

## Women and Power

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**"Do not shun power nor despise it, but use it correctly."**

**- St. Mechthildt of Magdeburg, 13<sup>th</sup> Century**

All of us need personal power to survive and grow. For women, however, the need is more acute.

### Why Women Need Power

"One of the things I decided on a personal level," says Aruna Alexander, an Indian-born ordained minister of the United Church of Canada and chairperson of a number of international bodies, "was that I was not going to allow someone else to define me; or if they did define me, that I was not going to internalise that definition".<sup>1</sup> For women living in a social and religious culture that deems them second class, it requires power to articulate and implement such a decision. "A woman's place is in the home" successfully domesticates them, cuts off their options and removes them from the spheres of development and power. It denies them the freedom to be and to name and own choices. Powerless, they are unable to determine or influence the behaviour and decision-making<sup>2</sup> of the people who shape their lives.

It is not easy for women to get out of this downward spin. Pejorative labels, attacks on their character, psychologi-

cal intimidation, physical assault, banishment from the home and even death, this is the price women pay when they step out of their "place". But unless women dare to take this risk they will be giving away their power, which will be used by others against them.<sup>3</sup> Their silence will become, by default, an act of collusion with the oppressors to maintain the status quo.

"Submission, whether overt or covert, is also unworthy," points out Reverend Elaine Farmer of the Anglican Church. "It is about giving away power, usually for the sake of peace and often in the face of fear. Submission is about meaningless suffering and it too deals in guilt and blame. It is about refusing to recognise one's own worth and power. At best it is misguided service. At worst it is masochism. Either way it is a refusal to take responsibility for one's own life. It has often been the only tool of women and it is unworthy of creatures made in the image of God."<sup>4</sup>

### Why Women Fear Power

Unfortunately, women are not comfortable with power. Conditioned for centuries to be subservient to male heads in every sphere of their lives, most

women have never enjoyed positions of power. As a result, they are unable to recognise the way power works and do not know how to use power. Worse, they are afraid of power. It opens up roles which threaten the traditional feminine identity which sees woman as a helper to man and subject to him. Alternatively, because women have been socialised for centuries to believe that they are “weak”, “emotional”, “irrational”, they have come to believe that they are not fit or have no right to own power. Further, in our male-dominated world too often women have been victims of oppressive power. For such women power is synonymous with oppression, and they will have no part of it. For other women the struggle to own power may be so difficult that they may prefer to stay with the familiar, but questionable, gains of powerlessness – shelter, a provider, a mate, a job. Even feminists are wary of power, rejecting it as one of the mainstays of patriarchy. They prefer to hide behind words like authority and influence.<sup>5</sup>

### Power and Authority

According to Ranjini Rebera, a Sri Lankan-born Australian feminist theologian and Consultant in communication and gender who has done considerable work on the nature of power and its impact on Asian women, authority is different from power. She defines authority as the right of a person “to be heard and taken seriously based on certain external circumstances, such as skill, knowledge, position or relationship.”<sup>6</sup>

Authority is a socially given power.<sup>7</sup> It is usually invested by the community and is not limited by a social class,

caste or race. In Asian cultures for instance, the authority of “grey hair” is usually respected. So also the authority of people with educational qualifications. The authority of a parent over a child, or a teacher over a student are other examples.

Included in this understanding is the authority that is ours when we tell our own stories. For women this is particularly important since it involves speaking a truth drawn from exclusively “woman” experiences based on their biology and child-rearing capacities that fall outside the reality of the generally accepted androcentric norm. Unfortunately, while women may speak their truth with authority too often they do not have the power to bring about the transformation they seek.

