

## Mission Anabaino Annual Collaborative 2022

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### Defining Power: Its Uses and Abuses in the World and Church

#### PART 1 | PLUNDERING THE EGYPTIANS; OR, WHY EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD HAVE A DECONSTRUCTIVE EDGE TO THEM

##### 1. Cultural Definitions of Power

1. Kanye West - "No one man should have all that power!"
2. **Nietzsche** - "the world itself is the will to power - and nothing else! And you yourself are the will to power - and nothing else!"
  1. "All things are subject to interpretation; whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth."
  2. <sup>\*1</sup>[It is important to note that Nietzsche's disdain of Christianity stemmed from his view of power. Since true strength and virtue are in dominating the other, and the powerful should be celebrated and on top, Nietzsche saw that Christianity at its core advocated for the opposite - that the strong are those who are weak and humble and sacrificial. Moreover, if our postmodern culture and worldviews stem in large part from Nietzsche ideologically, then we shouldn't be surprised that there is such antithesis.]

##### 3. **Foucault**

1. "It seems to me that **power is 'always already there'**, that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no margins for those who break with the system."
2. **Power is a strategy without a subject** - "In France, we don't have a Gulag, but we have ideas..."
3. "Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. **It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.** 'Liberate scientific research from the demands of monopoly capitalism': maybe it's a good slogan, but it will never be more than a slogan."
4. "In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. . . . What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it

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<sup>1</sup> [ ] indicate my reflections throughout the paper

doesn't 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's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of **detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural**, within which it operates at the present time."

1. [Note that Foucault and many others acknowledge that power cannot be erased. The question is who has it, and by what means. So we can basically agree (!) without adopting his views of knowledge, truth, etc. being relative.]
2. **Critical Race Theory** [quotes from CRT advocates in their book, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, by Delgado and Stefancic. First official CRT workshop held at a convent outside Madison, WI in 1989! Everyone say "Shibboleth"!]
1. "Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law." (3)
    1. [In this way, it follows in the footsteps of Nietzsche. Ironically, we can agree with many of the same critiques of Enlightenment rationalism, so we should be able to find plenty of common ground here.]
  2. Intersectionality - "the predicament of women of color and others who sit at the intersection of two or more categories." (7)
3. **Basic tenets:**
    1. "Racism is ordinary, not aberrational" and therefore difficult to address when it's not acknowledged
    2. "Our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group." (8)
      1. Interest convergence or material determinism means that civil rights victories like Brown v. BOE "may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite whites than from a desire to help blacks."
    3. Social construction - "race and races are products of social thought and relations . . . categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient." (9)
    4. Antiessentialism - "No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity"
      1. "Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the **voice-of-color thesis** holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be **able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know.**" (11)

#### 4. Two main camps

1. **Idealists** - racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorization, attitude and discourse
2. **Realists** or economic determinists - more than a collection of “unfavorable impressions of members of other groups, racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status.” (21) Therefore, “attitudes follow, explain, and rationalize what is taking place in the material sector.” (25)

1. [There’s nothing inherently non-Christian here. Our understanding of sin should be able to account for both idealist and realist views since the way we think and talk has been tainted with sin, just as the ways society functions and privilege is bestowed has been.]

5. **Different types of racism:** biological, intention, unconscious racism; micro aggressions; nativism; institutional racism; racism tinged with homophobia or sexism; racism that takes the form of indifference, coldness, or implicit associations; and white privilege, reserving favors, smiles, kindness, the best stories, one’s most charming side and invitations to real intimacy for one’s own kind or class.” (31)

6. **Differend** - this occurs when a concept acquires conflicting meanings for two groups, in which case “the subordinate person lacks language to express how he or she has been injured or wronged” (51).

1. [Understanding these instances is an important component of basic love - we need to be able to speak with each other and have compassion on all people. If I or the other is using a word that means something else in a different context, then we need to know! Some important links to cross-cultural missions here.]

