

Know Your Enemy:

Dark Powers in Heavenly Places

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The identification of the “powers and principalities” in the New Testament has become a question of sociology and psychology, not just angelology and demonology. The fundamental dichotomy of Christian Scripture is the Kingdom of God versus the “world,” with the former led by Christ and the latter led by Satan. The imagery is that of warfare. Just as Jesus confronted and exorcized demons, we fight against something outside ourselves. Yet,

we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).¹

The Ephesian author thus counsels us to arm ourselves with good character, faith, the word of God, and prayer (6:13-18).

An indispensable rule of combat is that one must know the enemy. How can I fight these powers and forces if I don't know what and where they are? This paper will look first at Christ's paradigmatic battle against the powers portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels. There seems to be no

¹All biblical quotations are from the *Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV)* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), unless otherwise noted.

distinction in the various Gospel writers' concept of demons and satanic powers, but this study will focus mostly on Luke's account. The Pauline texts will then be explored for insight into the invisible world of our spiritual adversaries.

Jesus Versus The Evil One

The Jesus of the Gospels lives in a world controlled by a personal Satan and populated with angels and demons. The beginning of Luke's gospel is punctuated with visits from angels. Gabriel even bears a name. Indeed, there is no indication in the Gospels that angels of the New Testament are any different from the personal spirit-messengers encountered in the Old Testament.

In Luke 4, Jesus endures a vigorous series of temptations at the hand of the devil. This malicious spirit even claims ownership over all the kingdoms of the world: "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will" (4:6). Christ does not object to Satan's claim over the nations. Instead, his rebuttal is that only YHWH is truly worthy of worship.

This is a key insight into the political viewpoint of the New Testament. The kingdoms of the world are under the control of Satan. It is not that they always had been thus, but that they had been "delivered" to him.

In Christ's subsequent ministry, we see the Messiah active in undermining this satanic control. Luke's Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming at Nazareth that he has been sent "to proclaim liberty to the captives. . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (4:18). His first miracle here (as in Mark) is an exorcism. In a remarkable display of Christ's authority, "the spirit of an unclean demon," which recognizes Jesus and speaks in the first person plural, is commanded to "be silent and come out of" a man in the synagogue of Capernaum (4:31-36).

Christ's message of "liberty to the captives" is a declaration of war against the powers of oppression, which are most clearly manifest in demonic beings themselves. In Luke 13, when a woman is healed of a "disabling spirit," Christ explained that although Satan had bound her for eighteen years, she was now "loosed from this bond."

Bible scholars now recognize that Christ's miracles of healing were not primarily proof of his divinity, but were object lessons on the nature of the kingdom. Like the demons, leprosy, paralysis, and blindness were oppressive powers that held people in bondage, and were subject to divine rebuke. Thus it can be said by Peter that Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). The same terminology of power and oppression is applied to illnesses, demonic possession, and those who are socially and politically oppressed. The reason this is so is because they are all manifestations of malevolent authority originating from Satan and his invisible kingdom.

Luke eleven provides a window into the cosmic struggle between two kings and their kingdoms. When Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, he retorts that the devil couldn't do such a thing. "And if Satan is also divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?" Christ then goes on to explain that he is a "strong man" even stronger than the devil, and he has the power to bind the devil and raid his kingdom (11:14-22).

The picture painted by these passages is of an organized resistance movement against the reign of God.² Satan is real, and he wields power over his own kingdom, which consists of demons and spirits which are not isolated individuals, but actors in a demonic conspiracy. They are able to influence events in the physical world, even to the extent of possessing human (and

²The accounts of Christ's exorcisms in the Synoptics "show that he was pitted against not just an odd demon but by an organized kingdom of Satan, which afflicts the human race, Jew and Gentile, at every level of personal and social life" – Stephen Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 132.

Wink is likewise correct in stating that "Jesus regards his healings and exorcisms as an assault on the kingdom of Satan and an indication that the kingdom of God is breaking in. The gospel is very much a cosmic battle in which Jesus rescues humanity from the dominion of evil powers" – *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 26.

porcine³) bodies. Even more threatening than demonic possession, though, is the way in which Satan's kingdom operates by influencing the authorities, stirring them up against Jesus and his disciples. Christ tells the Jewish leaders "You are of your father, the devil," who is a murderer and the father of lies (John 8:44-45).

Christ's ministry served to expose this satanic conspiracy and provide a way of escape. Paul recounts Jesus commissioning him "to open [the Gentiles'] eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). The unsaved are living under the "power" of Satan. He is the root of all which kills and oppresses, including those human governments and structures which do not serve their God-given purpose. That is why Christ can see Satan at work in Peter (Mark 8:33). Indeed Satan longs to get the apostles in his grasp to sift them like wheat (Luke 22:31). Satan even enters into Judas (Luke 22:3), ostensibly as part of a larger plan involving the chief priests and officers.

