ideas and transformed social structures. Especially in inter-personal and social interaction, power can never be conceived, following Parsons, as a mere means without simultaneously turning other people into mere means, the “thingification” of persons rightly attacked by Marx. As a relational notion, power always faces the other in her freedom. Power can be over, against, for or with others. Power, an exercise of human freedom and assertion, is pitted against the freedom of the other as either its constriction or enhancement.

DEFINING POWER

The prevailing definitions of power in the social sciences tend to be linear, one-sided and unworthy of human assent. The classic definition of Max Weber, for example, reads: “Power is the probability that one actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” As Bernard Loomer has shown in his D.R. Sharpe Lectures, “Two Conceptions of Power,”⁵ this definition of power is truncated and demonic. It views contests of power as necessarily a zero-sum game where the increase in power of the one entails a decrease in power—and, hence, in freedom, equality and solidarity—of the other. This Weberian view of power subsumes a mistakenly substantive and individualistic concept of the self.

Power in ordinary social science usage is “the ability to influence, guide, adjust, manipulate, shape, control or transform the human or natural environment in order to advance one’s purposes”—whether the actual exercise of power is direct or indirect, coercive or persuasive.⁶ This definition implies that comparative human worth and freedom depend on our relative and quantitative “size”, the magnitude of power we possess. It mistakenly assumes that power is some quality or attribute inherent in individuals or groups. It sees power in linear terms (a one way vector, $A \rightarrow B$) rather than as a mutual and reciprocal relation of two-way causality. It can succeed in this task only by engaging in the fallacy of simple location. But power is never located in or possessed by one entity, be it an individual or group.

One person’s or group’s freedom, self-hood and “size” depend upon, grow out of, interact with and impinge on the freedom, selfhood and size of the other. I am my sister’s keeper as she is simultaneously mine. I am my brother’s empowerer or its opposite as he is mine. My self (and my group’s) identity is an emergent property of relationships. Loomer properly suggests that a linear definition of power is anthropologically misleading since it imputes, falsely, an individualistic and substantive character to the self and its groups. It subsumes a utilitarian notion of power (as in the idea that power is an essentially neutral means to be judged by its purposes) which is demonic.

Moreover, prevalent social science definitions of power explain a genuine phenomenon, i.e. that we never or rarely relinquish power voluntarily, by encouraging the de-humanizing notion that power is essentially a zero-sum game. In so explaining and defining, linear views of power sustain and nurture selfish-

⁵D. R. Sharpe Lectureship on Social Ethics, mimeo available from The Divinity School, University of Chicago.

⁶Loomer, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

ness, the unregulated conflict of interest with interest, will with will. They suggest a view of power and, therefore, of human existence caught by Michel Foucault in his pregnant inversion of Clausewitz' aphorism that power is warfare carried on by other means: *homo homini lupus*. Nor is it by chance that these linear social science definitions of power imply an essentially voluntaristic decisionist world. Much of modern social science, following Weber in this, is polytheistic. The clash between values and the conflict between gods can only be settled by force and power. We have returned to the world of Thrasymachus.

Against this view, Loomer hears back to the older classical concept of Plato in *The Sophist* who held that the definition of Being is simply power, both active and passive power. As Loomer sees it, "The capacity to absorb an influence is as truly a mark of power as the strength involved in exercising an influence."⁸ In this view, "Power is the capacity to sustain a relationship. This is the relationship of influencing and being influenced, of giving and receiving, of making claims and permitting and enabling others to make their claims."⁹

Loomer's proposed model of relational, mutual power assumes that selves and groups are primarily relational, emergent and social realities. Power is a correlate and a measure of both freedom and community. Mutuality replaces linearity so that the one-sided vector ($A \rightarrow B$) is always also ($B \rightarrow A$). In this understanding, contests of power need not be seen as zero-sum games. Moreover, the magnitude of one's power, in this second view, consists in "the range and depth of relationships that we can sustain," including relationships of receptivity and even suffering, rather than in the size of the probability that my will will effectively shape the others' actions, even against their will.¹⁰