7. **Whiteness** - defined legally in America in the context of immigration law, such that initially Irish, Jews, and Italians were not considered white, but then came to be considered white.

1. **White privilege** - “the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race.”

1. For example - As the comic Dave Chappelle remarked, Why was it easier for Kaitlyn Jenner to change her gender, than for Muhammad Ali to change his name? Because once white men got interested, transgenderism gained power!

2. [Seems to me that if any dominant group did *not* create a privilege, then it hasn’t accomplished anything; if it has, Christians need to just become aware of what the privilege is in order to properly account for it.]

## PART 2 | POWER CONSIDERED FROM CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINTS

### 1. Power as a Gift

1. Power is the ability to make something of the world
2. “Underlying much of the academic fascination with power, it seems to me, is the presupposition that power is essentially about coercion—that even when power looks life-giving and creative, it actually cloaks a violent fist in a creative glove. I **believe this is exactly backwards. I actually believe the deepest form of power is creation** and that when power takes the form of coercion and violence, that is actually a diminishment and distortion of what it is meant to be. Indeed, **instead of creation being merely well-concealed coercion, violence is best seen as the result of misplaced and misdirected creation.**” (10-11)
3. “**Power is a gift**—a gift that has been diminished and distorted by sin, but a gift nonetheless. Power is rooted in creation, the calling of something out of nothing and the fruitful, multiplying abundance of our astonishing world. It is intimately tied to **image bearing**: the unique role that human beings play in representing the cosmos’ Creator in the midst of creation” (Crouch, 12)
4. “Jesus does not give authority to us; he retains it. He is sending us out *under* his authority to carry out *his* enterprises in *his* way.” (Langberg, 10)
  1. James Bannerman writes, “it is not the Church that governs and dispenses ordinances and spiritual graces in His name, and by reason of His original gift and endowment to her, but **Christ who, personally present, governs** and administers ordinances and blessing through the Church. The Church has no store of life apart from Christ being in it” (199)

### 2. Hiding Power

1. “**The powerful have a hard time seeing their own power and its effects.** We do not see when our exercise of power is cutting off life and possibility for others; we do not see the ways others are resisting or undermining our own power.” (Crouch, 123)
2. “Whether unmarked or marked, then, our maps of power both constrain culture making and make it possible. . . **None of us can map our power for ourselves.** We need one another to fill out our maps, to point out the resources we have of which we are unaware, and to warn us when we are at risk of misusing something we don’t even know we have.” (Crouch, 129)
  1. [Again, for a Christian this should not be surprising since we need others to show us all types of sin in our lives. If we don’t think this is true, then we’re probably reacting to critiques of “power” with knee-jerk personal or political defensiveness.]

