

Review: Redeeming Power

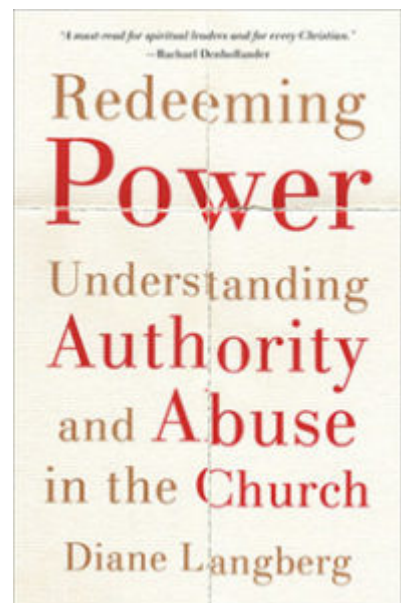
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Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church

By Diane Langberg (Brazos Press)

Redeeming Power is not an easy book to read. Once read, it's even harder to forget.

Author Diane Langberg draws on decades of experience as a psychologist and counselor as she presents a compelling—and disturbing—exploration of issues related to the abuse of power. While the book focuses primarily on sexual abuse in the church, Langberg also deals with other types of abuse in varied institutional settings. She includes a discussion of the power dynamics between men and women, as well as exploring the intersection of race and power. Some readers may find that broad view dilutes the impact of the presentation about sexual abuse. Others may discover it expands their perspective on the many ways people can suffer from abuse and experience trauma.



One of the book's strengths is its grounding not only in trauma-informed psychology, but also in biblical theology. When Langberg discusses power and personhood, she begins with the creation story in Genesis and the concept of "the image of God" in humanity. When she deals with power

between males and females, she makes a strong biblical case for equality and deals forthrightly with the misuse of the “headship” concept. The foundational chapters on the abuse of power are necessary. However, the concluding section on the redemptive and healing power of Christ is the most hopeful and helpful.

The only serious criticism of the book is the author’s lack of nuance and tendency toward painting with a broad brush. In particular, it seems odd that Langberg apparently never heard of Godwin’s Law—first applied to online discussions but often cited as a general principle for debate. In essence, Godwin’s Law says whenever one party in a discussion compares someone to Adolph Hitler or something to Nazi Germany, the debate ends, and that person loses. The first time Langberg uses that approach, it’s startling but effective. However, she plays the Hitler/Nazi card far too frequently and cavalierly. Comparing a sexual predator to Hitler is one thing. She totally lost me when she mentioned the Boy Scouts of America and Nazi Germany in the same sentence. Sadly, she didn’t need to do it. She makes compelling points about the power of deceit and systemic abuse without resorting to those tactics. And her final point is her most powerful one: Power is redeemed when it is exercised to protect the vulnerable rather than protect institutions.

Ken Camp, managing editor

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