

Chapter 2 & 3

# The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb

A Spirituality for Leadership  
in a Multicultural Community

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## CHAPTER 2

### What Makes a Lamb Different from a Wolf? Understanding Cultural Differences in the Perception of Power

“What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8

**A**s a Christian, doing justice is part of my calling and duty. Justice means equal distribution of power and privilege among all people. In the vision of the Peaceable Realm, the balanced distribution of power among the animals is essential. However, most of the time, we think of peace as the lack of conflict and the assurance of protection. Therefore, in the name of peace, many social systems exercise authority to control people's behavior. The rationale is that if people are fearful of the punishment prescribed by the law

of the system, they are less likely to hurt others or destroy properties. Fear is the operating principle in this kind of system. It is like the lion, the king of the forest, saying, "We will have peace by doing what I tell you; if you don't, I will devour you."

Our vision of the Peaceable Realm is not based on fear. Instead, it is based on the lack of fear. "The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den" (Isaiah 11:8, RSV). This lack of fear is created by the even distribution of power. The lamb is equal to the wolf. The calf is equal to the lion. Therefore, they can live peacefully together. True peace cannot be attained without justice. To do justice, then, is to be able to see and recognize the uneven distribution of power and to take steps to change the system so that we can redistribute power equally.

Can the church be God's holy mountain on which people from diverse cultures "shall not hurt or destroy" each other? The church, in the most basic way, is the bringing together of people, sometimes from very diverse cultural backgrounds. When people from diverse cultures come together, the power dynamic in which one group dominates and claims more power than another is inevitable. In a multicultural community, doing the work of justice requires us to understand the different perceptions of power from different cultural points of view. If we can understand the internal cultural values behind why some people seem to be powerless and others powerful, then we can understand the root cause of this "wolf and lamb" scenario. With this knowledge, we can then work toward finding new ways of being where power is more evenly distributed.

In this chapter, we will dig deeply into our internal cultures, looking specifically at the differences in perceptions of personal power among the different cultures. The perception of personal power is our own understanding of our ability to change our environment. In terms of interpersonal relationships, the perception of power is our sense of authority and ability to influence and control others. More often than not, this perception of power is unconscious. It is

part of the "instinctual" culture that I mentioned in the previous chapter. Here is another way of looking at this: The perception of power is one's degree of acceptance of inequality. If I accept an inequality of power and authority as a given, then I will not see myself as having the need or the power to change it. If I do not accept inequality as a given, and believe instead that everyone should be equal to me, then I must see myself as having the power to change my environment and the system in order to attain that equality.

The perception of power is different from the reality of having that power. Middle-class white Americans are taught to believe that they have the power to change society and to make a difference. In reality, the upper class is the group that really has this power and privilege. In fact, in recent years the economic and political power of the middle class has diminished. However, both the middle and upper classes have the same perception of their personal power. This perception of power expresses itself through one's behavior and attitude, and very often it is unconscious. If a white middle-class person is mistreated by the system her first reaction would be to speak up, fight back, and undo this injustice. This is the behavior of a person who perceived herself to have power. A person who perceived himself to be powerless would just accept the injustice as a part of life that a powerless person endures. Many middle-class white Americans, who realized that their economic and political power was diminishing, tried to be in "solidarity with" the poor but found their efforts fruitless and frustrating. This is because even though in reality they may be equals in terms of economic and political power, their attitude and behavior based on their difference in perceptions of power still separate them.

Once I gave a presentation on racism at a conference. Afterward, a young man confronted me in the hallway. He said, "How could you talk about white people as if they are all the same? We are not all racists. We are not all oppressors. I found it very disturbing to hear you stereotype us while you are talking about undoing racism." I tried to explain without being too defensive, knowing that some-

thing else was at work here. I had noticed how, all through the conference, he would speak out on how whites were oppressed too and did not deserve to be stereotyped. But the responses from the people of color were: "Now you know how we feel; the few moments that you felt the sting of discrimination is how we felt all our lives." These responses were by no means friendly. I watched this man withdraw more and more as the day wore on. As I explained how I decided to speak in such "stereotypical" terms (knowing he did not hear much of it), I probed at an opportune moment into why he was feeling that way.