### 3. Abusing Power

1. “**Coercion** is needed to protect the possibility of creation. . . . The legitimate role of coercion is to **make room for flourishing**, especially by restraining whatever fundamentally threatens the integrity of God’s creative image bearers. . . . But coercion is always penultimate. It is of limited use. Oddly enough, it is too strong to be truly useful as a form of power.” (Crouch, 147)
2. “**Privilege**—the accumulated benefits from past successful exercises of power—is perfectly indifferent to whether those exercises of power were creative or oppressive, rooted in image bearing or in idolatry and injustice.” - can be like “standing on the shoulders of giants” and therefore can be shared;
  1. **Status** is pure privilege that cannot be shared without loss, it is about ranking and excluding
  2. And privilege is dangerous because it can become invisible and forgotten
3. **When we have less power**, we can act in certain ways: spectrum of surrender (most passive) to suffer, defer, subvert, and counteract (most aggressive)
4. **When we have more power**, we can act in certain ways: spectrum of abdicate (most passive) to delegate, direct, command, and dominate (most aggressive)
  1. What’s the difference between dominating (which is simply ungodly) and commanding? (Burns, etc. 134)
5. **Spiritual Abuse** - “using the sacred to harm or deceive the soul of another. . . . We tell them, ‘God says,’ but we don’t reflect the character of the God whose words we use. We twist God’s words in order to coerce, to manipulate. A powerful position in a religious context carries inherent spiritual authority. A certain character is assumed when, in fact, **position may be used to hide character**. . . . An ability to articulate theological truths does *not* mean the speaker is an obedient servant of God. A spiritual leader has all the power tools at their disposal and can use them to harm verbally, sexually, emotionally, physically, financially, and spiritually.” (Langberg, 127)
  1. Manipulating, deceiving, or abusing people can often be done to cover-up our anxiety, shame, and insecurities.
  2. Research shows that the more power one has, the less compassion we feel to other’s sufferings! With that in mind, there’s the potential of mixing high-power people with low-power people:
    1. **High power people:** “feel fewer social restraints; judge others’ emotions less accurately; react less to others’ emotions; do not adjust their demands to another’s emotion; experience less distress with talker’s distress level; stereotype others more; are more resource rich; are aware they can act at will without interference or serious social consequences; exhibit disinhibited, self-serving behavior, which increase the likelihood of socially inappropriate behaviors.”

2. **Low-power people:** “experience greater social restraints, threats, or punishments; assimilate more to high-power person’s emotions; concede more to anger than to happiness in high-power persons; exhibit an increase in distress in response to high-power person’s distress; are more likely to be vulnerable to aggression and bullying; are more likely to be female or of a different race than those in power; attend to others more carefully and are vigilant so as to navigate threatening social environments; inhibit the direct expression of their own ideas.  
“(Langberg, 132-3)

#### 4. Redeeming Power

1. **Jesus did not sacrifice his power, he sacrificed his privilege and status - he “never accumulates privilege” and “consistently shows absolute indifference to status”** (Crouch)
2. “Power is nothing—worse than nothing—without love. But love without power is less than it was meant to be. Love without the capacity to make something of the world, with the ability to respond to and make room for the beloved’s flourishing, is frustrated love.” (25)
3. Power of the Word in Creation - “‘Let there be’ is not a direct imperative. It is simultaneously more powerful and less controlling than that. . . . ‘Let there be’ does not have to assert power, it assumes it. It does not have to impose power, it indwells it. . . [to] accomplish very literally what they describe. ‘Let there be’ **bequeaths power to others, making room for more power.**” (Crouch)
  1. “The true power that is available to us, the power that multiplies power, lies on the other side of the choice to empty ourselves of power.”
4. Character over gifts - the outside world does not corrupt us, but what is in our hearts
5. “You can tell what is most important to someone by what they protect most vociferously.” (Langberg, 187)
6. “**Institutions** are essential for flourishing. . . [and they] create and distribute power” through generations with four essential elements: artifacts, arenas, rules, and roles. (Crouch, 172).
  1. “The best test of any institution, and especially of any institution’s roles and rules for using power, is *whether everyone flourishes* when everyone indwells their roles and plays by the rules, or wither only a few of the participants experience abundance and growth.” (Crouch, 185) This includes instances, which are inevitable, when there is unequal distribution of power.