Loomer's view of power as relational, mutual and reciprocal corrects the one-sided individualistic and utilitarian notions of power regnant in the social sciences. It also shows a correlation between an adequate notion of the self as a relational and emergent social reality (both product of society and reciprocally creative agent) and an adequate concept of God, the all-related one. God is related to all of Being, nature and history both as the active source and ground of present existence and lure to future, creatively emergent forms of Being, Nature and History, and also as the passive recipient and guardian of the effects of the freedom and autonomy ingredient in created Being, Nature and History. God gives and receives, is active and undergoes. God is a *process* and—as Trinity—essentially a *relation* in his very being and substance. God is all-powerful precisely because he is all—and, appropriately—related to all being, nature and history. In God, as in humans, power is not a one-way linear relationship but a mutual, although not in any way equal or univocal, reciprocity of freedoms. God's relation to creatures flows from his initiatory freedom and calls out to their freedom to be, to be secure in their being and to become more. The free God shares his freedom with his universe so it can become more and, ultimately, become united to him and to its parts in community. Power is relation. As Loomer notes, the more relationships we can sustain, the more truly powerful we are, the more like to God as well.

While Loomer's theological anthropology is a corrective to one-sided

⁷Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, p. 67.

⁸Loomer, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

linear views of power, he conspicuously neglects the reality of sin. For, in fact, the exercise of power is, often, the continuation of war by other means. Thus, there is a certain idealism in his understanding of power as mutuality and reciprocal empowerment in freedom. In a fallen world, as Karl Rahner notes, there is "a sort of power which ought never to have existed." This power is coercive power or force—whether exercised by authorities or in resistant freedom to the authority's abuse of power. It is defined by Rahner as "a certain self-assertion and resistance proper to a given being and hence its innate possibility of acting spontaneously, without the previous consent of another, to interfere with and change the actual constitution of that other."¹¹ The key phrase in this description is, "without the previous consent of another." There is in human history a kind of power, never exercised by God, a constraining power of assertion of resistance which does not wait upon, as God's power always does, the free assent of the other.

Rahner trenchantly notes that coercive power "can only be asymptotically moral".¹⁵ But against all idealistic conflict-free notions of power as pure mutuality and reciprocity, respectful of the freedom of the other, Rahner also realistically champions freedom in a fallen world. Against all utopian visions of freedom always waiting upon the willing freedom of the other, Rahner acknowledges, despite its dangers and the merely "asymptotically moral" character of its exercise, the sometimes legitimate resort to coercive force. For, as he strongly asserts, "Power which on principle always had to wait on the consent of those affected by it, would not be power at all!"¹³

In a helpful contribution, the psychologist Rollo May in his book, *Power and Innocence*, distinguishes five different forms of the exercise of power:

1) *Exploitative Power*: This form of power depends on physical force or coercion. It involves power *over* the other. It is, by definition, a species of domination. But May notes that only an illusory innocence would deny such power in society.

2) *Manipulative Power*: Manipulative power is a variation of exploitative power which uses psychological means to attain power *over* the other. Both exploitative and manipulative power involve domination and inequality.

3) *Competitive Power*: Competitive power looks to a fair fight among equals in a contest of power *against* power, will against will. Relative equality of status is the essence of genuine competition in games, economics and politics. Otherwise what seems to be competition, in the absence of relative equality, is really a domination.

4) *Nutrient Power*: Nutrient power, like exploitative or manipulative power, involves inequality of status in the parties to a relationship. Nutrient power is neither power *over* nor power *against* but power exercised *for* the benefit of the other. It is, for example, paternal power exercised on behalf of children or custodial power of the severely psychologically or physically handicapped—in short, power exercised *for* those who lack adult, conscious responsible freedom. While nutrient power can be beneficial, we should also be suspicious of its many abuses as in psychiatry and the management of various social welfare

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹¹Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 401.

¹³*Ibid.*

agencies. Here, especially, it is worth remembering Yves Simon's reminder that paternal exercises of power *for* are essentially substitutional and must look to their own eventual withering away.¹⁴ Power *for* children, for example, envisions their gradual but eventually complete coming into adult freedom.