"How dare you say that I am one of them," he almost shouted with tears in his eyes, "when my wife and I have given up all our material goods in order to be in solidarity with the poor? We have given up our privileges and power as whites in order to live with the poor and work for the poor. How could you say all whites are the same? I am not one of them!" As he spoke, I got in touch with his frustration and feeling of being rejected by the people of color in the conference. I affirmed his willingness to be in solidarity with the poor as courageous and admirable. I also invited him to reflect on the cause of people of color's reaction to him. He walked away still angry. I thought to myself that while he believed intellectually that he was in solidarity with the poor, his behavior, governed by his perception of his power, certainly did not. His individualism, his yearning to be accepted, overpowered those who did not have a strong sense of their own power. I believe it was this overpowering behavior that the people of color rejected, not his good intentions to be in solidarity with the powerless and the poor.

Good intentions are not going to create a just community. Addressing the cultural clash that is happening at an internal unconscious level will at least begin to move in that direction. The different perceptions of power among cultures are the undercurrents that drive an intercultural encounter toward "the wolf and the lamb" scenario. When we uncover these undercurrents, we will be able to work with it and redirect it so that power may be redistributed justly.

Having grown up in Hong Kong and immigrated to the United States at the age of fourteen, I spent a lot of time feeling totally powerless. When someone mistreated me, I did not fight back. When I was told to do something that I did not want to do, I did not complain. This was normal in my cultural upbringing. In Hong Kong, you began life being powerless and you waited until it was your turn to have power. You gained power in two ways: by seniority, or when an authoritative figure appointed you. Therefore, in addition to feeling powerless, I also spent a lot of time waiting to be invited to take on leadership.

I was not aware of my powerless posture until I entered the education system in the United States. Before, I waited for the teacher to recognize my worth because a teacher was expected to know every student's ability. In the States, I had to volunteer my answer to prove that I knew it better than the others. If I did not do that, the teacher might not know that I existed. It was a slow and painful process to survive the education system here. Since I was not aware of my weak sense of personal power, I constantly felt ignored by my teachers and peers. I spent many afternoons walking home after school reciting this under my breath: "How could they not know that I can do better than the others? Why did my teacher never call on me? What's wrong with me? There must be something wrong with me. I'll show them. I'll show them I am smarter next time." When the next time came, I would be frozen and powerless and not able to speak up like my other classmates. I wrote this poem in my tenth grade English class.

Timid, ambitious  
Always blaming myself  
I

What happened to me? I was living in two incompatible cultural understandings of personal power. At home and in Hong Kong, I was taught to compete. When I succeeded, I waited to be recognized. The understanding was that when I

was good, others would know it and I did not need to blow my own horn, which would be considered very impolite. In order for this cultural system to work, the people in power also had the sensitivity to recognize and perceive nonverbally what people were good at and when they were ready to participate. In school in the United States, I was also taught to compete. The difference was that I had to let others know I was good or they would not notice. I did not have the awareness to see this cause of my frustration. So I thought there was something wrong with me. I blamed it on myself, which is a tendency of a powerless person. In order for me to survive school and work, I, at one point in my life, rejected my Chinese heritage, thinking that it was useless. All it did was to slow me down. If I were to climb the ladder of the American dream, I had to learn the aggressive ways of the system here.

My experience of personal power has gone through many evolutions. Through my experience of the Gospel, I learned about empowerment. I was liberated and was able to confront anything that came my way. I would never have been able to make it through seminary had I not felt that empowerment. Then during my field education with Chinese refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, I discovered I was so overpowering that it was counterproductive. The foundations of my perception of personal power were shaken once again. I had to rethink what empowerment meant if my own empowerment could cause others to become powerless. True empowerment should empower others at the same time.

