POWER AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity.

—Martin Buber, *I and Thou*[1]

My stepsons love to tell the story of how the younger boy, when he was three years old, ran pell-mell up to a giant saguaro cactus in the Arizona desert standing with its arms outstretched. He threw his arms around its middle in a bear hug. My husband and the older boy were horrified and rushed to him, expecting to be confronted by a frightened and crying human porcupine. But Adam was just little enough to have avoided the large stickers. He turned to them in amazement at their worry and with a broad smile on his face said, "The cactus likes me!"

What a wonderful world it must seem to three-year-olds who can still see and respond so spontaneously to the Thou in every living creature and feel themselves to be in real communication with plants, animals, waves, even rocks. This is akin to the seeing of native shamans all around the world, and is a respect, wonder, and expectancy that is born into everyone and that is only slowly eroded as we are civilized.

This capacity for deep seeing, this deep *faith* in the sacredness of all living beings, is not something we have to work to acquire. On the contrary, I believe it is something inherent in human consciousness. But we do lose it—or, rather, we lose access to it. It remains stored, but often buried under layers of conditioning that cause our conscious selves to forget. Remembering or "re-membering"[2] our sense of interconnectedness with all life is usually regarded as the eccentric activity of mystics—or lunatics.

This chapter begins with Martin Buber's well-known affirmation of the primary human longing for relation, for an unmediated encounter with a You.[3] All the abstractions and uses to which people put one another, and even subjective inner experiences of the other, constitute some manner of objectification, an I-It encounter.[4] He writes:

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.[5]

Buber did not address gross acts of violence or social oppression in *I and Thou*. Yet, the subtleties and complexities of interpersonal relationality that he explored lay

a foundation for understanding human violence on a larger scheme. Heeding our own innate yearning for I-You relating, and resisting the many social and systemic forces that press us from all directions toward objectification, is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian commandment to love God and neighbor. We yearn for mutuality and unmediated connection. "In the beginning is the relation."[6] In these words of Buber, Christians may also be reminded of John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What is the *Logos*, the divine Word, if not a reaching out and toward, a primordial first spark of connectivity?

This chapter addresses two interlocking themes that help to define and analyze the nature of violence against women: relationality[7] and power.

First, through the lens of Buber's *I and Thou*, we can understand violence against women—and violence more generally—as the annihilation of connectivity, the dulling and erasure of human relationality through objectification. Tamar's story is a poignant, even wrenching, example of a woman who yearned for I-You connection, who offered care, and who met unlove with reason and respect. And yet she was treated as property passed from hand to hand, cast out, and finally disregarded, *somema*, wasted.

Second, an exploration of I-It relating and its consequences leads to a discussion of power. Exploitative power and objectification go hand in hand. Tamar's story has taught us that violence against women is primarily a matter of power (especially political power and the power of property), not sex. The fact that her story is told in a biblical framework of salvation history also suggests that the saying coined in the rape crisis movement in the 1970s—"Rape is power, not sex"—is fundamentally a theological assertion.

Before the specific forms of violence against women and our pastoral response can be explored, it is essential that the question of power be addressed. Perhaps one of the reasons the church has been slow to take up the issue of violence against women as an issue of power is precisely because it has not yet come to terms with—even recognized—the extent and the limits of its own power, nor has it yet entered fully into the theological and ethical questions pertaining to a nonabusive understanding of power, both human and divine, in the world.

Power is an enormous and complex subject, and any brief discussion will necessarily be partial.[8] Nevertheless, some theological and ethical groundwork concerning the subject of power must be set down before an examination of the question of violence can be meaningfully undertaken. This will lead, in turn, to some suggestions for alternative understandings of power as nonabusive and for a basis for community that is built on accountability, relationality, and care.

I, Thou, and It

Sadly, the view of the world through the eyes of a three-year-old gets lost as we grow up and become used to a very different (often tacit) ethic. Our yearning for connection may be innate, but the *construction* of connection—how we go about achieving relations—is learned from our social context. Business as usual in our world encourages us to forget this sense of interconnectedness and to regard others as It's. Our entire social and

economic structure depends upon the *use* of the It—regarding plants, animals, people, and the earth largely as consumable resources. This way of life, however, is now being caught up short by the dawning realization that none of these resources is in inexhaustible supply. Our abuse of them has not only resulted in extinction of species and pollution of the entire planet, but has also endangered our way of life and even our very survival.

Violence as Control and Loss of Connection

Our loss of connection with the world and with other human beings is also at the center of violence against women. In a battering relationship, just before the actual physical violence occurs, the batterer calls his partner a name.[9] There is a moment of decision, when the man consciously crosses the line and hits (or kicks or chokes): "You . . .."

One common belief about domestic violence, rape, and other forms of assault on women is that somehow the man momentarily loses his head. As long as our Western civilization has existed, for example, there has been a lesser punishment for men who killed their wives in a so-called crime of passion, usually justified as being committed in a fit of sexual jealousy. In English and American jurisprudence, such crimes have been designated with the lesser charge of manslaughter, which is defined as killing someone, but without malice. Frequently this is determined by the presence of so-called mitigating circumstances—that is, those in which any "reasonable man" would also be likely to kill.

But the man does not really lose his head. (If this were true, then why does he manage to beat only his wife and not others who anger him at work or other settings? How is he capable, in the course of supposedly losing his head, of battering only in ways that do not leave marks, or targeting certain parts of her body only—her pregnant belly or her breasts?) Rather than losing his head, the abuser makes a critical shift in perspective, no longer seeing her as a human being, equally precious as himself, but only as an object to be manipulated—from a Thou to an It. The epithet he hurls at her becomes the key that opens a passage for him into a violence that in his mind at that moment seems justifiable.

The fact that wife beating and the lesser charge of manslaughter for killing one's wife as opposed to one's neighbor were long accepted as a cultural norm, says more about the consensus of men over the decades regarding the possession of women as objects than about the ethical truth. Violence against women is connected to all other forms of violence, just as all living beings are, in reality and in spite of our forgetfulness or callous indifference, interconnected. We are confronted daily with the many forms of violence in our world. We often end up feeling that our powers are fragmented, as one worthy cause after another is lifted up for study, fundraising, or volunteering. We have a great agenda for social reform but are often overwhelmed by the myriad social problems confronting us. What is needed is a way for understanding how, from a personal and holistic perspective, all violence is one.

All violence begins with the personal, with the I, and with a point of decision, a crossing of a line, where each of us chooses momentarily to view another living being as an It rather than a Thou. The ultimate purpose of each act of violence, each reduction

of another person from a Thou to an It, is to control the other. All violence begins with the objectification of another person. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, drawing on Buber, has proposed that the face of the other—that precious manifestation of the other's uniqueness and vulnerability—by its very nature calls us to ethical accountability to that other.[10] When we truly look into the face, into the eyes of another person, we are called to care for that person as a subject (a fellow "I"), a "Thou" deserving of our utmost compassion and respect. For Christians, this is our baptismal call to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being."[11] Our choices matter, even on what seems like a small scale. They have resonance in the universe. When we truly see another person or living being as a Thou, we cannot dominate or control them. We then must enter into a different kind of covenant, where power is shared. This is the "universal reciprocity" that Buber recognized as mysterious, connected with the divine.

Impersonal Messages

Just as a critical moment of objectification occurs when a husband batters, a labeling or name calling (spoken or unspoken) happens before every violent act in our world. Racist epithets usually emerge at the start of wars: Krauts, Japs, Gooks. Similar labels have been concocted in neighborhood turf wars when new ethnic groups would move into cities and towns during the natural unfolding and movement of generations: Micks, Dagos, Wops, Spics, Hymies, Niggers, Coons, Towel heads.