5) *Integrative Power*: Integrative power is cooperative. It envisions complete or general reciprocity in freedom between parties to a relationship. Neither power *over*, power *against*, or power *for*, integrative power is power *with*.¹⁵

The virtue of May's scheme is that it illustrates the essentially relational character of power. Moreover, it is couched in quasi-moral terms of approbation (integrative and nutrient power) and condemnation (exploitative and manipulative power) as a reminder that every concrete exercise of power has a moral character. It also suggests that power is not a univocal relationship. The disadvantage in his scheme is a certain idealism which backs away from most forms of coercive power. As a map of power, it reminds us that any exercise of power can be ranged along a continuum in which one pole looks to the complete respect for the freedom of others, while the other pole involves the coercion of others, even without their consent. One pole assumes relative equality in the power of those in relationship, the other inequality. Although still too simple, May's map suggests several of the important values (freedom, equality) necessary for evaluating any exercise of power. Community and solidarity would be obvious other values to be included.

In summary, then, since effective freedom in a fallen world would be powerless as assertion or resistance if it always had to wait on the consent of those affected by it, not all coercion is immoral, although it remains a limit case, the merely "asymptotically moral". Power is always relational. As Rahner notes, "In the actual order of things, the exercise of power . . . is not irrelevant to salvation: it is a process either of salvation or perdition".¹⁶ Any given exercise of power looks to freedom, its expansion or constriction. It looks to mutuality and equality or their opposite. Integrative and genuinely competitive power are relatively unproblematic morally. Nutrient power can sometimes be abused. It is also a provisional substitute for those who lack as yet responsible adult freedom.

Coercive power is a form of power which ought never to have existed. It does not exist in God. In a fallen world, coercive power can sometimes be justified as the essential correlate of genuine, even if fallen, freedom. Max Weber is ideological when he stipulates that only the authorities may legitimately resort to coercive force. For this definition denies effective resistant freedom to those outside the structures of authority. By mere stipulation, this definition conjures away the possibility of posing the classical question: *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* In a fallen world, acknowledgment and acceptance of a conflict between wills, interests and powers is necessary if we would genuinely champion freedom. Finally, no one except God is all-related, in both receptivity and actual causality, appropriately to all Being, Nature and History. This all-relatedness is the root meaning of God being all-powerful. Every creaturely exercise of power is essentially ambiguous. Thus, as Rahner notes, to intrude on

¹⁴Yves Simon, *Nature and Functions of Authority* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1940), p. 23

¹⁵Cf. Rollo May, *Power and Innocence* (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 105-21.

¹⁶Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

the freedom of the other by an exercise of power always remains full of risks. Even when the risk is legitimate, the Christian will exercise power "conscious that what he does remains subject to the dialectic of history, never fully succeeds, is always somewhat thwarted and is always intrinsically part of that life which bears death within itself."¹⁷ Because we are not all-related, our exercise of power always bears something of sin and tragedy about it. It is only asymptotically moral.

As we will now see, power is an essentially value-laden and contested concept. Moreover, a consistent hermeneutic of suspicion alerts us to hidden forms of power lurking behind appearances. To develop these points I want to turn now to the issue of locating power. To do so, I will use the work of Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault. But first I want to end this section on the question of the definition of power by citing Foucault's remarks about power in his book, *The History of Sexuality*: a description or map rather than a definition of power; a reminder that power is as much the property of systems as of persons; and that only a concrete analytic and genealogy of power relations in a particular society rather than a general theory of power is possible. "Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations, *immanent* in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as *the process* which through ceaseless struggles and confrontations transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or *system*, or, on the contrary, the disjunctions and *contradictions* which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the *strategies* in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is *embodied* in the state apparatus, in the formation of the law, in the various social hegemonies."¹⁸

Immanence, process, system, contradictions, strategies and multiple embodiments are underlined by me in this citation. Thus, "One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt [about power]: power is not an institution, not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society."¹⁹ Because power is immanent in the sphere in which it operates, it is often hidden. Because power is neither a thing nor an institution—indeed, it is a multiplicity of force relations constituting both sometimes a system and sometimes disjunctive contradictions—Foucault can assert that "power is omnipresent in the social body because it is coterminous with the conditions of social relations in general."²⁰ If power can not really be defined—although some attempts at definition, as we saw with Bernard Loomer, are anthropologically misleading—it can "perhaps" be located.

THE LOCATION OF POWER

Power is omnipresent in the social body such that no one can ever really be "outside power." So-called marginalization is itself the result of power arrangements. Nevertheless, we properly try to locate special concentrations,

¹⁷Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

¹⁸Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 92–93; italics mine.

