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I went to a meeting where the speaker said he doesn't attend any meeting that's not about building power. We chanted that we demand power. Then I went to another meeting where the opening prayer by Benedictine [Sr. Joan Chittister](#) called for resisting temptations to power. Not surprisingly, the first meeting was in the black community and the second meeting was with a group of nuns.

It's enough to make a person feel bifurcated — and then set a person to thinking.

For myself, I mostly go to meetings that build community. I'm trying to help build a new world in the shell of the old, a Quaker axiom. But I also urge legislators to take action. And I take action myself, marching, boycotting, risking arrest.

It all depends on what we mean by building power and what we mean by building community. Maybe the bottom line is a commitment to the common good. Power certainly can redound to the benefit of the individual. Plenty of movements have gone astray with the rise of an unscrupulous charismatic leader. Even shared power can go awry when a power struggle ensues. These are the temptations.

My own conclusion is simply that we must be vigilant. We need to stay alert to our own motivations and biases. We need to question others. Mostly, we need to show up at all these meetings, prepared to listen and speak and ready to take action.

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