All are familiar with the terms children bring home from school, either as victims or as perpetrators of schoolyard bullying and violence, terms that usually echo multiple forms of racism, heterosexism, sexism, or able-bodyism: ho, bitch, fag, dyke, cripple, retard. We learn to label in self-defense against those who would label us. Well trained from childhood experiences, name calling is carried into adulthood—Communist, right winger, hippie, liberal, feminist, fundamentalist. Political campaigns have become increasingly uncivil, including imagery of hunting targets superimposed on candidates' faces,[12] and racist portrayals of candidates, for example images of President Barack Obama manipulated to resemble Osama bin Laden.[13] Female candidates are subject to blatantly sexist imagery, for example, nutcracker dolls of Hilary Clinton with the captions: "Is America ready for this nutcracker?" "Stainless steel thighs!" and "Cracks toughest nuts![14]

The desensitization used, for example, by the military and media during wartime and practiced by all to decry or label others can lead to a lifelong desensitization to cultural and personal violence. A recent study has shown that within the military, the willingness to kill a fellow human being has increased dramatically in the past sixty years, with "firing rates" rising from a range of 15 to 20 percent during World War II to 90 percent in Vietnam.[15] This is attributed to "programming" or "conditioning" to a "war-fighter mentality," a "gung-ho" killing mind-set that is actually considered to be counterproductive in a "winning hearts-and-minds" doctrine of counterinsurgency, and has led to numerous murders considered war crimes by the military itself.[16] Further, there is an explicit connection between violence and sex in the indoctrination of soldiers to

be a "lean, mean fighting machine." As Susan Thistlethwaite has written, the boot-camp chant "This is my weapon, this is my gun / One is for shooting, the other's for fun" demonstrates how sex

> becomes a vehicle for overtly denying embodiment by asserting dominance over it, and the need of the lonely, stressed, and vulnerable recruit for relationship remains unacknowledged. The need itself, however, does not go away but gets reconfigured as power and dominance through the use of force. Sexuality and relationship then get constructed as violence.[17]

Such conditioning extends far beyond, and much earlier, than the training of military servicemen. According to one study, our youngest children watch an average of twenty-seven hours of television each week (with numbers as high as eleven hours each day in inner cities). Based on these figures, an American Psychological Association study concluded that children witness an estimated eight thousand murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence before finishing elementary school.[18] A *TV Guide* study conducted during eighteen hours (6 AM to midnight) on April 2, 1992, in Washington, D.C., tabulated 1,846 individual acts of violence; 175 scenes in which violence resulted in one or more fatalities; 389 scenes involving "gunplay"; 673 depictions of punching, pushing, slapping, dragging, and other physically hostile acts; and 226 scenes of menacing threats with a weapon.[19] In fictional programming, the study found more than one hundred violent scenes per hour. Children's cartoons were the most violent program form, with 471 violent scenes per hour.[20] A number of nationally sponsored studies concur that violence on television does lead to more aggressive behavior by children and teenagers watching the programs.[21]

Children are not only passively exposed to violence on television. They are actively initiated into committing hundreds of symbolic acts of violence every hour "playing" video games. A video game, *Mortal Kombat*, released by Sega Genesis, includes a feature in which the action stops and the computer says to the player, "Finish him." By entering a code, the player then causes the character who is winning on the screen to rip off the head of the opponent, pull the spine off the body, and hold it up triumphantly, dripping blood.[22] In other so-called games the same manufacturer has released or is developing, half-naked women are pursued by zombies and raped and murdered, with sexual acts graphically depicted using filmed images.[23] In *Night Trap* (withdrawn after congressional hearings on video violence), digitized video images of real teenage girls are stalked and killed by hooded assailants[24]—manipulated by players using joysticks. In 2007, Mystique released *Custer's Revenge*, a game for the then-popular children's game system Atari 2600, in which a naked General George Custer moves through a battlefield to win a tied-up, large-breasted Native American woman wearing a feathered headband, and rapes her.[25] Such media are not going away any time soon. In June, 2011, the Supreme Court struck down a California law outlawing the sale of violent video games to minor children. The California law defined banned games as those "in which the range of options available to a player includes killing, maiming, dismembering or sexually assaulting an image of a human being" in a way that was "patently offensive," appealed to minors' "deviant or morbid interests," and lacked "serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value." Suggesting that the games were comparable to the level of gore in Grimm fairy tales,

Antonin Scalia wrote for the majority in deciding that such material was constitutionally protected as communicating ideas, even social messages, through features "distinctive to the medium."[26]

Drawing Connections

One of the great blessings of the church is that we insist on drawing the connections among persons and valuing each as precious as the next. For example, many of us have held the hands and gazed into the eyes of Salvadorans who were no more than targets for pilots of AC-37 fighter planes. Without the concern and involvement of North American churches, we might never have known the extent of the violence in El Salvador and other embattled countries.

The act of remembering (or re-membering) one's connectedness to all life has grave political consequences. Some time ago, I attended the first-anniversary celebration for a village named Panchimilama. The village had been reclaimed one year before, with the help of the local Lutheran church, by *campesinos* who had earlier been driven out by bombings in the region. That day, the chapel was dedicated and eight infants were baptized. How disturbing to learn that one year later, this village was surrounded by soldiers who pelted the inhabitants with grenades. The same week, the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in San Salvador was bombed, and its offices were leveled to the ground. Bishop Medardo Gomez continued to receive death threats for carrying out the basic Christian mandate to minister to the poor. Like many other church leaders, he was called names, such as *subversivo* and *comunisto,* by the death squads. During the 1980s he often had to live apart from his family and even, briefly, in exile out of the country altogether, but he insisted on returning to El Salvador, building the humanitarian mission of the church. He refused to be bullied out of the country, but he knew that it might have meant his death.

The I-Thou relationship is not simply an attitude of love toward others—although it is that—but also actions of making connections and actively working for justice. Had not hundreds of delegations of church people traveled to places like El Salvador and South Africa, meeting people and making friends with them, sharing their ministry, standing in small and large ways against oppression, a sense of I-Thou relationship would be no more than a vague commitment. It would be all too easy to say, "Well, that's just the way things are down there." The press reports little of what actually happens in two-thirds-world countries,[27] and when they do, it may seem distant and abstract, an It. But the gospel message that is the great ethic of our faith is that we do reach out across borders and across cultures, both within the United States and abroad, and we honor the millions of Thou's of every race and creed whom we recognize as our brothers and sisters throughout our neighborhoods and throughout the world.

Examining Aggression

How easy it might be to romanticize the I-Thou moment of connection as something that good people simply choose before they attempt to stamp out I-It relations as hurtful. In 1922, the same year that Buber published *I and Thou,* Sigmund Freud was completing a different book, but with a similar title, *The I and the It (Das Ich und Das Es,* more commonly

translated as *The Ego and the Id*).[28] Aggression, Freud maintained, is a core aspect of the structure of the human psyche from infanthood.[29] The most primal passion to survive within each of us, our internal It (or in Latin, our *Id*) begins with that primitive part of our psyches that demands to have its needs met heedless of others. This internal It cannot respect the selfhood of another. Because it is pre-Ego, pre-I, it knows no I *or* Thou. It is incapable of sharing.

Far from ignoring or pretending that we have all risen above our inner It, our inner aggression or even violence, we need to acknowledge that it does, indeed, exist. Repressed into the unconscious, the internal It can wreak havoc unless it is brought into the light of conscious insight. We need to begin addressing violence, both in the microcosm of our households and the macrocosm of the whole human family, by courageously facing it within ourselves. We need to nurture our own ability to recognize another person as a Thou, and catch ourselves when we start to objectify that other into an It. In this way, we will all begin to be more comfortable with the complex challenges of sharing power, honoring differences, and entering into relationships with an open-mindedness toward being changed.