5. **Regulating Power:** or, how we can actually learn from a 19th Century Scottish Presbyterian!
1. **Spiritual Authority of the Church consists of three things:**
    1. *Dogmatike - Dogmas [Word]*, or articles of faith - revealed in the Word, the Church is a "divinely appointed witness for God's truth" to those outside the Church, and a witness and teacher to those within
      1. Anything but a spiritual authority is inconsistent with the goal, which is to bring men to faith and obedience - "a compulsory power can never secure my belief"
    2. *Diataktike - Ordinances and Government [Sacraments]* - administrative and declaratory power, as channels through which the Spirit works
      1. No physical influence, or temporal or coercive power, can be used
    3. *Diacretik - Discipline* - admission to and exclusion from the fellowship of the Church
      1. Confirm in their faith and obedience; or convict of sin and recover them by admonition, warning, censure, rebuke or excommunication
  2. **"The Extent and Limits of Church Power"**
    1. **Problems to avoid:**
      1. *Overrate* - extending it beyond the bounds of Scripture;
      2. *Underrate* - church power becomes merely human appointment and advice, not authority
    2. **Extent:** Submit to Church power insofar as it is in agreement with the Word of God AND, in a subordinate sense, because it is emitted by the Church, which is itself instituted by God in His Word - lest there be no power that is binding *except for what the members otherwise consent to*. **Authority, by definition, cannot be limited by consent.**
      1. Church power is more and better than just a human power that is in agreement with the Word, which is **advice, not authority**
      2. If the Church is more than just a voluntary, humanly-appointed institution, then it must possess power outside of human consent; otherwise, there would be "laws without authority, ordinances without grace, and discipline without judgment" (239). Compare the judgment of a civil law court, which is pronounced and carried out regardless of the consent of those it applies to.
      3. **If power is only so far as consent goes, then the majority, in effect, becomes the office-bearers, since the minority must obey the will of the majority.**
        1. The danger of "personal collisions" looms large here, whereas in a Presbyterian case, the personal aspects can be extracted when a case is brought to a higher court (244).

2. The “bishops”, “presbyters”, “rulers” and “pastors” are throughout Scripture NOT bound by the consent of the community
3. “Reprove” and “rebuke” do NOT admit of being limited by the consent of those receiving it, although one would do the best to persuade
4. Obeying your elders, submitting to them, does NOT admit of such limits
5. See Heb. 13.17; Luke 2.51; Rom. 13.1,5; 1Cor. 16.16; 1Cor. 5

## 6. Additional Reflections

1. What about the Holy Spirit? The true agent of power in our ministries and church?
2. How do we share power across generations and the institutions we play roles in?
3. What privilege and power do we have that is hard for us to see? That is so easy to forget?
4. Does unequal power impact how we apply Matt. 18:15-20, since it is in the context of “brothers”? How does that compare with 1Tim. 5:19-20, which seems to skip over Matt. 18’s first step for false teachers?

### ***Books Consulted:***

- *Playing God*, Andy Crouch
- *Strong and Weak*, Andy Crouch
- *The Politics of Ministry, Navigating Power Dynamics and Negotiating Interests*, Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, & Donald C. Guthrie
- *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, Diane Langberg
- *Subtle power of spiritual abuse: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church*, Johnson & van Vonderen
- *The Church of Christ*, James Bannerman