Understanding my own perception of power came into crystal-clear focus when I was doing research in multicultural ministry during my sabbatical in 1989. I read the work of Geert Hofstede. In his book, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Hofstede reported the results of a research project that involved exploring "the differences in thinking and social action that exist between members of forty different modern nations." He identified "four main dimensions along which dominant value systems in the forty countries can be ordered and which

affect human thinking, organizations, and institutions in predictable ways."<sup>1</sup> One of the dimensions, called "Power Distance," described the different understandings of inequality across cultures.

Societies in different cultures have developed different solutions to inequality. Power Distance is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally."<sup>2</sup> Hofstede describes this variable as a continuum, and the forty countries in which he did the survey fall somewhere in between the two extremes. One end Hofstede called the "High Power Distance" cultures, in which people believe that there should be an order of inequality in the world. In these cultures, everyone has his or her rightful place. The existence of inequality and hierarchy is an accepted fact of life. In this hierarchy, superiors and subordinates treat each other as different kinds and tend not to mix socially. On an individual level, the small elite powerholders believe that they are entitled to privileges and should try to look as powerful as possible. The powerless, which is the majority, accept their state of powerlessness and usually do not feel that they can change the system. Power and authority are usually not challenged and the legitimacy of the use of power is irrelevant. If changes are to happen to the social system, it usually happens by dethroning those in power. People in these cultures find strength and power in larger groupings. Many social changes in these societies may happen when the powerless gather together to express their dissatisfaction, which may lead toward dethroning those in power. Even though cooperation among the powerless is a way of changing the system, cooperation is very difficult to bring about because of the low level of trust among people in general. These cultures tend to have no—or a very small—

<sup>1</sup>Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences—International Differences in Work-Related Values*, abridged edition (Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987), p.11.

<sup>2</sup>G. Hofstede and M. Bond, "Hofstede's culture dimensions: An independent validation using Rokeach's value survey," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 15 (1984): p.419.

middle class. The majority of the people are poor and have limited access to higher education. The elite powerholders tend to be the ones who have the education and wealth.

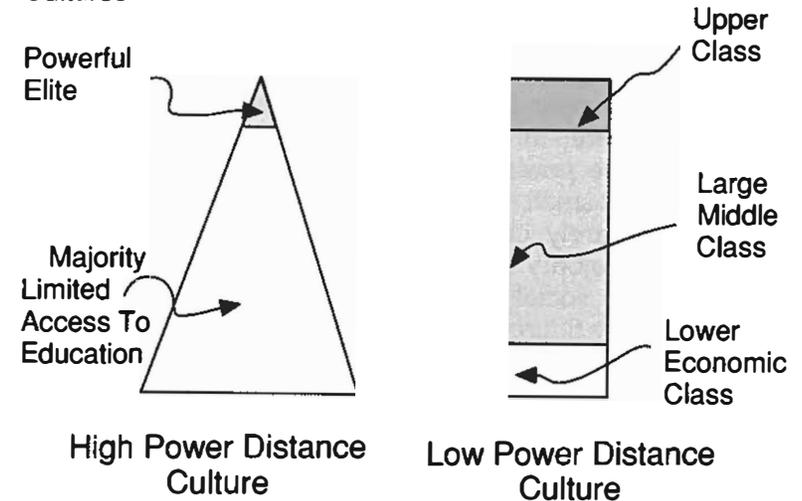
At the other extreme, which Hofstede called “Low Power Distance,” the majority of people believe that inequality in society should be minimized. The existence of a hierarchy is only for the convenience of accomplishing tasks of the organization. This inequality of roles should not affect relationships outside the organization. Superiors and subordinates treat each other as equals. People should have equal rights. People in power should try to look less powerful than they are. They spend a lot of time justifying and legitimizing their use of power. Since these cultures place importance on rewards, and legitimate and expert power, people believe that they can gain more power by doing the “right” things so that they can be rewarded with more power. They can also gain more power through education, which certifies them as experts. Implicit in this view of power is that people believe they can change the system by redistributing power. For the powerless, this means gaining more power themselves and therefore getting into the power system, forcing the system to change. For the powerful, this means including the powerless in the system by giving them power. In such a society, there is a well-developed middle class in which people reach a certain level of education. There is a minority of less-educated and low-income people in these societies that shares a belief with the majority of the people on the other end of the continuum. That belief is: they do not have any power to change the system, and they accept inequality as a given in life.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2.1 (on facing page) gives a visual representation of the difference between High and Low Power Distance cultures. The triangle and rectangle represent the total population of a society. The shaded areas represent the proportion of people who believe they have power and the clear