Freud's construct of the human personality was essentially pessimistic. He saw the normal narcissism of the newborn infant as a basic foundation of human nature. There is no question that this primary narcissism is a part of our personality structure, which we only partially successfully contain, for the most part at an unconscious level and very early, for the sake of interfacing with the world and surviving with other human beings. However, what Freud failed to see fully was the spark of universal connection, also present from birth—that spark that imbues early childhood innocence with a zest for relationship, a willing and eager trust, and an indomitable (at least for a while) sense of "yes!" to life. Aggression itself, when channeled constructively, can be understood as a force for creativity and life.[30]

One of C. G. Jung's significant contributions to the study of the psyche was precisely in his acknowledgment of this transpersonal dimension, which he thought moved through the larger Self (much larger than the conscious ego) via the "collective unconscious," the accumulated deposit of human species wisdom encoded deeply, and largely in symbolic form, in the human mind since the dawn of humanity itself.[31] He even considered the possibility that this transpersonal dimension, which when tapped gave one an oceanic sense of well-being and interconnectedness with all life, could be continuous with the divine.[32]

Seen in the perspective of honoring each person as both an I and a Thou, the Golden Rule of Jesus—"Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31; Matt. 7:12a)—is not simply a legislative *quid pro quo* ethic that maintains basic civilization, but it is deeply personal and relational. As other human beings are viewed as Thou, a sense of the deep interconnection is evoked. We begin to share the Native American wisdom that respects not only all other human beings, but also the animal world and our environment, the earth, as Thou and not It. We are beginning to realize that by "having dominion" (Gen. 1:28) and holding power over other people, animals, and our environment, we have ended up exploiting them, destroying them, and using them up. As North Americans, every time we visit a two-thirds-world country we realize how rich in material things we are. Each of us can find new Thou's in our midst to honor: every time we let the water run or buy clothes made in a two-thirds-world factory, we

participate in an "It" way of using the world. We are in desperate need of learning new, harmonious ways to live—ways that can only be learned by a conversion of perspective, a *soul* conversion, from I-It to I-Thou. Our survival depends on it. We are pushed by an I-Thou ethic beyond the simple notion of loving the neighbor as one's self, even beyond Jesus' sharpening of that commandment into loving one's enemy, the one who is different, challenging, even attacking us. We are pushed to view every creature in the whole creation—both animate and inanimate—as a Thou, and then to transform our relationships accordingly. This is not easy, heaven knows. We all struggle with this simplest yet most radical gospel imperative: to love God, neighbor, and even enemy unconditionally, as God loves.

Rereading Tamar's Story

Amnon from the beginning sees Tamar as an It: "It seemed impossible to Amnon to *do* anything *to* her" (2 Sam. 13:2). He plots to get her alone with him entirely for his own interests, and without regard to hers. Even after she reasons and pleads with him, he "would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her" (13:14). Absalom, too, it seems, thinks of Tamar more as an It than a Thou. When she returns to him weeping after the rape, he tells her to hold her peace. Nevertheless, in Absalom's case, there is some indication that he sees the humanity of his sister. She is referred to four times as his sister, even his "beautiful sister," emphasizing their relationship, and he himself addresses her as "my sister"—although negating her voice at the same time, by twisting Amnon's relationship as "your brother" into grounds for suppressing justice for the sister: "Now, hold your peace, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart" (13:20).[33]

Amnon, too, calls her "my sister," but only *before* the rape. This form of address becomes a ruse in Amnon's mouth. He is interested not in relationship, but in use. Once the rape is over, he shows his true nature: "Put *this woman* out of my presence" (13:17).

David, too, apparently regards Tamar as an It, while he clearly loves and sees his sons as Thou's. David goes to see Amnon when he hears that he is ill. He sends Tamar to minister to him—she is used merely as a tool for bringing about Amnon's recovery. Later he is "very angry" when he hears "of all these things," but there is no record of his calling Tamar to him for consolation or even a full report. In the whole story, it is only Absalom whom he addresses as "my son." We never hear him address Tamar as "my daughter." Finally, it is the deaths of his sons that make David weep. The rape and eventual death of his daughter is not worthy of any response, at least in the historical record.

It is Tamar who consistently regards both her brothers, as well as her father, as Thou's. She trustingly follows her father's request to bake cakes for Amnon. She brings the cakes near to him without questioning. As soon as Amnon asks her to lie with him, her very first words are "No" and "my brother." She goes on, arguing her case like an equal, appealing to his reason. She concludes by reminding herself and Amnon of their larger context of relationship and acknowledges the authority of their father by naming him with his title: "Speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you" (13:13). Finally, after the rape, she continues to appeal to his relationship with her. Again, she says, "No, *my brother*, for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other which you did to me" (13:16). But he would not listen to her and had her put out, using the

words "this woman,"[34] denying their relationship and robbing her of the dignity that such relationship might have at least partially redeemed. The label *this woman* does not mean "this person" but, rather, "this property" (now used and to be discarded). Tamar goes into the unlit night of historical oblivion, without ever having lost sight of the Thou's in relationship all around her—her last days are spent in the house of her brother Absalom. Thereafter she is like so many women in history, a derivative being, with only her brother as a point of reference for her identity. She is reduced to a label, an It, a voiceless and desolate woman.

The Interconnectedness of Oppressions

The Power Shuffle is a dramatic exercise that is often used in workshops or classes on violence against women.[35] This exercise was developed by a small, visionary group of women and men as part of a larger program for unlearning racism, sexism, and homophobia; prevention education with young people of all races; and rehabilitative education for batterers and men working to stop their violence. The exercise begins by asking all the workshop participants to move silently to one side of the meeting room and to remain silent throughout. As various categories are called out, those people who identify themselves as belonging are asked to cross the room. They turn and face those remaining, and then after a moment are asked to walk back to rejoin the group.

One by one, the categories are called: "If you are a woman, please come to the other side of the room." "If you have ever been called fat." "If you or anyone in your family have ever had a mental illness." "If you are Latina or Latino." "If you grew up in a family where there was alcoholism." "If you are black or African American." "If you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual." "If you grew up poor." And so forth.

The accumulated effects of these (and many other) separations and exposures, however voluntary, build in the silence. Participants are moved from initial unease and hesitancy, to fear, shame, anger, both personal and vicarious, and even despair at the gulfs between people. There are moments of guilt when people sometimes feel that they have had to stay too long on the seemingly safe side. There are also moments of liberation and defiance and pride as people claim their past, their identities, their uniqueness, their solidarity with others across the line. Few people are unmoved by the experience.

Afterward, a long period is spent, at first more quietly and privately in pairs of participants, and then as a whole group, reflecting on the feelings evoked by the experience. Then the theoretical basis of the exercise is shared. The categories that were called out in the exercise all have one thing in common: they represent groups that in our society are systematically targeted for oppression, or *target groups.* The participants then construct a chart of target groups and their counterparts, or *nontarget groups,* on the other. Privilege and power generally reside on the nontarget side of each category (see Table 1.1).

One of the most common objections to the experience is that it seems to create more divisions between people, and that they feel their separations from each other when, especially at such a workshop, their attention is especially tuned to moving toward unity and togetherness. The exercise evokes a powerful sense of frustration about the

artificial separations that are imposed daily in our world and into which we are born—separations that serve no other purpose than keeping the various ranks on the power pyramid in their proper place.