\*\*\* **Additional Notes from Crouch, *Playing God***

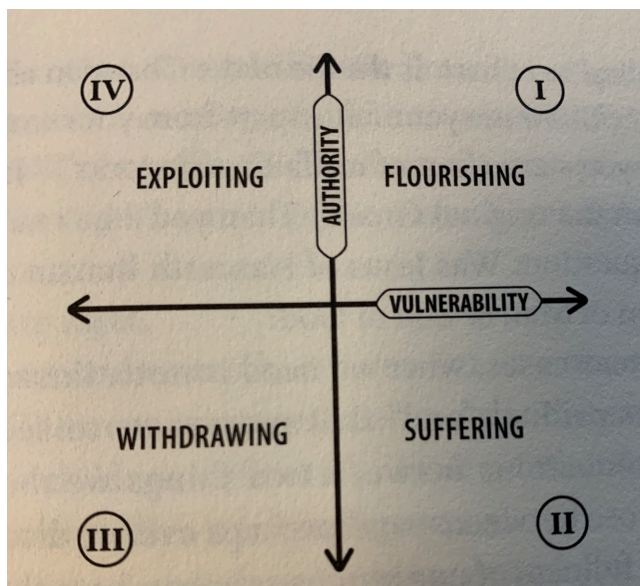
- If Nietzsche and Foucault are right - and they probably are - power is everywhere; but they're wrong in its uses. But power is also a gift and the gospel is good news about power.
- "Power is for flourishing" (13)
- "Power is the ability to make something of the world" (17), specifically to make something with meaning
- "Powerlessness is being cut off from world making" (18) - so you can be materially poor, but not *act* poor
- A positive-sum transaction - what game theory calls it when "the total amount of power in the world has increased." [like cello lessons]
- Consumer culture offers a type of power that is really privilege - to buy something that "requires no detour through humility, no apprenticeship, and no risk. It is perfectly safe. It is also utterly inert, entirely detached from my real, embodied existence" (42-3)
- "The dream of magic [which our technology basically does for us] is to have power, the ability to make something of the world, without suffering, without relationship and without risk" (43)
- "In the resurrection the original power of creative love displaced sin and death. Indeed, sin and death turn out to be the only things that will ultimately be truly defeated and destroyed in the Nietzschean sense. . . . The only Nietzschean defeat is for those perversions of power that cannot tolerate anything but Nietzschean victory." (53)
- "Idols ask for more and more, while giving less and less, until eventually they demand everything and give nothing." (56)
- "Idolatry is the result of a curious hybrid of power and powerlessness" [because we have unique ability for image bearing as well as vulnerability]
- "Whether making false gods (idolatry) or playing false gods (injustice) the result is identical—the true image of God is lost, and not just lost but replaced by something that purports to represent the ultimate truth about reality." (71)
- "Give to Caesar, etc." is where Jesus transforms what they think is a zero-sum competition into positive-sum

**See more in ch. 6, "The Hiddenness of Power"**

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- And privilege is dangerous because it can become invisible and forgotten

**Notes from Selections of *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk & True Flourishing*, by Andy Crouch**



**The Grid**

**Flourishing**

What is flourishing and who is flourishing according to which definition? Angela (woman with trisomy 13, an extreme version of Down’s Syndrome) appears to not be.

1. **Communal:** “How can we become the kind of people among whom Angela flourishes and who flourish with Angela in our midst?” - 32
  1. “The question is not whether Angela *alone* is flourishing or not—the question is whether her presence in our midst leads us to flourishing *together*.” - 33
2. **Authority:** “The capacity for meaningful action” - 35
  1. **Meaningful** means to participate in a story, with a past and present
  2. “**Always given**” - shared reality, not a private possession, that always comes from outside ourselves (it can be either “ascribed” like a title or inheritance; or “achieved”)
  3. Given to all humans by virtue of the *imago dei* - all authority is limited, but some more so than others

### 3. Vulnerability

1. Different from just oversharing or emotional transparency
2. “**Exposure to meaningful risk**” is true vulnerability - the possibility of loss
3. Emotional transparency can become manipulation if it’s used to “win followers, avoid confrontation or sidestep accountability” - 42
4. Humans have most authority of any creature and most vulnerability of any creature. No other creature can “be naked.”
  1. The One with the most authority was born dependent, naked, and vulnerable
5. “What love longs to be: capable of meaningful action in the life of the beloved, so committed to the beloved that everything meaningful is at risk.” - 48

#### Withdrawing (lack of authority or vulnerability) - this is my tendency!

- Healthy version was called “safety”, and it is how humans are meant to begin life
- When it’s extended in unhealthy ways, you have “bulldozer” parents, who produce children with no capacity for authority or vulnerability. It appears safe, but if you want flourishing, it is actually dangerous.
  - Filled with inaction, fear of exposure, minimizing risk, avoiding real engagement and abandonment
  - “Amidst safety the world has never before known, the greatest spiritual struggle many of us face is to be willing to take off our bubble wrap.” - 90
- **Simulated Authority** - “the real temptation for most of us is not complete apathy but activities that simulate meaningful action and meaningful risk without actually asking much of us or transforming much in us” - 82 (think the technological culture)
  - “The authority may be largely simulated but the vulnerability is entirely an illusion. . . Ironically, the reason video games develop so little real skill is that they are *too* rewarding. Real authority is a tedious business.” - 84-5
- **Friction-free Activism** - social media can be used by those suffering in order to grant them access to real meaningful action (authority), OR it can simulate engagement and risk nothing - it leaves us “mired in apathy and our neighbors in their need” - 88
- Pretty much any move is a step in the right direction! Consider a move into the **natural world**, where we’ll be humbled, or the **relational world** of real bodies with heartbeats, hands and faces.