<sup>3</sup>For a full description of High and Low Power Distance, see Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences—International Differences in Work-Related Values*, abridged edition, pp. 65–109.

**Figure 2.1**

Graphic Representation of High and Low Power Distance Cultures



areas represent the proportion of people who do not believe they have power. The major difference between the two cultures is that in the Low Power Distance culture there are more people who believe they have power. They are the expanded middle class. Power Distance is not only a cultural variable, but it is also a variable based on economic classes and education.

Hofstede’s research data helped me understand my experience growing up in Hong Kong, which is a High Power Distance culture. By immigrating to the United States, I was thrown into a Low Power Distance culture. In my struggle to survive this culture shock, I reacted by denying my Chinese cultural heritage and tried to assimilate into the Low Power Distance culture of the United States. Then I found out that the cultural values I adopted did not prepare me for my ministry with the first-generation Chinese-American community, which maintained its High Power Distance culture. My adopted Low Power Distance cultural value was too overpowering to the High Power Distance community. Even

though I set out to empower others, I was doing the opposite because of my power perception of myself.

Whenever I try to explain Hofstede's concept of Power Distance, my audience becomes confused about the terms High and Low Power Distance. One way to lessen the confusion is to see that Power Distance is inversely related to people's perception of power. That is, in a High Power Distance culture, the majority of the people believe that they have little power to change their environment of inequality. The small elite group who has the power and authority is rarely challenged. In a Low Power Distance culture, the majority of people believe that they have power to change the social system. They are not afraid to challenge authority figures and work toward a more even redistribution of power. Figure 2.2 shows countries that fall within the two ends of the Power Distance continuum.

**Figure 2.2**

High and Low Power Distance Countries from Hofstede data

<b>High Power Distance</b>	<b>Low Power Distance</b>
Philippines	Austria
Mexico	Israel
Venezuela	Denmark
India	New Zealand
Singapore	Ireland
Brazil	Sweden
Hong Kong	Norway
France	Finland
Colombia	Switzerland
Turkey	Great Britain
Belgium	Germany
Peru	Australia
Thailand	Netherlands
Chile	Canada
	U.S.A.

The two lists illustrate that the countries in which the majority of people feel powerless are mostly Latin American and Asian countries. On the other extreme, the countries in which people feel they have power are English-speaking and Germanic language-based countries; most of these are northern European countries.

Taking this data and applying it to the multicultural situation in the United States, I hope to explain why there is a dichotomy between the people of color and whites in their perception of power in the United States. There are three factors that we have to consider:

1. The majority of recent immigrants in the United States are from Latin American and Asian countries. Recent immigrants are less influenced by the dominant culture of the United States, which believes that everyone should be equal. In other words, they tend to retain the cultural values they brought with them.
2. From a class perspective, the majority of the lower-income and less-educated people in the United States are people of color and recent immigrants. As I mentioned earlier, the low-income and less-educated class in Low Power Distance cultures behaves just like the majority of the High Power Distance culture: they believe they do not have power to change their environment.
3. Even though they have been in the United States for more than three generations and have attained the education and income level to be classified as middle-class Americans, many people of color may still retain a lot of the High Power Distance cultural traits. Their attitudes toward power may still be very different from the white middle class. This is because the melting-pot theory does not work