¹⁹Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, p. 75.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 246.

hegemonies or centers of power. Steven Lukes in his study, *Power: A Radical View*, complements the analysis of Foucault by pointing to the connection between "locating" power and attributions of responsibility.²¹ Although, in fact, as Foucault argues, power is largely a property of systems and structural determinations and contradictions, we tend, quite justly, to assume that there is an element of relative and varying freedom within social systems such that the special responsibility of certain actors or groups for or over social systems can be located. In locating responsibility, we also locate power.

Lukes develops this relation between locating power and the concept of responsibility:

The use of the vocabulary of power in the context of social relationships is to speak of human agents, separately or together, in groups or organizations, through action or inaction, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others (specifically in a manner contrary to their interests). In speaking thus, one assumes that although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently. The future, though it is not entirely open, is not entirely closed either (and, indeed, the degree of openness is itself structurally determined).²²

In Lukes' view, "to identify a given process as an exercise of 'power' rather than as a case of structural determination is to assume that it is in the exerciser's or exercisers' power to act differently."²³ Like power, itself, the concept of responsibility is an essentially contested notion. But no adequate theological anthropology can dispense with the concept of responsibility in the face of certain positivistic social science notions of "determinism" and "fate." Salvation in this world consists precisely in breaking open determinisms and "fate" to a more open future, a future pregnant with more humane possibility than the present. Note this is never a completely open future. God acts in history not to remove all structural determinations but to break the lockhold of "fate" such that a more humane possibility presents itself as grace and real social possibility. This real possibility, despite all structural determinations, is what Paul Tillich calls *kairos*.

At issue in locating power in social systems is the assumption that certain social actors or groups could have acted differently and where they were unaware of the consequences of their action or inaction could have ascertained these. Lukes argues in favor of attributing power to those in strategic positions who are able to initiate changes that are in the interests of broad segments of society but do not. Following C. Wright Mills, Lukes claims that it is sociologically realistic, morally fair and politically imperative to make demands upon individuals or groups "in" power and to hold them responsible for specific courses of events. As power and freedom are correlative notions, so are power and responsibility.

The catch lies in the proper moves in the locating of power. Lukes develops a hermeneutic of suspicion against the ordinary social science views of locating power. He shows the inevitable biases in the positions of pluralists in political science such as Robert Dahl and Nelson Polsby who deny any notion of a power elite. By restricting their research into power to the question of who

²¹Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (New York: Macmillan, 1974).

²²Lukes, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 89.

prevails in cases of overt conflict and by focusing on the re-creation of actual, observable contests of power, (e.g. voting), the pluralists neglect hidden power. As Lukes notes, the pluralists mistakenly assume consensus whenever there is no overt conflict.

But the most pervasive power is not usually overt. Indeed, by an ancient law of political science, when power becomes naked, overt and seen, it is already in jeopardy. In this regard, Lukes notes that "A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants".²⁴ If we penetrate behind appearances, a second layer of power emerges.: "Power is also exercised when [someone] devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous" to his interest.²⁵ He or she continues to control the agenda—through the media, control over information or the instruments of socialization—in such a way that certain demands are effectively prevented from ever becoming political issues or even being publicly made. The absence of overt conflicts does not entail implicit consensus. It can paper over a manipulated and coerced consensus where power is exercised, massively but not in the open, to prevent people from doing or sometimes even thinking certain possibilities.

One of the virtues of Lukes' radical view of power lies in his consistent hermeneutics of suspicion. A second is his reminder that the very definitions of power (differing according to whether they are Liberal, Reformist or Radical) are themselves exercises of power. Lukes comments, in this regard, that "both its very definition and any given use of it, once defined, are inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions which predetermine the range of its empirical application. . . . Moreover, the concept of power is, in consequence, what has been called 'an essentially contested concept'—one of those concepts which inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users. Indeed, to engage in such disputes is itself to engage in politics."²⁶

Language, in defining the world selectively, including and excluding, is a political tool. In this sense, Lukes would agree with Michel Foucault's reminder that knowledge and power are correlatives. Power seeks to constitute forms of knowledge. But by classifying and "normalizing" knowledge, in its turn, serves to constitute our reality. Knowledge is a form of power, neither politically nor morally neutral.