### Power and Influence

Women’s “use of dependency to claim power is sometimes referred to as **influence**”.<sup>8</sup> Many women create dependency within their families, place of work and even their church communities. They make themselves indispensable to the functioning of these entities, and use the power this gives them to influence and control the proceedings from behind the scenes – a gentle “suggestion” here, a little emotional blackmail there. The man makes the decisions without losing face and the woman is able to exercise power without disturbing the status quo. This, however, has negative connotations as it works outside the democratic process that is established for the good of all.<sup>9</sup> Since women refuse to openly own power, they cannot be questioned or be held

accountable. Even at committee meetings where women are content to have their ideas appropriated by men in the mistaken belief that the end is more important than the means, it is a no-win situation. As Rebera argues,

We (women) abdicate our right to celebrate our identity by owning our contribution. Men abdicate their right to mutuality by permitting women to exercise subtle control over them and by refusing to affirm women's contribution as being valid and equal.<sup>10</sup>

## Power

Thus, for most women, the power issue is a vicious cycle. Because they are uneasy about power they refuse to even talk about it; and because they shy away from power, they cannot seize it and so facilitate their own empowerment. If we are to break this cycle women must bring the power issue out into the open. "What they need to do," concluded women at a Seminar of Third World women, "is talk about what power is, what they want or need it for, and how they would use it in their private as well as their public lives."<sup>11</sup> Women also need to understand how power can be abused. "Knowing something about the ways in which power is used against us gives us a choice," says Aveen Maguire.<sup>12</sup> A choice to reject or accept patriarchal structures; a choice to use the system to bring about change or to create "new forms of collective consciousness"<sup>13</sup>; a choice to speak and challenge, or a choice to remain silent.

It must be said at the start that power is a dynamic of every human relationship. All of us use power, and all of us are objects of its use. Power in

itself is not oppressive. It is neutral. What colours it is the way we use it. As Rebera points out,

As human beings we are born with power. Through our socialisation, our ability to relate to the world around us and in our search for an identity, we mold and shape the exercise of power.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, says Regina Coll C.S.J., Professor of Theology at Catholic University, U.S.A.,

because we have witnessed so many abuses of power we have begun to confuse power with its abuse. Power has become a dirty word. We must reinstate it among the virtues. Power is the ability to do something. It can be, ought to be, a force for good.<sup>15</sup>

For this to happen however, it is necessary to distinguish between the use and abuse of power.

Psychiatrist Rollo May in his book *Power and Innocence*<sup>16</sup> identifies five types of power based on the way power operates:

**Exploitative Power or Power over Another:** It seeks to control another, to advance an agenda that has been drawn up exclusively by it. It assumes superior rights and authority and directs people but is not accountable to them and does not respond to them. There is no transparency in the exercise of this power.

Politically, we experience this power in the domination of the South by the developed world; religiously we are witnesses to the unquestionable power of religious heads who often claim divine status; socially, we are a party to the marginalisation of people because

of their “difference”— a majority community dominating the minorities, rich controlling the poor, white looking down on coloured peoples. Many hierarchies function this way, including those in which women claim their own rungs based on their social status, economic resources, educational qualifications, caste or race.

**Competitive power or power against another:** One upmanship. It builds up the user by putting the other down. It pits people against each other and assumes that in order to win some one must lose. It is an exclusive form of power that gives the right to rule to the “best”, those with the most talent and opportunities. It keeps people out rather than inviting them in. It seeks the benefit of the individual not the development of all.

This is a kind of power we are all familiar with. It is part of our school systems, our job markets, our corporate world, our race to do one better than the Jones.

**Manipulative power or power that manages another:** It works subtly and can at times be invisible. It withholds or distorts information so that the other cannot make a truly informed decision. It retains power in the hands of a privileged few by persuading others that they are receiving what is best for them and that their interests are being addressed, till they come to believe that their oppression no longer exists. It hides the truth, keeps people down (“in their place”) and destroys the will.

This is a kind of power that affects women particularly. “I only eat food

cooked by my wife” is one way of keeping her in the kitchen. “She asked for it!” conveniently returns power back to the rapist. “Self-giving and self-sacrifice are the marks of a woman” works towards making doormats of women. The power of the media to strengthen sexual stereotypes, interpreting scriptures to reinforce patriarchy, trivialising or co-opting feminism and women’s issues and using canon/civil law to further the agenda of those in power are other examples of this kind of power.