So, Christ is opposed in the Gospels by the Roman and Jewish civil authorities. But in the big picture, even these rulers and authority structures are pawns of Satan's devilish machinations. Christ engages the powers in a two-front assault, both confronting demons personally and waging war in the battlefields of human minds.

Paul: The Demythologizer?

The scholarly consensus since Berkhof is that Paul took the "powers" mythology he inherited from Judaism and de-mythologized it into something sociological and psychological.

³Luke 8:26-39 recounts the story of Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac, who is possessed by the "legion" of demons (which perhaps double as an allegory for Roman occupation). The fact that the demons are able to possess both humans and pigs is interesting in light of the fact that modern medical researchers often use pigs for experimentation because their internal structure resembles the human viscera more closely than any other mammals. Is this why demons are able to enter pigs? And does this have anything to do with pigs being unclean in Judaism? Are pigs unclean because they can be carriers of demons, and thus cannot be allowed into the demon-free zone of the promised land?

But is this really the case? My understanding is that Paul sees no clear demarcation between the human rulers and institutions and the real spiritual entities which manipulate events behind the scenes. Both are equally as real. Charismatics tend to over-emphasize the spiritual aspects over the temporal and physical ones, while liberals tend to disbelieve in the spiritual forces and focus on the more earthly aspects of the powers. Our challenge is to hold the two realities in balance, and follow the biblical world-view that what happens on earth affects things in heaven, and vice-versa.

First off, although they are admittedly rare, there are references to angels, demons, and Satan in the Pauline letters. Forbes finds “a maximum of fourteen references to angels in the Pauline corpus.”⁴ In most cases, the angels are rather passive, which comports with the rest of the biblical witness (excluding the apocalyptic texts). Demons appear in 1 Cor. 10:20-21 as participants in idolatrous worship. Demons are also associated with heresy in 1 Tim. 4:1. The devil (*diabolos*) is mentioned in Eph. 4:27 (don’t give him a foothold), 6:11 (resist his schemes); 1 Tim. 3:6-7, and 2 Tim. 2:26 (the devil’s judgment and his trap). Finally, Paul refers to Satan about ten times. He seems to be an active presence, a cunning tempter (1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11) who masquerades as an angel (2 Cor. 11:14). Satan torments Paul (2 Cor. 12:7), hinders him (1 Thess. 2:18), and is helping to bring forth the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:9). Satan must also be equivalent to “the god of this world” who “has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Other references include Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20, 5:15.

Yet scholars have been more interested in Paul’s vaguer, more abstract terminology for the spiritual forces which oppose or otherwise influence God’s people. Perhaps this is because of these terms’ inherent mystery. Or perhaps it is because these terms lend themselves to becoming the vehicles of the scholars’ own political and theological agendas.

⁴Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?,” *JSNT* 82 (2002), 64.

Dunn identifies the following terms which appear in “power” contexts in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians: *angeloi* (“angels”), *archai* (“principalities”), *archōn* (“ruler”), *bathos* (“depth”), *dynameis* (“powers”), *enestōta* (“things present”), *exousia* (“authority”), *zōē* (“life”), *thanatos* (“death”), *kosmokratōr* (“cosmic power”), *ktisis* (“creature”), *kyriotēs* (“dominion”), *mellonta* (“things to come”), *pneumatika* (“spiritual forces”), and *hypsōma* (“height”).⁵ Most studies would also add *stoicheia* (“elements”)⁶ to this list.

Some of these words refer to spiritual beings (“angels,” “spiritual forces”). Others are more abstract forces (“principalities,” “powers,” “authority”). Then, others are metaphorical personifications, such as “life,” “death,” “height,” “depth,” “things present,” and “things to come.” The fascinating thing to many scholars is the way that Paul can juxtapose these elements in a single context, such as Romans 8:38-39:

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers (*archai*), nor things present nor things to come, nor powers (*dunameis*), nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

In what way are angels related to rulers? Are “powers” and “spiritual forces” the same things? Are the “authorities” human authorities or angelic hierarchies? Or is it some of both? Is Paul de-mythologizing the spirit-words by coupling them with terms for human power structures,

⁵James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 105. His sampling includes Rom. 8:38-39; 13:1; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; 3:22; 15:24; Phil. 1:20; Col. 1:12, 16; 2:10, 15; Eph. 1:21; 2:2; 3:10, 12, 18; 6:12.