On its part, Foucault's hermeneutic of suspicion also reminds us of the mistake of getting lost in a fascination with overt exercises of power as if prohibition, censorship or negation—repression or ideology—were the ordinary or favored tools of power. The repressive hypothesis mistakenly suggests that liberation is a fairly easy task. But power does not primarily repress. It positively constitutes our reality. "If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 26.

fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."²⁷

Real and pervasive power, then, may not be perceived at all or as repressive. It surrounds us as the air we breathe, the world we take for granted, the reality which seems most real. A radical view of power must be able to step back from the prevailing social system (in a contrast experience such as the experience of overt victims of the social system; contrast provided by familiarity with another social system or a marked contrast with God's law and purpose for power). Such contrast experiences allow us to maintain that some people's perceived wants may be themselves a product of a system which works against their deepest and genuine interests and values. Those interests and values can not be determined empirically but only in a normative and, ultimately, religious vision of power serving freedom, justice and love. Before turning to this vision, I want to push our hermeneutic of suspicion of power even further by appealing to the biblical notion of "the powers that be."

THE POWERS

The New Testament witnesses to a notion of "the powers" (δυνάμεις or ἐξουσιαί) which has been often dismissed as a species of medieval angelology. This is a mistake. I want to summarize, very briefly, what I take to be the heart of the biblical notion of the powers and to suggest how it might function as a further hermeneutic of suspicion about power.²⁸

In the Near East, power was linked with gods and gods were associated with particular nations. Gods, in their turn, were inextricably linked with politics, that is, with real political systems and the conflict of empires. The existence of alien deities, powers other than JHWH's power, confronted Israel with a theological dilemma. How could JHWH be all powerful if there were also these other powers, palpably not of him? Sometimes syncretism and sometimes suppression were used as devices to deal with this dilemma. A typical solution to the dilemma of powers not of God, however, was to use the device of subordination. Thus, in many of the psalms, for example, JHWH presides over the council of many alien gods (cf. Ps 39:1; 104:4; 82). These alien powers became, in the biblical view, God's retainers and retinue. Importantly, however, they were not always subservient to him. They did not really become converted.

When the New Testament takes up the idea of the powers, it subsumes and builds upon this Old Testament view of the powers subordinate to God. It also continues to stress their political role. The powers are God's creatures, indeed (Col 1:15-17). Yet, they are fallen and rebellious to God (Eph 2:1; Gal 3:1-

²⁷Foucault, *Power and Knowledge*, p. 119.

²⁸I am richly indebted for this section of this essay to an unpublished essay of James McClendon, "Social Ethics" as well as to standard works on "the powers" in the New Testament such as Martin Hengel, *Christ and Power*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); George Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956); and Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, tr. John Howard Yoder, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1962).

11). It is possible to identify the powers with empire and its Lords. (Rom 13:1-4). Jesus, in his mission, is seen as in radical conflict with these powers. His conquest over the powers is proclaimed by Paul in Colossians 2:15: "On the cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and then led them as captives in his triumphal procession."

In the Gospels, Paul's abstract powers and authorities become very concrete persons and institutions, the human rulers of the state and temple. Jesus' conflict with the powers is against Herod, Caiaphas, Pilate and the demonic forces which cause madness, sickness and temptation. Jesus' conflict against these subordinate yet still fallen powers consists in his healing, forgiveness, the gathering of community, his submission to the cross and his triumph over the cross in resurrection. In short, Jesus confronts the powers by exercising power in a new way, by engaging in a politics of truth.

In the New Testament, Jewish Christians apply the critical judgment on the powers not only to alien powers which interrupt and threaten their own society from outside (as the heathen gods threatened and contested the power of JHWH and Israel). They also apply the critical judgment to the very religious structures of their own society (sacred power) and to the protecting but persecuting superpower of Rome (cf. Rev 13).

Note that in this New Testament view while the powers are overcome and made subordinate to Christ they are not destroyed, abolished or ever fully assimilated to Christ. There is not any Christianization of the powers. As God's fallen creatures whose very being is sustained by God and whose power is mitigated by Christ, the powers remain in their ambiguous state as rebellious, fallen and unredeemed until the end of time. What this means for Christians is that just as JHWH subordinated alien gods who still remained rebellious and Christ encountered the powers, defined concretely in the gospels as particular agents and structures, so the followers of Jesus will, until the end of time, encounter powers which are not of God. There is a structure of power which is not amenable to conversion. In confronting these powers, Christians will need to take up crosses of their own.