In Andhra Pradesh for instance, tens of thousands of poor and Dalit women fought a prolonged battle against the arrack trade.<sup>17</sup> It all began when one woman was inspired by a lesson on alcoholism in a literacy programme. She started a campaign against liquor shops in her village which soon developed into a state wide agitation.<sup>18</sup> Government profits of Rs. 8.9 billion were involved, while unofficial profits were to the tune of a staggering 20 billion. The issue was a socio-economic and political one, and the women had to take on politicians, government officials, the police, and the money power of the ruling class. They had to contend with armed gangs and police attacks, and resorted to dharnas, roadblocks, destruction of arrack depots and vans, gheraoing of officials and propaganda campaigns. Unfortunately, the politicians co-opted the movement and introduced statewide prohibition. This turned out to be an impossible policy to implement and the movement ultimately collapsed. The politicians, however, got what they wanted: the women’s votes, and the liquor trade flourished as before.<sup>19</sup>

**Nutritive power or power for another:** This is a positive form of power. It aims to develop others so as to make them competent enough to take charge of their own lives. It assumes that if all people are enabled to develop, all will benefit. In this understanding individual gifts are not for the exclusive use of the individual but for the good of all. A typical example is the use of nutritive power by parents for their children. Unfortunately, this is the "only power that has been willingly allowed to women," says Reverend Farmer. "But this is not for their sake, but for the sake of others (usually men and children) for whom they (women) become footstools. It is given to them because of their assigned roles, not because of their gifts and abilities,"<sup>20</sup> and ends up making them victims of manipulative power.

**Integrative Power or power with another:** This power works for the development of both. It allows no hierarchies and works on the premise that there is mutual gain in the interaction. One person having power is not seen as taking away power from another. Everyone's rights are acknowledged and respected, not treated as threats to be suppressed, defeated or ignored. It is inclusive, participative, respectful of the other and open to change. Farmer suggests that with integrative power we have arrived at the Christian way.<sup>21</sup>

In this form of power, women, indigenous peoples, the poor and other marginalised groups create a space for their voices to be heard. They become part of the decision-making process that controls their lives. More important, they are treated with respect, and there is

recognition of their wisdom and wealth of experience.

Power with another is not to be confused with power-sharing which has elements of arrogance and dominance. As Rebera points out, "Who is it that decides how the cake of power is to be cut and how it is to be shared? Or when it is to be cut or not cut? Inequalities can be incorporated into power-sharing."<sup>22</sup> She identifies instead yet another form of power:

**Transforming Power or power-within.** This power has the potential to transform both the individual and the community.<sup>23</sup> It is a "sacred power" that brings healing to victims of dominant power and "allows the touching of heart to heart".<sup>24</sup>

I do believe that such power often has a spiritual (not necessarily religious) root that transcends the dictates of the world. It translates itself into a solidarity that recognises our shared humanity: if one suffers we all suffer, if one hurts we all hurt. In effect it calls us to move beyond reaching out to reaching within. As Lilla Watson, an aboriginal Australian, remarks, "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together."

Two women of our times who have realised the potential of their transforming power are Mother Teresa and Medha Patkar. The former saw Christ in discarded humanity. This not only empowered her to care for the poor and the neglected, but also awakened the global consciousness, putting its power

at their service. Similarly Medha Patkar driven by a powerful love for the tribals and their land sparked off the Narmada Bachao Andolan that brought together not just the affected tribals, but caught the attention of environmentalists world-wide.

Given its understanding of interconnectedness, power-within also has the potential to transform our understanding and experience of God from the Absolute Power of domination to the Compassionate Power that intertwines us with each other and with the Divine.<sup>25</sup> By centring us within God, the Source of life-giving power, it provides an avenue for identifying power as the foundation for God's presence in the world.<sup>26</sup> It redeems power, making it a holy tool for the liberation of all.