TABLE 1.1: OPPRESSION AND TARGET GROUPS

NONTARGET/POWER	TARGET
men	women
white	persons of color
adults	under 25 and over 60
boss	worker
normal	developmentally disabled
Christian	Jew or Muslim
heterosexual	gay/lesbian/bisexual
rich/upper-middle class	working class/poor

A deeper basis for hope, however, emerges through an experience of a new form of connection, even though the initial feeling is that of separation. Nearly everyone finds himself or herself variously targeted, depending on the category that is called. Although the false unity by which we all sometimes try to remain optimistic, that "we're all in this world together, we're all the same," is disrupted, it is replaced by a fragile but deeper sense of real hope—a sense of empathy and compassion based on real common ground.

Even though the various forms of oppression have different, specific effects on the targeted groups and individuals, at a deeper level all oppressions are linked to maintain a pyramid or hierarchy of unequal privilege and access.[36] Most of us know personally what it is like to be on the targeted side. Thus, while we do not any longer assume we know the particulars of another person's experience, we do share the feelings of having been disempowered simply by virtue of who we were and are. On this shared experience, we can build a bridge.

The targeting system is maintained by violence. Children in the schoolyard learn either to beat up or be beaten. Deeper than physical bruises, however, is a psychological learning. The name calling of the schoolyard—which is the same I-It objectification described earlier—is carried into adult life, only in more subtle ways. Stereotyping, which insists on attributing certain traits, usually negative, to those on the target side, is not only learned at a young age by those on the nontarget side but is also internalized by those on the target side. So women as well as men come to believe that women are less logical, poor at math, poor at mechanics, and so forth. Blacks as well as whites come to believe that blacks are slow, lazy, violent, primitive, and more criminal. Gays and lesbians as well as straight people come to believe that they are sick for being attracted to the same sex. This internalized oppression—often born of the necessity for self-protection, even survival—is more insidious even than overt acts of oppression by those on the nontarget side, because it undermines the health, wholeness, and self-esteem

of people on the target side from within. It accounts for the subtlest and most difficult obstacles to overcoming oppression: the woman in the parish who "just can't see" a woman as her minister; the fearful and closeted gay man who writes an editorial on the sin of homosexuality.

We all suffer from this social system. Nobody voluntarily chooses to be on one side of the chart or the other, at least not initially. We are born into most of the categories, or they happen to us because of aging, illness, or accidents. We suffer in several ways. We are set against each other, so that it is difficult to see any common ground. Our sense of horizons is limited, so that we accept that current injustices are natural or inevitable (for example, taking the following phrase out of its context in Matt. 26:11) "the poor you will have with you always." We use reverse logic to justify oppression: "It's proof that blacks are inferior because there are so many more of them in prison," instead of asking what it is about our system that causes that inequality. This limits our relationships, because we tend to be segregated and stick with our own "kind." Ultimately we forget that we all need and are entitled to certain basic rights: good health care, stimulating education, and challenging work.

The workshop continues with addressing the question of bridging the many rifts between people. It is not a theory of quick fixes, like sharing ethnic foods, singing "Kumbaya," or even making personal friends with people of another race or sexual orientation—although spending more time together is certainly an invaluable prelude to understanding. It is a theory of *building alliances*, forging partnerships across lines of power and privilege for the sake of shared advocacy for social change. This goes deeper than a promise of support or politically correct rhetoric. It requires a conversion of heart that recognizes solidarity in and across difference.[37] It calls for deep self-reeducation and sacrificial listening when we find ourselves on the privileged side of the line, and self-empowerment and claiming of authority when we find ourselves on the side targeted for oppression.

Imagine a radiant, laughing, loving three-year-old, arms flung wide, saying "yes!" to life. We are born with natural curiosity, warmth, trust, and kindness. Prejudice and oppression, both externalized and internalized, are *learned.* And they can be unlearned. Unlearning racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, able-bodyism, and all the other -isms requires effort on the part of those on the nontarget side. It is not the responsibility of the targeted groups to teach their nontarget counterparts. It is not their job to take care of those on the target side in yet one more way.

The goal of those on the nontarget side is to become allies. An *ally* is a member of a nontarget group who educates him- or herself about the target group and is willing to help make changes in ways that he or she wants to have happen. An ally does not set the agenda for change or reform for the target group but, rather, listens to what priorities and needs are expressed by those who know the experience of injustice from the inside out. To be an ally is challenging work: taking risks, making mistakes and admitting them, staying open to dialogue even though it sometimes hurts. There is no shame in having misinformation—the system has guaranteed that we all will be misinformed about one another. The responsibility an ally assumes is in being willing to give up those misconceptions.

Who participates in alliance building? Because virtually everyone is now, has been, or will be at some time (if only by aging) a target of some type of oppression, and

because virtually everyone is now or has been or will be at some time in a nontarget group and therefore in the position of power over others, alliance building is for everyone. The effect of alliance building is to interrupt oppression. Allies cease being It's and become Thou's in each other's (and their own) eyes.

This training model is not without certain difficulties. It can tend to reify labels *oppressed* and *oppressor* even as it speaks about alliance building, mutual empathy, and the elimination of objectification across lines of privilege. Also, although the analysis in this model addresses cultural institutions and systems, the method still tends to be largely personal or interpersonal, and may inadvertently psychologize violence that is social and systemic and therefore beyond individuals' good intentions or even capacity for greater consciousness.[38]

The proposed solution, alliance building, is therefore a complicated matter. It is not accomplished by simply teaching individuals to listen better to one another, although that certainly is a prerequisite for any true mutuality. No one individual can represent the aims, experiences, and agendas for social change of an entire oppressed group. Anyone who has been engaged in social-change work for any length of time knows of the changing and often competing agendas promoted by individuals claiming, often out of genuine concern, to speak for an entire target group. Conversely, to pretend that, as a white woman, I have nothing to say to another who is, say, an African American woman—that I can offer no challenge or disagreement because this other is African American—can incarnate another form of racism. Treating another with kid gloves is not mutuality. How can the basic premise of this antioppression training model, which is to mobilize empathy and relationality toward building alliances across lines of privilege and discrimination, actually be applied to creating larger, systemic change?

I-Thou-We: A Paradigm of Accountability

Wherever the sacredness of the I-Thou relationship is destroyed by exploitation, violence, or abuse, the power of relationship as peers is replaced by a dominating power. Tamar's story presents this picture of power—power that is equated with raw force, dominance, and violation. Dominating power presupposes and requires for its existence an I-It way of regarding other living beings. It feeds on objectification.

Even knowing about these outcomes and the costs, and despite our best efforts and intentions, we fail time and again to maintain an I-Thou relationship with others and with the world. We need a larger container to hold and reinforce our efforts and intentions to be in I-Thou relation. This container is *community*, creating a third dimension of "we-ness" to the sacred dyad of I and Thou.[39] Beyond the I-Thou pair there needs to be a "holding environment,"[40] which acknowledges all thoughts, feelings, and impulses, and at the same time reinforces I-Thou mutuality while containing or restraining I-It aggression. Accountability to community becomes the safeguard of mutual care and justice, in some sense providing a loving parental frame for both encouragement and healthy limits. This accountability to community itself, taking the role of parent, replaces the paternalistic and authoritarian parent-idol of unaccountable hierarchy that has dominated social structures for at least four thousand years.