for people of color in the United States. The second- and third-generation European Americans can “melt” into the dominant American culture fairly easily. In many families, they are discouraged from retaining their European identities in order not to distinguish themselves from others. However, the picture is very different for immigrants of color. I was in a conference in which a Chinese American shared that she was a sixth-generation American and people continued to ask her which Asian country she was from. No matter how hard people of color try to “melt,” they are not yet accepted by whites as true Americans. So the melting-pot theory works only for European Americans and it has never worked for people of color. Many people of color choose to remain in their own ethnic community for survival. In this return to isolation, even though many are more than third-generation Americans, they still retain many of their ethnic cultural values and are less affected by the dominant culture of the United States.

Putting all this together, when we are in an intercultural encounter, we can generalize that people of color tend to function like those from High Power Distance cultures. That is, they do not have a strong sense of personal power. On the other hand, white middle- and upper-class people tend to function in a Low Power Distance perception of their own power. This is confirmed by my experience of working with multicultural groups. Most of the time, white persons in the group tend to behave as if they are equal to each other and people of color tend to behave as if they are powerless.

We can see how the technical terms *High and Low Power Distance* can get in the way of my trying to explain and describe what I am trying to communicate. Instead of using these terms to represent groups with different power

perceptions, I will simplify with *people of color* and *white*. I have been using these two terms loosely up to this point. With the discussion in this chapter, I will now define them more specifically. I will use the term *people of color* to represent Asian Americans, Latinos/Latinas, African Americans, and American Indians, believing that most of the time, in a multicultural situation, these groups tend to behave in a High Power Distance understanding of their personal power.

I added American Indians to the list knowing that I do not have any hard research data to back this up. I know the term *American Indian* includes many tribes and cultures, just as *Asian American* includes an even more diverse group of cultures and races. From my experience, however, whenever American Indians are involved in a multicultural group, they tend to behave in the same way as the others in this category. I believe this may have to do with their economic status.

I will use the term *whites* to represent white middle- and upper-class Americans with northern European backgrounds, believing that most of the time, in a multicultural situation, these groups tend to behave in a Low Power Distance understanding of their personal power. I recognize the danger of overgeneralization. I believe that having understood these generalized principles, we can then step back and acknowledge that, independent of people’s ethnic backgrounds, they may or may not fit into this theory. The generalization is no more than a guideline or a pointer for us to analyze and reflect on our intercultural encounters. Let me tell an ancient Chinese story that illustrates this important point.

There was a fool who wanted to buy a pair of new shoes. In preparation for this, he cut a piece of straw that measured the length of his foot. The fool thought to himself, “This would be the size of my shoes.” He left his house and walked to town, which was a three-hour walk. He entered the only shoe store in town. The owner asked him, “May I help you?”

“I would like to buy a pair of shoes,” the fool replied.

“What size?”

At that point, the fool reached into his pocket and discovered that in his hurry to leave his house, he had left the piece of straw behind. Without another word, he ran out of the shoe store, ran all the way back home, found the piece of straw, and ran back to town. By the time he reached the shoe store, it was evening and the store was closed for the day.

As a result, the fool ran around all day without getting his new shoes.

Why did he run around looking for a piece of straw when he had his own feet right there at the store? That is why he was a fool. The model and theory that I presented in this chapter is no more than the straw that approximates the reality of how cultures might be different from each other. They are useful to us only as an instrument to help us reflect and analyze our intercultural experiences. They should not be used to make gross generalizations that further stereotype people. That would be like the fool running around looking for straw, forgetting that he had his own feet there. One of the common mistakes that people make when they deal with models and theories is that they treat them as modes into which people have to fit. Most theories come from human experience, not human experiences from theories. Theories and models are but artificial one-dimensional rulers (straw) that people create to measure or try to make sense of human experiences that are multidimensional (feet). As we explore and understand more and more about the experience we try to measure or make sense of, these straws will eventually cease to represent the reality. Then theories and models need to be modified or new ones need to be developed. For now, Hofstede’s High and Low Power Distance helps me understand the power dynamic between whites and people of color in the United States. I am sure that the generalization I am making will be modified and expanded as we encounter the reality of multicultural interaction.