Some feminists have identified two other types of power based on the sources of power:

**Personal power** as defined by Rita Nakashima Brock, Director of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College, Harvard University, is the power that comes from "knowing yourself well enough to be in control of your own behaviour".<sup>27</sup> It has its basis in a core inner sense of well-being that needs to be continually nurtured and strengthened if it is not to be lost. According to her women give away their personal power when they allow their personal histories of pain and struggle to make them react with destructive anger. It makes them vulnerable and easy to manipulate. What women need to do instead is to choose their response, whether it is confrontation, dialogue or silence.

**Structural or positional power** comes from the positions we hold or roles we play in social and religious systems. James Poling, a counsellor and Professor of Pastoral Theology, maintains that while all of us have personal power,

society dictates how power is distributed. Institutions and ideologies determine who has the privilege to be dominant and who must defer...power is actually organised by the relational webs of which we are a part. Our ability to act in effective ways depends on our connections with other persons and with institutions and ideas that form the basis of our experience. Power is gauged by the complexity of the relationships that can be contained in an interaction.<sup>28</sup>

While some of these power relationships are obvious, others are subtle. Sexism, racism, casteism and classism, for instance, while not overtly stated, often dictate the way people are hierarchically arranged.<sup>29</sup> "It does not matter how old I am," complains Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, an Asian Canadian, Professor in the Toronto School of Theology and ordained minister of the United Church of Canada, "the male minister comes in, and people turn to him – not me, even though we are both ordained."<sup>30</sup> As Brock points out,

"Understanding these structural arrangements is really important for knowing how to operate inside institutional structures and being wise to what's happening to you in them."<sup>31</sup>

Such an understanding is not easy, however, for personal and structural power usually do not function in watertight compartments. The CBCI

Commission for women, for instance, began with the exercise of a woman's personal power to speak at a CBCI meeting. It triggered off the Bishops' structural power which resulted in a structural change, the institution of a Women's Commission with the first woman secretary of a CBCI Commission. On the one hand this gave women positional power, but on the other it curbed their personal power. As women (personal power) how could they question the bishops (structural power) even as they fulfilled their obligations (positional power) to the Commission? It is a dilemma faced by all those who work for institutions. As Brock observes astutely,

...we have to think about whether we really want them (institutions) to die and whether we really want to be unemployed. So you have obligations to the institutions you work for, be it the church, the academy, the professoriate. Some positions come with power, while others come with having to call power into question. The work of discernment is always to pay attention to what is going on and to respond appropriately. You can't do any of that without an inner sense of personal power.<sup>32</sup>

## How women can acquire power

### *Disbelieving*

Perhaps the first step towards empowerment for women, suggests Elizabeth Janeway, author of *Powers of the Weak*, is disbelief.<sup>33</sup> "Disbelieving the definitions imposed by a dominant culture, disbelieving the accuracy of dualistic thinking...disbelieving the God-givenness of the status quo"<sup>34</sup> and dis-

believing laws, religious and social, that are based on a male perspective. God did not ordain that women should be subordinate to man; a woman's place is not only in the home; reason is not the monopoly of men nor emotion that of women; men are not the norm.... With this disbelief comes discontent and a search for alternatives. It is a long and slow process, for women are hampered by a lack of confidence and feelings of powerlessness and insecurity, but once women get together the process is hastened.

### *Uniting*

The power that comes from women's solidarity is in fact women's greatest strength. It stems from women's longing for relationship. Witness them at the marketplace, or the village well, or as they drop their children at school. They share information that helps them to better the lives of their families, they make plans together and network, they express joy and sorrow and create opportunities for sharing and caring, they exchange community news. Every time I leave my children at school, for instance, a few of us mothers stand around to chat for a while. We check out what is happening in school, share information about job opportunities, discuss the politics of our workplaces, extracurricular classes for our children and where to pick up a good haircut or clothes at bargain prices. We give each other travel tips, discuss recipes, health issues, the law and order situation and how to augment our incomes. Any difficulty, and there is always a mother with a useful suggestion or an offer of help. With variations, this kind of networking, which

is often discounted as “gossiping”, is common to all strata of women and is essential to women’s functioning in their multiple roles. It is a coming together that can be effectively used to build women’s power base.