I-Thou-We also acknowledges that God is not only in the sacred interaction of the I-Thou pair but also surrounds the pair and transcends their particular binary unit. Although Buber primarily develops the twofold conception of relation, he hints at this mystery. True community must be built of subjects, not objects. Buber writes:

> Two basically different notions are confused when people use the concept of the social: the community built of relation and the amassing of human units that have no relation to one another—the palpable manifestation of modern man's lack of relation. The bright edifice of community, however, for which one can be liberated even from the dungeon of "sociability," is the work of the same force that is alive in the relation between man [sic] and God. But this is not one relation among others; it is the universal relation into which all rivers pour without drying up for that reason. Sea and rivers—who would make bold to separate here and define limits? There is only the one flood from I to You, ever more infinite, the one boundless flood of actual life.[41]

God is not only in the I and in the Thou but also in the We. God stirs us all to love and justice precisely in the matrix of the We—a loving web of connections that both includes us and reaches beyond us as far as the limits of the universe. The We is the *matrix*, literally, the *womb*, of all our being and all our relationships. Accepting the language of God as the "ground of our being,"[42] then the matrix of the We is God's womb, the warm and spongy place in which we are held and our creativity is fed. The capacity of each individual to grow, have impact, and create is both nurtured and also mediated within the larger context of all the other individual beings' unique impact, growth, and creativity.

What, then, brings about social change, especially if social change is understood to be more than a matter of purely personal I-Thou commitment and empathy between individuals? How is I-Thou-We relationality nurtured and contained through community accountability? This brings us back to the question of power.

Power, Consciousness, and Mutuality

Power in the most fundamental sense is the power of the "I" to be able. The English word *power* derives from the Latin word *posse*, "to be able," from which we also derive *potency* and *potential*. This already implies the basic dilemma of community: How can we honor and satisfy the capacity of each I to do while at the same time honoring and mediating the complex striving of so many unique selves?

In psychologist Rollo May's terms, the *power to be*, basic to every infant's survival, is the knowledge that one can make an impact and feel one's own significance.[43] This is tied up with the power of self-affirmation and the power of self-assertion as well. May, in fact, draws the conclusion that what he terms the *power of aggression* and the *power of violence* emerge or erupt when the power of self-assertion is repeatedly blocked and denied expression.[44]

How do we exercise that power to be and to do in the context of an enormous society of others who also must have the freedom and the space to be and to do? What happens when these powers come into conflict? I believe the answer lies in our innate

awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. The expression of our individual powers is tempered by our conscious and intentional awareness of our interconnectedness. In May's words, "the future lies with the man or woman who can live as an individual, conscious within the solidarity of the human race."[45] Neither the individual nor the solidarity is sacrificed in this picture. Our consciousness of the other, of the Thou, is as much a part of our own inner voice as our awareness of hunger, thirst, or sexual desire. Chronic hatred and fear are learned. Other beings become It's through our social conditioning, but we are born with the capacity to relate to all creation as a Thou.

Owning our own personal power is essential to any real mutuality. Mutuality is not equality, not sameness.[46] Mutuality involves empowering each other to find and express what each can truly know and do, each one's unique contributions, not the dulling uniformity of the lowest common denominator. Differentiation of this sort threatens a falsely built unity that depends on merger and the suppression of disagreement. But by integrating disavowed anger, competition, envy, guilt, and fear, much greater power to do and to be is freed and released. Violence, ultimately, comes from not trusting and not believing in one's own power to do and be. It is only out of fear that one must control others, whether in overt or covert ways.

There is tremendous power in the integrity of one's own vision held in the awareness of solidarity with all life. This is the power of the cross. Being willing to surrender even life itself rather than surrendering the authentic power of self-in-compassion led Jesus to the cross, but also to resurrection.

Our language to describe power is impoverished by the narrowness of our culture's understanding of it.[47] We need new words, a new terminology to express the richness and complexity of this dimension of human relations. One response to this need has been a threefold typology of power that has been gaining consensus in feminist circles, articulated most succinctly by Starhawk:[48] *power-over* versus *power-within* and *power-with.*

Instrumental, utilitarian I-It ways of relating lead to only one kind of power, the currently predominant understanding of power as *power over others.* I-Thou ways of relating break down and melt this dominating view of power, replacing it with mutuality, justice, and care. This is a different kind of power, *power-with,* traded and shaped together through negotiation, struggle, and mutual concern and respect. Implicit in *power-with* is the power of the self, the authentic voice of the I, or true self.[49] This is *power-within,* the charisma of the individual. Not until one's own self-authority is acknowledged and claimed can one enter into true mutuality. To expand Starhawk's paradigm, this might be called *power-owned,* to indicate a conscious claiming of one's power-within.

An I-Thou-We framework extends this even further—power is not only owned and then shared, but also held within this matrix of community, a matrix of accountability, of containment and checks and balances. Here we need what I am calling *power-in-community,*[50] which recognizes the power that is *beyond* the individual and the relationship. This power enters the realm of the prophetic, which holds both individuality and relationality and transforms them into something much larger—something that finally approaches what Jesus referred to as the "kingdom of God."

My own understanding of power-over, power-with, power-within, and power-owned—with power-in-community as an overarching category that embraces the other forms of power—both draws on, and also departs in some significant ways, from the threefold typology that gained consensus in some feminist circles in the 1980s and

'90s. In order to enter into dialogue with this view, it is first necessary to describe the logic and purpose behind it.

A Feminist World History of Power as Power-Over

Feminist scholarship regarding power begins with a view of world history. This issues in an indictment of the normative understanding of power in Judeo-Christian civilizations for approximately four thousand years—dating back to the earliest establishment of a culture that was both monotheistic and patriarchal—as the power to manage and control others.[51] Power in this normative sense means power-over, to "have dominion" or, literally, lordship (Gen. 1:28). The more people and creatures under one's care and authority, the more power one has. The worldview that accompanies this understanding of power is a Darwinian one of the world as an arena for struggle, striving, and competition. One is either over or under. One defends one's own self against rivals and defends those more vulnerable who belong, as it were, to him or her, while striving to stay on top. This understanding of power, however well disguised under a veneer of sophistication and social etiquette, is based on a harsh anthropology of eat or be eaten, an anthropology of fear. Power in this worldview is associated with virility, potency, masculinity, and even biological male sexuality, as revealed in our language: "the thrust of his argument," "a penetrating analysis."

This view is not confined to an analysis of ancient history, which anthropologists and archaeologists can study at a distance. Even though many huge changes have occurred in terms of technology, culture, and specific forms of government over four thousand years, and although vast cultural variations exist between different countries and continents, many feminists point to a prevalence of modern patriarchal systems operating with an understanding of power as the power of dominion over others.

Caution needs to be taken regarding the universalizing inherent in some versions of this view. The temptation to homogenize different cultural systems of male-female relating and arrangements of power is considerable. This approach can function ideologically or reductionistically, and not reflect adequately the experiences of women and men, real subjects, even in different patriarchal cultures. This being said, patriarchy does prevail in a variety of ways in the modern world and appears deeply resistant to change.

The word *patriarchy* often causes alarm in church circles. We want to believe that women and men can and should be in relationship and partnership together and that men are simply human beings, some nice and some not so nice, but human beings nonetheless who as a group should not be blamed for the world's social and political distresses. It is helpful to make the distinction that to name patriarchy as the prevailing structure of power is not to blame individual men or to question most men's good intentions.[52] More individual men than not do not find themselves in lofty positions on the power pyramid and, in fact, feel quite powerless.[53] To name patriarchy for what it is, however, is to point out that, even in the twenty-first century after over one hundred years of reforms intending to grant more rights and more access to women and people of color, the vast majority of government officials, senior corporate executives, tenured university professors, high-ranking military officers, and senior church officials worldwide—the leaders of the main social institutions of government, business, education, the military, and religion—are men and, specifically, heterosexual white men. These

facts are not in dispute. What becomes controversial is when this entrenched system is called to our attention and dredged up from the realm of unconscious acceptance, and the question is raised: Is this right? This question, after so long being ignored or suppressed, has deeply disturbed the world and, like a major earthquake, has caused deep fissures in the structure of the pyramid.