#### Exploiting (authority without vulnerability)

- Seeking to maximize power while eliminating risk

- If withdrawing is risk aversion, then exploiting is “loss aversion” - for most of us, “the possibility of loss counts far more than the possibility of gain” (95), so we try to move to the left if possible, and also up
- Example of walking into a room full of people (if you’re not Jefferson!) and needing alcohol to decrease your sense of risk and increase your sense of power
  - Most of **the 7 deadly sins are ways to increase power without vulnerability** - “sex without commitment (lust), food without moderation (gluttony), goods without limit (greed), anger without compassion (wrath), and above all the pursuit of autonomous, godlike power (pride)” - 97
    - Pornography epitomizes this because it simulates authority without no vulnerability, and epitomizes an idol that will “whisper fantasies of power but end up with us completely in their grip.” - 98
  - **Exploiting is an illusion - there’s no such thing as true authority without true vulnerability**
  - **Best early warning sign: your closest relationships begin to decay** - because they’re the ones with the greatest potential for meaningful action and vulnerability.

### Hidden Vulnerability as a Mark of True Leadership

- **Essence of manipulation:** when leaders are perceived as more vulnerable, more exposed to meaningful risk, than they actually are - they use fake vulnerability as a strategy to gain more authority
  - To disclose vulnerability to people who do not have the authority to respond is actually to just add to their suffering (vulnerability w/o authority)
- **“Leader’s own personal exposure to risk must often remain unspoken, unseen and indeed unimagined by others. And second, the leader must bear the shared vulnerability that the community does not currently have the authority to address.”** - 122
  - **Example of black church pastors bearing hidden vulnerability with public dignity** - authority is itself a great risk and a most vulnerable calling.
  - “When I am speaking, my deepest calling is to help a community bear the *community’s* vulnerability”
  - “When leaders take risks, including the risks of personal disclosure, they do so for the *sake of others’ authority and proper vulnerability*. This is one sense in which leadership is always servanthood—it is always about others’ flourishing, not our own, and it is always directed toward others’ authority, not our own.” - 130

### Questions & Reflections

- Which quadrant do you naturally fall into? Why is that? As a person? As a pastor?

- For me, **I personally tend toward withdrawing**, and am risk-averse, so I can tend to overlook the authority God has given me, which also overlooks the ability I have to share people's vulnerability (whether or not they're aware of it).
- Our culture is **naturally adverse to pastors "exploiting"** authority. Do you find yourself struggling with that or over-compensating to avoid it, but then not taking meaningful action?
- As pastors, is there a tendency toward exploiting or manipulating? What about fake vulnerability? This could be sharing real suffering, but to people who have no capacity to act in a helpful or meaningful way.
- I see Crouch's grid as **mapping onto the Incarnation** quite nicely - Jesus as the one with all authority chose to take on all vulnerability, to the point of death on a cross. Docetism would be Jesus with all authority but no vulnerability. Is there a helpful way in which our ecclesiology would map onto that as well? **High church and high gospel** could be understood as a high view of office coupled with a gospel-centered view of suffering and death to self.
- As pastors we have both "ascribed" authority in the office, but also should seek "achieved" authority in a way that is still for the sake of another.
- This is a powerful definition - "What love longs to be: capable of meaningful action in the life of the beloved, so committed to the beloved that everything meaningful is at risk." Do you find that you are actually risking anything as pastors? Risking too much?