In these women-centred networks, women can gain strength from sharing their experiences knowing that they will be heard and understood. With the support of their peers they are often enabled to say “No” to oppressive situations - No, I will not be treated as an object of sex. No, I will not shut up. No, I will not be treated as a doormat. No, I will not accept less wages.<sup>35</sup> Within a group women are also better able to explore alternatives to situations which they may otherwise feel helpless to change, like domestic violence or sexual harassment in the workplace.

Most important, as a group women can often achieve what they cannot do alone. Examples abound. Like the women of a village who decided to literally blow the whistle on wife beating. Each woman was given a whistle to call for help the moment her husband started beating her. On hearing the whistle the other women would gather around and shame the man. Domestic violence soon stopped in the village. At a wider level there are the women in Bankura, West Bengal, who started off with involvement in an income generation scheme and ended up with a place for themselves in decision making at the local and regional levels. Through an aided project these women acquired wasteland, refertilised the soil and grew a plantation of mulberry trees for cocoon breeding. They sold the cocoons to a

government marketing agency. In time the project grew to include 1,700 women. They make their own decisions, manage production activities, link with government services, mobilise new women members and deal with local panchayats. It has earned them inclusion by the West Bengal Forest Department on the village level forest protection committees as foresters.<sup>36</sup>

According to Dr. Mary Grey, Professor of Contemporary Theology at the University of Southampton, England, Jesus is the embodiment of such relational power.<sup>37</sup> I perceive this both in Jesus’ mission and his method: to be in right relationship with God through our relationships with our neighbours. He neither creates a power structure nor connects with the existing one. Instead, his power comes from his union with God. It is a transforming power that he asks all, especially the outcasts of society, to plug into.

### **Sharing knowledge**

Another tool for acquiring power is the sharing of knowledge, says Greer Anne.<sup>38</sup> Power has always followed knowledge, whether it is knowledge of the three ‘R’s, the self, the law, the land, the economy. While these areas are at least named, the importance of understanding power, especially for women, is not recognised and there is danger that the analysis of the current realities of power will remain words on paper. As Rebera points out, if the victims of abusive power are to benefit from these theories we have to establish “closer partnerships between those who know and those who need to know... (and)



bridge the gap between theorising and the daily experiences of powerlessness”.<sup>39</sup> Women who understand power must first translate their knowledge into action in their own interactions with other women, especially those of another age group, class, caste or race, and then share their knowledge with the powerless. Thus, women in positions of authority can be taught to opt out of dominating styles of exercising power. Senior women can be encouraged to empower girls and younger women (sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, colleagues) to have more choice. Women in the home can be made aware of non-verbal strategies of expressing power, like the refusal to give or take dowry, or the bringing up of sons and daughters without discrimination. As educator Christine Cargill observes, “...in a small way if I change my behaviour as part of the structure, then in time maybe the structure will change”.<sup>40</sup>

### **Becoming financially independent**

For women, the “poorest of the poor”, the issue of power is also linked to their poverty, whether in the workplace or at home. Concentrated in poorly paid clerical jobs or in the unorganised sector where they have no access to unions and labour laws, they are without the power to make wage decisions, define their working conditions and fight sexual harassment. Victims of the globalisation that benefits the powerful, they lack the power that will get their voices heard in the international forums that decide global policies. In the family, too, they do not have the bargaining power that money brings. Dependent and discounted because they do not vis-

ibly contribute to the economic welfare of the family, women are excluded from decision-making, prevented from defining their own lives and often subjected to violent abuse which they feel powerless to address. Even for women who have joined the paid workforce the struggle to claim the power that enables them to change social structures to accommodate their multiple responsibilities and to negotiate the sharing of household duties still remains.

Thus, for many women access to power begins with access to money. Financial stability not only makes women self-sufficient but also builds self-esteem. This allows women to make choices with regard to their persons, their jobs, their particular situation.