Power and authority, both for and over others, have for four thousand years been largely unquestioned as fitting hand in glove. In Judeo-Christian cultures, power is understood as distributed along a pyramid, upon which sits one God (whether Yahweh or the Christian triune God) at the pinnacle; below God come the ruling (male) government officials, (male) priests, and their (male) prophets (today, read advisors), all under "His" (read God's) direct orders; and then come the rest of the people generally distributed according to their social and economic status. Status has been defined differently in various centuries and locales, but the result has nearly always been that women, children, and serving-class people of whatever age and gender have been heaped near the bottom. Beneath them, scarcely noticed, are animals, plants, and the earth itself. The lower beings on the pyramid support the life of those higher up. Those lowest are cultivated, used, and exploited for their resources with little or no acknowledgment or compensation. Below a certain line (usually defined by gender, age, race, or serving-class status), beings always have been regarded as the property of those above the line. They are used, used up, and abused.

Power-Within and Power-With

From this analysis, feminist writers have sought to deconstruct and dismantle this notion of power as power-over. Power-over is recognized as death dealing, both for individuals and for the planet. The proposed alternative is to affirm power as power-within and power-with. Unlike power-over, both power-within and power-with are formulations of power intended to embody mutuality, justice, responsibility, and care.

Power-within is the power of one's own inner wisdom, intuition, self-esteem, even the spark of the divine. Theology that values power-within is joyfully incarnational, celebrating the inherent goodness or "original blessing" implanted in the human being,[54] not preoccupied with human sinfulness but, rather, with human goodness and inspiration. It is an *enthusiastic* theology, in the etymological sense of the word: *en-theos*, "God within."

Tamar demonstrated this clear, God-given power-within when she resisted Amnon's attack. In her valuing of her own powers of reason, in her learned argument, and in her attempts to salvage some dignity and respect even after the rape occurred, Tamar remained true to her own spiritual center and her own knowledge of her value as a human being. She managed this even while Amnon was relentlessly trying to reduce her to the status of an object. In the midst of a traumatic situation, Tamar respected herself with acts of resistance. She tore her robe and put ashes on her head. She went away, crying aloud, to let the world know of her innocence, her outrage, and her grief.

Power-with carries the dignity of power-within into relationship. Power-with is the power of an individual to reach out in a manner that negates neither self nor other. It prizes mutuality over control and operates by negotiation and consensus.[55]

It is Tamar's faithful and consistent relating to her father and her brothers as Thou's, in spite of being endangered, objectified, unheard, and uncared for by them, that characterizes her relational stance as one of power-with. Although her options were limited by her time and culture, she approached them with dignity and dignified them in all her responses. The rupture of right relationship lay in the refusal of these men to meet her power-with stance in mutuality. Where she brought power-with, they met her with power-over. She was silenced both by the men in her family and by the historical record. But her commitment to a different kind of mutuality in relationship was never completely erased.

Limitations of the Threefold Typology

The understanding of power-with and power-within is a liberating and necessary alternative to power-over. The act of identifying these two forms of power, whether with this particular terminology or something similar, is a courageous act of reclaiming forms of power that have been largely unacknowledged or devalued by the dominant culture.

Much work has been needed in deconstructing the paradigm of power as power-over and beginning to recognize and defuse the destructive messages of oppression, both external toward other groups and internalized toward ourselves. While we are still immersed in patriarchal culture and structures, however, it is nearly impossible to envision anything beyond it. The work of deconstruction is demanding, even exhausting.[56] It is the work of a lifetime, because the messages of oppression are so deeply ingrained. Is it too much to say that maybe we are all "racists [etc.] in recovery"? Like the alcoholic who achieves sobriety, we can find ways to make our behavior healthier, but we can never eradicate all the messages of unhealth. It is disheartening and disturbing how early and how deep they are planted, and our awareness can sometimes lead us to despair. Deconstruction seems at times to be our only hope.

Perhaps for this reason, because so much energy is still needed in deconstructing the paradigm of power as power-over,[57] there has been little success as yet in constructing an actual workable alternative. Often, feminists (especially white feminists) have tended to shy away from the exercise of any explicit sort of authoritative power in women's organizations, experimenting instead with models that are largely collective and leaderless.[58] A few theoretical frameworks have been developed, including one by Starhawk based on her typology of power-within and power-with, as exercised in a collective with central coordinating function(s) but with no traditional leadership, and Riane Eisler's social vision of a "partnership way."[59] The goal of such models has been to discover a way toward a more mutual exercise of authority.

It is complex and troubling to work on the constructive rather than the deconstructive side of the problem of power-over. It is easy to see the perils of a dominator understanding of power, because they are more blatant and because our world produces many examples, to our continual shame and horror. The damages of power-over in modern times range from the mildest forms of interpersonal harassment and petty exploitation to evils as global and incomprehensible as genocidal massacres in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and the Nazi Holocaust. They include acts of war against entire nations motivated by the desire to maintain and protect a capitalist-consumer way of

life, and the stockpiling of weapons of planetary catastrophe in the name of maintaining dominance as a so-called world power.

More subtle forms of abuse are also real, however, even in a collective social structure, yet harder to see. The constructive task of envisioning an authentic, just, and caring exercise of power is elusive, prone to both subjectivism and sentimental idealism.

Existing proposals often run the risk of falling into a largely untested utopianism, although they carry the seeds of a promising new paradise of mutuality and justice for all.[60] There are aspects of both peril and promise with all three forms of power: power-within, power-with, and power-over.

The danger of overemphasis on power-within is solipsism: mistaking the voice of one's own neurosis or simply the more limited view of one's conscious self—in Jungian terms, the little ego—for the voice of the Self with its larger wisdom. Scars of old wounds can impede and block the free circulation of the human instinct for good, just as internalized messages of prejudice and self-hatred can also distort our perceptions. "The human being has an infinite capacity for self-deception."[61] When this inner voice moves into the ethical arena as the governor of our choices and actions, can we really always access our inner wisdom to know what is healthy and right? Can we really tell the voice of our inner wisdom from the encoded voices of our parents, our peers, our society, and our own ego defenses? Or, in the more traditional religious terms, can the notion of sin, as defined as alienation from God and from each other, be quite so easily dismissed?

Also, when the power-within of one person seems to shine out and enthrall others, there are clear dangers if such charisma is neither healthy, caring, nor just. At the outer extremes, such power-within as charisma can lead to cult violence, ending in tragedies such as the Branch Davidian inferno or the mass suicide at Jonestown,[62] or terrorist acts inspired by radical leaders like Osama bin Laden, resulting in the deaths of thousands in New York City, Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001.

On the other side of the power spectrum, *power-with* seems like a natural opposite to power-over and clearly has greater potential for mutuality and intimacy. In rejecting a dominator model, one sows seeds for nonviolence and revalues process as having as much value as tasks, goals, and outcomes. There are dangers here, too, however—dangers that have been felt by many in feminist and other collective organizations. There is a largely unacknowledged dimension to purely collective models for sharing leadership and authority, which is the banishment of open anger and an inability to tolerate direct disagreement. A longing for niceness, agreement, and mutual love can result in locking conflict in the closet. Affiliation and mutual care can lead to stifling merger. The disavowed parts of the collective then can become dangerous—anger and distrust are projected externally onto a shared enemy. The group psychological process becomes one of *splitting*—incapable of holding good and bad together in dialectical tension—so that the group tends to see people and things as either all good or all bad. Ideologies become rigid: "You're either a part of the solution or a part of the problem." Any member of the group who begins to challenge this is scapegoated. Disagreement is viewed as betrayal of trust. Vicious woundings take place with little insight into the projections involved. This is a form of violence that is often cloaked in ideological rhetoric and thus not named as violence at all. We talk about confronting or "calling each other" on unacceptable speech or behaviors in a quest for greater and greater purity of

thought and purpose. This drive toward unity and perfection is often understandable in groups whose ideals are so high, and whose mission is to confront an oppressive structure that is perceived as so overwhelming. It is easier to turn inward and focus on the internal conformity of the group than to face the hugeness of the task of outward-looking social reform.