This very brief and truncated view of "the powers" in the New Testament reminds us that there are created, essentially rebellious and not redeemed, vanquished but not to be discounted powers whom Christ confronted and continues to confront. In this New Testament view, besides individuals there are structures, orders and forms of existence which embody a power not directly from God. In the end, perhaps, as Ephesians notes (cf. Eph 3:10; 1:10) Christ's ultimate conquest of the powers will be their restoration from fallenness rather than their abolition or replacement with other structures. Meanwhile, the question we have to pose for ourselves is, "What are the created, rebellious, vanquished but not to be discounted powers that we confront?" Quite clearly, they are the political, economic, cultural and religious structures, the social structures which engage our lives. They are the systems by which we are confronted. In this sense, we too must move from a mythical or abstract notion of power as a general concept to the concrete embodiments of fallen, unredeemed power in our own situation just as the gospels translate the Pauline notion of the powers into concrete narrative, drama and history. Here the movement involved is not unlike that of our earlier movement from Foucault's stress on power as an im-

manent process of systems, contradictions, strategies and multiple embodiments to the difficult but indispensable task suggested by Lukes, of locating power and, hence, attributing responsibility.

In proposing a biblical hermeneutics of suspicion about a power not of God, still fallen, unredeemed until the end which is implicit in the New Testament notion of the powers, I am not arguing that Christians should hold aloof from all power. Indeed, as John Howard Yoder has put it, "The community will not ask whether to enter or escape the realm of power," since, willy-nilly, it no more stands outside power than any other creature. Rather it will ask, "What kinds of power are in conformity with the victory of the Lamb?"²⁹

In an appeal to this New Testament doctrine of the powers James McLendon has recently remarked, "No one should, on Christian grounds, abandon hope in the costly work of witness to the structures of society or indulge in a non-selective antipathy to whatever any government anywhere proposes (the latter is mere doctrinaire anarchy, not Christian witness)."³⁰ Still, suspicions are warranted. For as McLendon goes on to say, "It is vital not to suppose that when rulers become church members, *the conversion of the great power over which these rulers preside has already taken place*, for in the case of the Roman empire that naiveté was exceedingly costly to the on-going kingdom of God—as the post-Constantinian wedlock of church and empire proved again and again."³¹

It must be admitted that if power does not always corrupt, there is something mysterious about relationships of power when viewed in the light of the human insecurity of individuals and groups, human greediness, the conflict between being and non-being in which power is an ambiguous medium. Here a metaphor of Bertrand de Jouvenel, the French political philosopher, is enlightening as he traces the inevitable greedy and expansionary nature of power in the military, the state and technology. De Jouvenel notes that "the tendency of power is towards occupying an ever larger place in society."³² He refers to power as a devouring minotaur. Like freedom, like Being itself of which power is a correlate, power is expansive. Unfortunately, power can serve as a surrogate for the less accessible freedom and being and, in so doing, substitute an accumulation of power for a genuine growth in freedom and being.

The radical ambiguity of power consists also in the need for power in any group to become organized, whether formally or informally, around centers of power. Power can never be equally distributed without social harm. Centering of power, accumulation, is necessary for decisive action. Thus, power increases as one approaches the center and decreases as one moves away from it. This very necessity of social inequality in power, of centering in order to act, however, raises the issue of control over this centering tendency for power. Here it will always be salutary if we attend to the mysteriously expansionist character of the minotaur, if we continuously press the ancient question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

De Jouvenel states well the ambiguity of power.

²⁹John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 28.

³⁰McClendon, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

³¹McClendon, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

³²Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power* (Boston: Beacon, 1962), p. 15

Power has two aspects, of which sometimes the one and sometimes the other is the more present to men's minds, according to the character and situation of the on-looker . . . It is a social necessity. By reason of the order which it imposes and the harmony it creates it enables men to attain a better life. These services rendered by it have made so great an impression on the majority of writers and the idea of a governmental vacuum has filled them with such horror that in their conception, no foundation could ever be dug too deep for the rights of power.

It is also a social menace. It is not a thing of reason but a living complex animated by a dynamism which impels it to take over the forms developed already in the human congeries under its sway, that it may use them to its own purposes. The basic condition of all political science is to see Power stereoscopically from both angles.³³

It would be my contention that we need some notion of the mystery of human sinfulness as more than mere finitude, limit or ignorance, some such myth of power as a minotaur or the biblical myth of fallen, unredeemed, rebellious yet subordinated "powers and principalities," some concept of a non-essential yet permanently present historical drift of human history in the direction of a "power neither of God or of reason." Some such mythic notion may be the anthropological pre-requisite if political and social science is to see power steadily and stereoscopically from both angles. It would also seem necessary, if power is to be limited and constrained in its expansionary course, that it remain tied to an understanding of its subordination to a higher power, the transcendent God.