Victims of domestic violence who are financially independent, for example, are better able to consider alternatives. Similarly, a woman with a bank balance or earning capacity has a better position in the power equation in the home. Even in society and the church money raises the status of women and consequently their power.

### **Learning skills**

For women who seek public power whether in the villages or at the national level, the task is more difficult. According to a report of a workshop on Women, Power and Empowerment, “...too many (women) want to get into positions of leadership but do not want to undertake the work that it takes to get there, or to take the responsibility that comes with it or to develop the skills that are needed”.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, although many women may be good tacticians, they often fall short when it comes to strategy and planning, and are ill equipped to speak in public. Public power for women therefore starts with the empowerment of women. Basic education, so that women can at least read and write, is essential. Interpersonal skills like communication, group dynamics and conflict resolution must be developed. "Where to intervene, where to stay quiet, how to get the group involved if, for example, there's a major decision to be made" are important in the use of power, says Aruna Alexander.<sup>42</sup> Further, women must be exposed to programmes that help them in public speaking, systematic analysis and decision-making.

Due to their specific responsibilities women in power also need support structures like someone to look after their young while they are away from home. Timings that are suitable, transport facilities, financial independence and access to funds are also a necessity. Given women's second class status, women in public power also need the freedom to move about in society, the encouragement of family members, particularly husbands, parents and in-laws, supportive laws and law-enforcing agencies and public recognition and acceptance of their capabilities.

### **How women can use power**

The struggle to acquire power is so intense and time consuming for most women, that having "got there" they often feel the battle is won. In actual fact the biggest challenge has just be-

gun. "Why should women be politicians? To have as much power as men, or to change political decisions?" asks Dr. Janne Matlery, a political scientist.<sup>43</sup> These are crucial questions that can be applied to different fields, including the Church. Does the presence of women judges make a difference to the way laws are formulated and interpreted? Do women managers change the work ethic of their institutions? Will the understanding of priesthood be transformed if women are ordained?

Unfortunately, all too often women easily get co-opted into the very system that works against them. They accept as normal and unquestionable the existing power structures and patterns of functioning that exclude them and keep them in their "place". In a bid to be one with their male colleagues they tend to downplay their femininity and support male agendas at the expense of other women. Afraid of losing their hard won power they are inclined to resist participative power systems and perceive the emergence of other women leaders as threats. Alternatively, in an unconscious attempt to prove their superiority, they block the rise of other women with the excuse that they are incompetent precisely because they are women.

Indira Gandhi and Margeret Thatcher who were often acclaimed as the only "men" in their cabinets are two examples; oppressive mothers-in-law and authoritarian superiors are others. Ivana Dolejaova, a Czechoslovakian woman priest, observes that in the mid-eighties though more than one-third of their clergy were women, "Many of the women priests were just as authoritar-

ian as men, equally distant, equally striving for power... the feminine gentleness and compassion, the openness to people and willingness to listen were rare".<sup>44</sup>

### ***The Power of Vulnerability/Compassion***

Perhaps the key to understanding how women can use power lies in realising that power must be had as a means, not an end. "Power-over" that seeks to control others must give way to "power-for", "power-with" and "power-within" that challenge the status quo, take responsibility for the powerless, protect rights and foster growth and transformation. As Rebera points out, "For women to 'reclaim the *ekklesia* as community' we have to permit the right to own and claim power for ourselves and to use it for wholeness, for empowerment and for building community".<sup>45</sup>

Paradoxically, such power can be strengthened by women's weakness. By getting in touch with their own vulnerability women can empathise with others who are vulnerable – the young, the old, the disabled, the poor, the abused, the marginalised. Through remembering their own experiences of exclusion women can develop a perspective that values inclusive, participatory styles of management. Their pain can lead them to listen intently to the stories of others in pain and their capacity for relationships can provide a basis for putting persons before the status of institutions.