This may be compounded in women's groups, where the socialization of women to be polite and kind, to seek agreement and affiliation rather than to disagree and fight, causes conflict to go underground. Nurturing is the expected relational stance at all times, even when it is in conflict with competence.[63] Envy, competition, and anger are taboo, and so remain largely unacknowledged. (This in itself is a function of internalized sexism—unconsciously adopting stereotypes of femininity.) The feminist movement has been generally slow to examine this phenomenon, but the truth of it is perhaps confirmed by the charged quality of family secret that it carries for those who dare to discuss it.[64]

Another pitfall of power-with social organization is indecisiveness. So much attention can sometimes be devoted to process that tasks are not accomplished.[65] There is an inability to "bite the bullet" and make difficult decisions. This is especially true when the decision will cause pain even though necessary to set limits, maintain healthy boundaries, or be faithful to the overall mission of the organization over the long term.[66] This often arises in organizations particularly around the volatile issues of personnel and budget, and sometimes larger questions of structure, process, and communication are raised in crisis moments as a way to avoid making the painful decisions at hand.

Finally, collectives are susceptible to manipulation. Power-over cannot be banished simply by decree. Whether or not it is an innate part of the human psyche (or in theological terms, "original sin"), it is certainly ingrained in us from our absorption of patriarchal culture. Given this reality, power-over will usually emerge. If authorized leadership is either weakened or disempowered by a distrust of power in whatever form, then power-over will erupt unauthorized. Collectives are thus susceptible to manipulation, covert exercises of power-over, and psychological bullying that the group is unable to acknowledge and address because power-over has supposedly been banished. Certain individuals, although not in any identified coordination or leadership function, can hold the entire group hostage to the extreme detriment of the group's original purposes or goals. Energy is diverted to placating or bargaining with the bully, and away from productive and healthy pursuits.

This is not to advocate for a return to a dominator model of power. Domination does not need to be equated with leadership. Leadership can be valid and authorized. In this sense, power-over, or aspects of power-over, need to be reexamined in a positive light. Positive aspects may include legitimate authority, responsibility, nurture, and steward-ship. Martha Ellen Stortz has helpfully described this aspect of power-over as "power-for," which is also similar to what Karen Lebacqz describes as "trusteeship" and to Rollo May's "nutrient power."[67] This is the power of the parent to protect and nurture the child[68] and the teacher to educate the student.[69] It is the legitimate charge of authorized police and fire corps "to serve and protect." It is the ancient power of wisdom of the elders.

Here, admittedly, we are on dangerous ground. Who is served and protected at the expense of whom? Do all really receive equal protection? Who assumes the

responsibility to speak for whom? Are all voices equally heard? By what authority is this power being exercised? Who appointed those in power? To what ends? Problems inevitably arise when those vested with power-over, even in the form of power-for, do not have the wisdom, experience, accountability, and genuine care to exercise it for the good of others. And that good must be defined by those served, not by those serving. This leads to a pivotal criterion for the exercise of power-over, or power-for, which is that power must be proportionately linked with service, and the purposes of that service must be defined by those served.

One of the more subtle difficulties with even the most well-intentioned forms of power-for is that there is always a danger of the privileged presuming to speak for those without voice, rather than making room for them to enter the conversation and speak for themselves. Oppression has been aptly defined as "not needing to learn the other person's language."[70] This often hidden dynamic has rendered a great deal of the church's service and advocacy work, not to mention centuries of so-called charity, ineffective and ultimately revictimizing.

Nevertheless, there is a role for power-over in the form of power-for. Legitimate authority can cut through red tape and get things done. It can perform the necessary functions of setting limits, organizing, advocating, and coordinating. It is particularly needed in times of crisis when decisiveness is crucial. If the theater is on fire, there is not time for everyone to sit down and come to consensus about a plan of action.

Power-in-Community

The limitations with the current threefold typology of power-over, power-within, and power-with point to the need for another paradigm for power—one that embraces the power of the individual self and values relationality and mutuality, but also is large enough to meet the challenges of the larger sphere of social construction. While power-over has the most obvious potential for violence, violence can be a consequence of any of the three. To the extent that any of these forms of power are exercised within the larger social context of patriarchy, violence will fall disproportionately on those who reside lowest on the pyramid, including women, people of color, and the poor.

The term *power-with* comes closest to the idea but does not say enough, thus prompting my turn to the term *power-in-community*. In truth, every theory of power implies a corresponding theory of community.[71] Power-in-community can embrace all three forms of power—power-within, power-with, and power-over/power-for. It requires a differentiation of these forms of power, like Paul's frequent use of the imagery of the human body to describe the body of Christ. Power-in-community is organic. It needs a head (a leader or leadership group) to organize and direct the body.[72] But leadership in this model, unlike a patriarchal, power-over model of hierarchy, is authorized by those who are served by that leadership and is accountable to them. Compassion[73] and justice are embraced as the goals of the community together with its leadership, rather than competition for dominance. Leadership also may be fluid and may rotate from one person or group to another as the task or mission may demand. Leadership in this model is based on a mutual I-Thou relationship. Seeing those served as Thou's rather than It's does not mean abdicating responsibility, authority, or care for them. On the

contrary, it means being careful, responsible, and authoritative (as in setting limits or confronting and stopping violence as it occurs) as the role of serving requires—rather than authoritarian. This leadership is consultative, consensus oriented, and earned by the good faith it demonstrates.[74]

One last caution must be raised here. As I reread my own writing, I can hear someone saying, "Aha! So it's right that men should have dominion in the home—just use it responsibly!" or substitute white persons, heterosexuals, or any other group who traditionally have held authority as power over other groups. A vindication of any concept of authority must be approached in our patriarchal culture with the utmost care, caution, and awareness of the horrors already perpetrated by those in power. I am not by any means proposing a new rationale for the status quo. I do not envision the same people holding all the power and privilege they do now, only doing it a little more nicely. That would be simply another version of paternalism, in which one holds power unto one's self for the good of the other.[75] Nor will it do simply to shuffle the cast of characters around, so that those who are currently oppressed can be on top.

I am, however, arguing that a leveling of authorized or overt power will not eliminate the emergence of violence through covert abuses of power. Power-over/power-for must be authorized by the community as a whole, not just by the privileged elite who already hold power-over. Power-over/power-for should never be conferred in society solely according to a given category (e.g., gender, age, religion, class, physical ability, skin color, sexual orientation).

Those who are authorized to serve in a power-over/power-for capacity do not *have* the power; *it is on loan from the community*. Power ultimately resides in the community itself, and every person is responsible for seeing that it is exercised well—or else to demand that it be reconferred or redistributed. Hannah Arendt located power ultimately in the power of the *polis,* the gathering of people:

> The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people. Only where men [sic] live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them, and the foundation of cities, which as city-states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization, is therefore indeed the most important material prerequisite for power. What keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed (what we today call "organization") and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power. And whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons.[76]

Tyranny succeeds, according to Arendt, not primarily by force, but by isolating people from one another and from the leader.[77] Thus power is reclaimed in community—where people talk to one another and name injustice, when mutual fear and suspicion are overcome and solidarity is achieved.