A HIGHER POWER

Because of limitations of time, my third point will be only briefly noted. My argument will be quite simple. In the history of the West there have been two main attempts to radicate power in creeds of wider or transcendent justification. The classical and biblical positions saw God's power and sovereignty as both a limitation and an entitlement to power. This view rejected any radical asceticism in the face of the material order of the concretely political. It rejected, as well, the cynic's notion that all power is evil. While recognizing steadfastly that there are powers not of God and maintaining a radical hermeneutic of suspicion of sinful power and the sinful drift of even legitimate power, the Christian view still maintained that, in some sense, power could be of God, from God and toward God. It recognized that, in Paul Tillich's terms, "Being without a power structure means being without a center of power"—and, therefore, without an effective self, a viable community and genuine freedom.³⁴

Because God is all powerful, we who are not can, nonetheless, share in the power of God. The limitation on power comes from its radical source and ground. Our exercise of power must strive to approximate to God's all-relatedness, in both active causality and receptivity to all being, in calling out to the freedom of others to be and become more, in putting our power to work in furthering the world-historical purposes of God's powerful action in history. Those purposes are stated by James Luther Adams. "The power that is worthy of confidence, the power that is alone reliable has a world-historical purpose, the achievement of righteousness and fellowship through the loving obedience of its creatures." As Adams sees it, "where true community is being formed, there the divine power is working".³⁵

³³*Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁴Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 97.

³⁵James Luther Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

Some key to understanding this true community is found in Paul Tillich's small classic, *Love, Power and Justice*. Tillich reminds us that power exists to create a community of love whose form is justice. As he puts it, love is a passion which includes also the passive quality of receptivity. It eschews merely linear power. Justice involves a claim on the basis of the power of being. Finally, "The basic formula of power and the basic formula of love are identical: separation and reunion or being taking non-being into itself."³⁶

The second strand of justification in Western political thought involved an appeal to the direct and full sovereignty of the people, the general will. The people is not always right. Besides the obvious danger of an oppression of the minority by the majority, this second justification and appeal has notoriously failed to serve as a check against abuses of power. It is unable radically to answer the question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* since it has forgotten the necessary refrain of Psalm 127. In the first instance, it is a fundamental voluntarism which lacks any way of grounding substantive law or liberty. It lacks also a view of utopian community. In the final analysis it cannot warrant full respect for persons in its majoritarian justification. It inevitably operates out of utilitarian premises. Also, almost inevitably, even in the democracies, the justification of power by the general will alone has eventuated in some clique (be it a party apparatus, a class, multi-national corporations, the apparatus of the state, an elite) speaking or acting "in the name" of the people. Ultimately, this second justification for power is unable simultaneously to provide both a consistent hermeneutics of suspicion and a cautious but positive, non-cynical, re-evaluation of power and its purposes. Looking at the results of trying to ground power in a general will which knows neither civic love nor substantive notions of justice, Bertrand de Jouvenal states in melancholy terms: "We are ending where the savages began. We have found again the lost arts of starving non-combatants, burning hovels and leading away the vanquished into slavery. Barbarian invasions would be superfluous. We are our own Huns."³⁷

When one looks at power as an issue for theology one needs also to turn the tables. It has been my contention that theological anthropology can provide a resource for limiting, suspecting yet cautiously and effectively embracing power. It grounds a view of the human which does not need to flinch from the realization that "Power is neither angel nor brute but like the human person herself, a composite creature, uniting in itself two contradictory natures."³⁸ A Christian theological anthropology with its doctrine of the powers would clash against individualistic understandings of power. Most of all, God's all-relatedness, in both receptivity and active freedom calling out to freedom and community, can serve as an ideal and lure for the humane exercise of power in freedom. As Tillich so finely put it, "Love, power and justice are one in the divine ground, they shall become one in human existence."³⁹

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³⁶Tillich, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³⁷De Jouvenal, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 283.

³⁹Tillich, *op. cit.*, p. 108.