### ***The Power of Marginalisation***

Ironically, women's marginalisation in society and the Church also gives

them an advantage. According to Amanda Clarke, an economic statistician and member of an eclectic group called *Making Women Visible*, it "puts us in a place to challenge the mainstream and conservative ... Our difference gives us power".<sup>46</sup> Women speak with a different voice because they listen and speak from the margins. "To be in the margin", writes Bell Hooke "is to be part of the whole but outside the main body".<sup>47</sup> It makes for a world-view that is out of step with the rules, terms and practices of the centre. Consequently, when women speak they raise unsettling questions and disturb the status quo, for the transformation they seek of the margins cannot take place without the transformation of the whole design.<sup>48</sup>

It is a power women have used effectively as seen in the Bodhgaya movement (1978) in Gaya district, Bihar. It started as a class struggle by landless labourers (mostly Dalits) and share croppers for control over their production base which was in the hands of a Hindu Math. As the movement progressed, women slowly came into their own. Led by women activists with a feminist perspective, they organised public meetings on the gender inequities within the hill society. They questioned hierarchical relations within marriage and domestic violence. They insisted that men share in housework and childcare and fought for an increase in the number of women in the decision making process within the movement. Not only did they succeed in their demands but they also managed to get independent land rights at the time of redistribution.<sup>49</sup> With their insights from the

margins, they had succeeded in changing the centre.

### ***The Power of Mutuality/Inclusivity***

Another 'womanly' attribute that can be used as an effective stepping stone for integrative power is women's concern for the human person. Thus, Aruna Alexander, for instance, admits: "My own leadership style in terms of power is not so much one of command and control. Mine is much more interactive and involves having a sense, particularly in my congregation, of what kind of different personalities am I dealing with: what are the different personalities, what are the different gifts, what are the different talents?"<sup>50</sup> Such an inclusive style allows people to own choices, set achievable goals and take responsibilities.

### **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, women's empowerment involves both a struggle *for* power and a struggle *with* power. Once freed from their shackles, their very positions of disadvantage equip them to challenge the relationships and structures that imprison their power. In a special way they are called to re-define the parameters of power, re-negotiate the terms on which women work with men and re-design the systems within which they work. It is not an easy task, but it is a choice truer to their selves as women and closer to the gospel ideal. It is part of sharing in what Dr. Mary Grey calls "God's power of com-passion" – a passion for justice and wisdom and truth.<sup>51</sup>

### **Notes**

1. Aruna Alexander, "Towards A Theology of Power and Authority," *In God's Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p. 34.
2. Elaine Farmer, "Power and Its Misuse...Or Missing the Christian Way," *In God's Image*, 17 (1998) 3, p. 17.
3. *Ibid.* p. 18
4. *Ibid.*
5. Ranjini Rebera, "Power and Equality," *In God's Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p. 44.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, "Power in Two Cultures," *In God's Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p.42.
8. Ranjini Rebera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.
9. *Ibid*, p. 49.
10. *Ibid.* p. 45.
11. "Women, Power and Empowerment", in *Women's Link*, (July-September 1996), p. 41.
12. Aveen Maguire as cited by Ranjini Wickramaratne Rebera, "Recognising and Naming Power", *In God's Image*, 17 (1998) 1, p. 41.
13. Caroline Ramazanoghu, as cited in Ranjini Wickramaratne Rebera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.
14. Ranjini Rebera, *In God's Image*, 16 (1997) 4, p. 44.
15. Regina Coll, "Feminist Liberation Theology: It's Past and Future," *The Emerging Christian Woman: Church and Society Perspectives*, edited by. Stella Faria, Anna Vareed Alexander, Jessie B. Tellis Nayak, Indore: Satprakashan Sanchar Ishvani Kendra 1984, p. 30.
16. Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence*, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York: 1972 as used by Elaine Farmer, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 17-18.

17. "Anti-arrack Movement - Andra Pradesh", *Axe* XVI (Jan-Mar 1999) 1, p. 35.
18. Rudolf C. Heredia, S.J., "Our Theological Mission in Our Changing Situation," paper presented at the meeting of the Indian Theology Association April 1999.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Elaine Farmer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.
21. *Ibid.*
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