Because power resides in community, many more people can carry leadership and authority—and carry it well—than is currently supposed. Our criteria for leadership need to be reexamined in the light of our prejudices and stereotypes. But authority, in and of itself, is not negative.[78]

Finally, privilege and power are not synonymous, and need not coincide. Powers to lead, care, govern, teach, and prophesy may be differentiated and distributed. Privilege, in contrast, can be shared. As privilege carries dignity and respect, then all should have equal access. As, in our society, privilege also means wealth and access to resources, then clearly our current system of privilege needs to be dramatically revised. As long as power-over is used to garner more and more resources for one's self, while others are freezing on the streets and starving, then clearly such power is not accountable regardless of its rhetoric.

The operative relationship within this power-in-community, then, actually goes beyond what can be described as I-Thou. Even in one-on-one relationships, if power is truly vested and held in the community, it is to that entire matrix that even the I and the Thou belong.[79] There is an expansion of relational consciousness that holds the preciousness of community together with the preciousness of the I and the Thou: *I-Thou-We* intertwine in a fluid, mutual dynamic.

Some Words about God

This brings us back to the assertion that the saying "Rape is power, not sex" is a theological statement. All the foregoing discussion, while grounded in theology, has been largely a discussion of ethics—that is, how human beings treat each other in the world. But Buber's *I and Thou* is theological, even if his intent was primarily to write an existential philosophy of human relations.[80] How we reimage our relations with one another and our planet has immediate and far-reaching consequences for how we come to reimage our God. Or, to turn that around, how we image our God has everything to do with how we image our relationships with each other.

Even as our society has rendered certain groups of people from Thou's to It's, so we have rendered God into an It. Rather than seeking to know God as a Thou, and responding to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit in our midst prompting us to love and justice, we have created God in our own image—or, more accurately, the image of those at the top of the power pyramid. This idol appears to us as the old white man with the beard, above us rather than among us, more judge than advocate, and more ruler than friend.

To construct a new theology is the task for another book, and other authors have already made admirable beginnings toward deconstructing the authoritarian God-idol of old and reconstructing a God of love and justice. Feminist,[81] liberation,[82] process,[83] and other theologians[84] have begun to provide us with an array of new images for God, many of which have sound biblical sources, and, as well, have reclaimed ancient alternatives[85]: images of mother[86] (e.g., Num. 11:12-13; Deut. 32:18; Ps. 131:2; Isa. 42:14; 46:3-4; 49:15; 66:9); of midwife (Ps. 22:9-10; Jer. 49:15); of lover, friend, bakerwoman (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21); mother bear (Hos. 13:8); one who enfolds humanity under a warm wing (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34-35; Ruth 2:12; Pss. 17:8-9; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4; Luke 13:34).[87] The Hebrew word for God's compassion, *rahum*, and the word for mercies, *rahamin*, literally mean "womb love": "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:15). For some of these writers, the very task of theology is one of imagination, to reimage or even remythologize God.[88] Images are being reclaimed, as well, from

ancient Hebrew, indigenous, and non-Western European cultures as well as from biblical sources—recognizing God in all beings rather than perpetuating a man-centered view of the world through a man-centered view of God: God as tree of life, as river, as fire (Deut. 4:24; the Elijah story), as rock (Isa. 17:10). Sallie McFague also points out the strength of relational images for God in the Hebrew Bible.[89] Paul Tillich's phrase for God, "the ground of being," which is now being adopted in a number of liturgies, draws on Eastern understandings of God[90] and recalls the God in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Such images pose an alternative to the patriarchal God-father-judge. They are incarnational, immanent, working together with humanity on the side of justice and peace, and sorrowing with humanity when justice and peace are ruptured.

These images imply a different solution to the problem of theodicy, that is, how God can be both good and omnipotent, and yet allow evil to exist in the world. Rather than meting out catastrophe and pain as punishment for sin, God is seen as suffering with us when we suffer.[91] In such a view, God is *not* all-powerful to prevent human suffering, which would obviate humanity's free will but, rather, stands in solidarity with a suffering humanity.[92] God's power lies not in the manipulation of the world like puppets, but in the constant and abiding energy for transformation of all things into good.[93]

The importance of a more inclusive/expansive language for referring in worship to both God and people is closely tied to these theological issues and to the issue of how oppressive stereotypes and paradigms are internalized early in life. If a God-idol is constructed in the image of those at the top of the power pyramid, then a vicious cycle is put into place in which subsequent generations of children are taught to believe that some people are more like God than others. Little girls grow up believing, mainly at an unconscious level, that they are created less in the image and likeness of God than their brothers. Black children, looking at Victorian paintings of a blond and blue-eyed Jesus, conclude that Jesus has less to do with them than with white people.

These considerations also extend to those who function as ordained clergy and religious leadership. To the extent that the most numinous or sacramental roles, whether designated as priest or some other term, are reserved for men alone, then only men will be seen as God's representatives. Children will infer that this is what God looks like as well, rather than being able to see God in the marvelous diversity and fullness of humanity and all creation.

Thus considerations about how we image both God and humanity in our worship language have far-reaching consequences for the perpetuation of violence. Changes in language, moreover, must be more than an exchange of masculine pronouns and images of masculinist values of domination for feminine pronouns and images of stereotypical feminine values of nurture. As soon as we think we have any particular fix on God, we have fallen into idolatry.[94] Buber wrote, "God . . . the eternal presence, cannot be had. Woe unto the possessed who fancy that they possess God!"[95] Our attempts at naming God are little more than labels that objectify God and fail to embrace the vastness of divine being. A shift away from patriarchal consciousness in worship does not mean a substitution of one set of formulas for another but, rather, a shift from believing that we can fully grasp God to metaphorical thinking and imagining.[96] Metaphor and imagination touch lightly on the impressions and experiences we have of God's relations with us—but never come to rest as if we had found the truth about the divine.[97]

A shift, then, of relational consciousness is required in our theology as well as our anthropology: not only must we learn to challenge our I-It thinking in relation to each other to become I-Thou and, as we invest power in the community, I-Thou-We; we also need to be open to the liberating breath of the Holy Spirit, and to the movement of the Holy Spirit within the community toward justice and peace, so that our relationship with God is fully I-Thou. And as we more fully recognize God-in-the-matrix—God's presence and movement in the interstices of all our communal life—we can relate to God as incarnate in the "I-Thou-We" of both human community and communion with the divine.[98]

Tamar's Story

Where was God for Tamar? If we depend upon the biblical narrator's voice to tell us, God was absent for Tamar. Tamar lived out her days, a desolate woman, in her brother's house. God was somewhere else, pulling the strings of the male power elite, maneuvering Israel's destiny through the men's machinations for power and property.

But faith discerns a different end. How differently things might have gone for Tamar had she had a community of faith to speak a liberating word of hope to her! Faith tells us that what happened to Tamar was a violation, not of her father's property rights and political assets, but a violation of her own personhood. Faith tells us that Tamar did not deserve what happened to her. It was wrong, and it should never have happened. And I believe that our faith tells us that God did not cause Tamar's suffering. Rather, God stood with Tamar, as silent in the narrative as the suffering woman herself. God suffered with Tamar, and although her story is lost to us down through the silence of the historical record, Tamar is not lost with God. With God, Tamar is not alone, and she is vindicated for eternity.

Now it is up to us, as the church, to proclaim her vindication and make it manifest in our truth telling and vigilance to bring about empowerment, relationship, justice, and change. In speaking her truth, *our* truth, we reweave the *concilium* and become the *re-concilers* that God has called us to be.[99]