One can say that this kind of power dynamic does not manifest itself only through cultural differences. It can occur between genders, the able and disabled, lesbian/gay and heterosexual, and the rich and poor. However, in the United States, the power dynamic set up by cultural differences is much more prominent as compared to other kinds of power differences. We need to be careful not to water down the cultural differences by lumping them together with gender and economic differences. While I must not lose sight of these other differences, my experience indicates to me that cultural differences tend to overshadow gender and economic differences in this power continuum. I will explain this further in Chapter Six.

When whites and people of color recognize that there are cultural differences in their perceptions of power, they take the first step toward doing justice. We can see that because of cultural difference some people are perceived as lions and wolves and some as lambs and calves. Furthermore, these perceptions are most likely unconscious. These perceptions set up an uneven distribution of power before the groups even meet. If the church is to become the holy mountain on which people from diverse cultures shall not hurt or destroy each other, we must respond to the call to do justice. Doing justice in a multicultural environment requires us to understand the consequences of these cultural differences in power perceptions. Doing justice commands us to reveal this unconscious and disproportionate distribution of power. Doing justice compels us to develop new leadership skills that can confront injustice. Then we can create a just community when people from different cultures encounter each other with equal strength. In the following chapters, we will explore these topics both theologically and practically. Perhaps they will contribute to the church’s effort to realize the Peaceable Realm.

*Differences in the  
Perception of Power and  
Their Consequences  
for Leadership*

**I**n the last chapter, I made the generalization that people of color tend to perceive themselves as powerless and whites tend to perceive themselves as powerful. It is very important to recognize that this perception of power is a continuum along which people from all cultural backgrounds fall. All I am saying is that on the powerful end there is a higher concentration of whites and on the powerless end there is a higher concentration of people of color. Cultural differences, social prejudice, economic factors, and education all play a part in creating this dichotomy in the United States.

The consequences of this difference in perceptions of power are many. It affects communication, work relationships, family structures, and our education system, just to name a few. In other words, it affects all aspects of our society. In this book, I would like to concentrate on leadership styles and group dynamics. The definition of a leader is not the same in different cultures because how a person is expected to manage a group is dependent on the group members' perceptions of their own power. How do you lead a group of people who believe they are equal to you? How do you lead a group of people who defer to you for all the decision making because you are the authority figure? How do you lead a group of people whose perception of their power spreads from one end of the power perception continuum to the other? These are important questions to answer if the church is to raise up leaders who are able to build faithful communities in the midst of a multicultural society.

I learned in seminary how to work with groups. The seminary I attended provided a predominantly white, English-speaking environment. Therefore, the group process I learned was based on the cultural assumptions and values of the white, English-speaking middle class. Take leading a Bible study group as an example. The method I learned involved asking a series of questions coupled with an experiential exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to help the group delve deeper into the meaning of the text. I did not realize how culture-bound this method was until I facilitated a Bible study group for a Chinese-speaking group. Everything I learned about group process and facilitation of dialogue around scripture did not work. I would ask a question and the response was always a painful silence. I would ask for volunteers to participate in an experiential exercise. No one would volunteer. As a result, I ended up doing all the talking to explain what the text meant to me.

I discovered another problem with my leadership style when I encountered multicultural groups. The white members of the group would disclose their insights and thoughts verbally and freely while the people of color would just sit and listen. The more I tried to include them, the worse it got.

These experiences forced me to explore new models of leadership that took into account cultural differences and how they could affect the way we relate to each other in a multicultural group.

Depending on the cultural contexts, a group's expectation from the leadership could be very different. Leading or facilitating a group has to do with power—power to influence others and being aware of the power dynamic among the group members. Therefore, it is very important for a group leader first to determine where he or she is in the power perception continuum. How does it influence the way she behaves and interacts with others? What assumptions and expectations does he bring to the group?

Secondly, when the group leader is in a multicultural situation, there is a need to know where the people are on this power continuum. If all participants have a strong sense of their own individual power, then everything learned in white middle-class group processing would be helpful here because everyone believes that he or she is equal to everyone else unless there are "experts" in the room. A good leader is someone who enables the group to do what it needs to accomplish. People are expected to volunteer their thoughts, feelings, and talents. Differences of opinion are debated verbally. A good leader attempts to get consensus from the group. Decisions can be made by compromising. When a consensus or compromise cannot be reached, decisions fall back on voting. Robert's Rules of Order is a prime example of group process based on these assumptions. Voting, when it is not unanimous, presumes that there are winners and losers. Groups with these kinds of assumptions automatically set up a competitive environment.

An image of a good leader in a white group is a pre-traffic-lights traffic cop who stands on a platform in the middle of an intersection. His or her job is to keep all the self-moving autonomous individuals from colliding with each other. The worst of the leaders in this setting is someone who sits back and lets people fight and escalate the conflict, all in the name of democracy and respect for individual opinion and freedom. Then when things get out of hand, the

leader comes in with his or her own agenda and says, “See, I gave you the power to decide and you can’t seem to be able to do it. So why don’t you let me decide for you?”

If everyone in the group falls on the other end of the power continuum (that is, they have a fragile sense of their individual power and would not challenge authority), someone will have to take charge and be the authoritative figure. The authoritative figure is usually the designated leader of the group. If no one takes on this role, nothing will get done. A good leader is sensitive to the needs and talents of everyone in the group. An image of a good leader is an octopus who has its tentacles extended into the different parts of the community. This person has a network of trusted people who give him or her information about what the community wants, who wishes to participate, and who has the gifts to fulfill the tasks. This person spends a lot of time before a meeting to acquire the essential information. At the meeting, the concept of invitation becomes very important because no one will volunteer. The leader has to invite people directly to offer their ideas and services. The leader will have difficulty if there are power struggles between two or more persons who believe they all have authority in the group. The worst of the leaders in this kind of group are those who use their power to push their own agenda because in such a group no one will challenge their authority.

What happens when you have a mixed group—say, one half is white and the other half is people of color? Remember that this does not happen just in a culturally mixed group; it also can happen in a mixed class group. Whenever I am in such a group, I usually observe the following pattern:

### **White Group**

White group members participate as they always do, and talk when they have something to say. If they disagree with someone, they disagree with them verbally and openly. Pretty soon, they realize some others are not speaking. So, with all good intentions,

they try to include them by giving subtle hints because it is not considered polite to put people on the spot. It usually comes out like this: “I think everyone should jump into the discussion, if you have something to say; there is no need to be shy about it.” The more they try, the more the people of color close up. As a result, they make decisions without the input and concordance of the people of color members, even though they appear to have consented to it. Then, the people of color get blamed for not participating. Occasionally, some white members feel guilty about dominating the group once more.

### **People of Color Group**

People of color take part in the group by expecting an authoritative leader to tell them what will happen and what to do. Instead, they hear many people talking without being invited to speak first. The assumption then is that these people must have a great deal of power and authority; so they let them talk and do not challenge them. Then, the white members of the group start hinting that they should be talking also but without a direct invitation. This may be what was going on in their minds: “If they really want my opinion, why don’t they come out and ask me? Apparently, I am not smart enough,” or, “How can I speak when there isn’t any time to think about what I want to say?” As time goes on, they feel more and more inadequate. “And then they made decisions without asking me to contribute or do anything—I must be worthless.” When the meeting ends, they leave and refuse to come back again.

What happens is that the white members of the group, by behaving “naturally” according to their cultural upbringing, are being perceived as superior by the people of color and, therefore, are given power over them. The people of

color, by seeing the situation from their cultural point of view, do not know that they are perceived by the whites as equal partners in the group. The lack of understanding of this difference in the perception of power, on both sides, leads to a situation of injustice. The white group has more power than the other by controlling the agenda and decision making and unintentionally excluding the people of color. This is not the fault of any group involved. Members of the two groups, by being themselves, create a power dynamic that is like putting wolves and lambs together in one room. Something bad is going to happen because of the different "natures" of the two groups.

In an ethnocentric way, most whites believe that inequality can be countered by simply physically including the powerless and the disadvantaged. They think that by inviting an individual representative from the powerless group to join them, they are able to redistribute power more evenly. The assumption is that everyone is equal to each other as individuals and everyone is expected to participate "fully"—meaning being able to speak for himself or herself. The truth is that not all believe they are equal to each other. I have already explained why this is. Another reality is that not everyone is an individual who can speak for himself or herself. Many people of color come from cultures that emphasize the collective over the individual.<sup>1</sup> It is very hard for them to speak as individuals. They feel powerless without their community behind them. This explains why tokenism doesn't work. Inviting only one representative strips the power of the person by not including a collective group from which he or she comes. This is a typical response when a church organization is confronted with not having the "proper" ethnic representations: "We invited them; they came once and didn't participate. Then they stopped coming. Can't say we didn't try!"

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion on individualism/collectivism, read Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences—International Differences in Work-Related Values*, abridged edition (Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987), pp.148–175.

This approach is what I call the ethnocentric way of doing justice. Ethnocentrism assumes one's culture is the only and superior way. With it comes the assumption that everyone should be and is like me. For whites, this means assuming everyone is equal to me in his or her power perception. Doing justice is very simple. We need only to physically include the excluded. The assumption is that once they are there they can play the power game just like us. This kind of approach to racial injustice is typical not only in churches; it also appears in the political and economic arenas of our society. Busing in the early seventies was based on this ethnocentric way of doing justice. With this assumption, we transported a small group of black students to a white school, believing that physical inclusion would take care of the problem of racial injustice. Contrary to what people expected, this kind of action actually created more unjust situations such as the one I have described.

Justice in a multicultural setting has to be approached in an "ethnorelative" way.<sup>2</sup> We begin by accepting the reality that people's power perceptions are different because of cultural differences. By analyzing these power perceptions and how they are relative to each other, we will see that there is a great disparity of power between the two groups. Based on this knowledge, we need to create an environment that allows people to interact with equal power and therefore redistributes power evenly. In other words, white members of the group need to know that they are perceived as powerful right from the start of the interaction and need to give up power in order to make themselves truly equal to others. People of color need to know that they are valued as equals and need to find ways to gather together a critical mass so that they can speak with power and as a collective.

In a multicultural community, we can no longer train leaders ethnocentrically. We can no longer assume every-

<sup>2</sup>The term *ethnorelative* was used by Milton J. Bennett to describe the latter three stages of intercultural sensitivity. Bennett, "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity," in *Cross-Cultural Orientation: New Conceptualization and Application*, ed. by R. Michael Paige (University Press of America, 1986), pp.27–69.

one is like us in their power perception. We can no longer do justice by simple physical inclusion. We must move from our ethnocentric way to an ethnorelative way of doing justice. We must train leaders to be more culturally sensitive, especially to their own sense of power and how they are different from people with different cultural backgrounds. We must train leaders to do power analysis based on their cultural sensitivity. Only in this way can we be truly inclusive. Only in this way can we move from mono-cultural leadership to multicultural leadership.

In the following chapters, I shall address the injustice created by the difference in power perceptions. I shall do this first theologically through studying the scriptures. Then I will explore practical ways of addressing the issue through case study and new designs of group processes.