⁶Modern studies have identified the *stoicheia* as the basic elements which make up the physical world (i.e., earth, water, air, and fire). But these elements in turn are also associated with “elemental spirits” that influence events in nature and human life. See Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers,” 81-3; J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 125-40; Wink, *Naming*, 67-77.

or is he pointing out the angelic and demonic forces that influence every aspect of our lives, even if they are undetected?

Before proceeding, let's read the rest of the primary "power" texts in Paul. The cumulative thrust of all of these passages is that the worldly/demonic powers have met their match in Jesus. Their days are numbered; they are already proleptically defeated. Those who are in Christ need not fear the powers, but rather should engage them by first exposing their true nature to the world and then by illuminating and redeeming the powers themselves with the light of the Gospel. Here are the key texts:

. . . we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers (*archontōn*) of this age, who are doomed to pass away. . . None of the rulers (*archontōn*) of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:6, 8).

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule (*archēn*) and every authority (*exousian*) and power (*dunamin*). For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

. . . he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule (*archēs*) and authority (*exousias*) and power (*dunameōs*) and dominion (*kuriotētos*), and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come (Eph. 1:20-21).

. . . the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God. . . so that through the church the

manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers (*archais*) and authorities (*exousiais*) in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:9-10).

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers (*archas*), against the authorities (*exousias*), against the cosmic powers (*kosmokratoras*) over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces (*pneumatika*) of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones (*thronoi*) or dominions (*kurioṗētes*) or rulers (*archai*) or authorities (*exousiai*) – all things were created through him and for him (Col. 1:16).

He disarmed the rulers (*archas*) and authorities (*exousias*) and put them to an open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Col. 2:15).

The question is, where did Paul get this language, and what does he mean by it?

According to Berkhof's groundbreaking study, these terms mostly correspond to the "classes of angels located in the lower and higher heavens" found in Jewish apocalyptic literature, such as the Book of Enoch.⁷ In such apocalyptic and rabbinic writings, the powers were always conceived as personal, spiritual beings, and they were always said to influence events on earth, especially in nature.⁸ Yet,

in comparison to the apocalypticists a certain "demythologizing" has taken place in Paul's

⁷Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, John Howard Yoder, trans. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977), 16-17.

⁸*Ibid.*, 17.

thought. In short, the apocalypses think primarily of the principalities and powers as heavenly angels; Paul sees them as structures of earthly existence. . . One can even doubt whether Paul conceived of the Powers as personal beings.⁹

To Berkhof, this new concept of the powers as structures of human existence appears to be Paul's own creation. Therefore, he says, "we must set aside the thought that Paul's "Powers" are angels."¹⁰

So, for Berkhof and those who follow his thinking, the fact that angelic powers are juxtaposed with abstractions and personifications in these Pauline texts suggests that the angelic powers are merely metaphorical. Their presence is an apocalyptic way of talking about the true reality, which is structures of human existence, or the inner spirituality of institutions.¹¹

I would suggest that it's the other way around. When Paul juxtaposes spirit-terminology with abstract power-terminology, the effect is that these abstract human power structures are infused with a deeper significance. Earthly power structures are not merely human in origin, but are also manifestations of angelic/demonic activity. Rather than de-mythologizing the powers, Paul is exposing human authority structures as being connected to supernatural satanic opposition.

But now back to the idea that Paul has little interest in angels and spirits (besides the

⁹Ibid., 23, 24.

¹⁰Ibid., 25-26.

¹¹In his books, Wink insists that he is not attempting a Bultmannian demythologization of the powers. Although he identifies the powers primarily with institutions, social systems, and political structures, "there was always this remainder, something that would not reduce to physical structures – something invisible, immaterial, spiritual, and very, very real" (*Naming*, 5). Yet Wink can not tell us what this invisible aspect is. Wink cannot say it is angels, because he does not believe in angels, nor does he want Paul to believe in them very much. Thus, Thomas A. Noble observes that "Wink demythologizes in effect," though "that is quite clearly not his intention" ("The Spirit World: A Theological Approach," *The Unseen World*, Anthony Lane, ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 211). Cf. also Susan R. Garrett, "Christ and the Present Evil Age," *Interpretation* 57:4 (Oct. 2003), 370-83, who critiques both Wink's demythologized view of the powers and Tim LaHaye's "Left Behind" eschatology.

Holy Spirit). Forbes observes that although “Paul clearly believes in angels, demons, spirits and Satan, the vocabulary he seems to prefer. . . is made up overwhelmingly of impersonal, abstract terminology.”¹² Dunn similarly finds Paul’s limited reference to spiritual powers “puzzling:”

The suspicion begins to mount, therefore, that Paul himself did not have a very strong, or at least a very clear, belief regarding these heavenly powers. . . he never thought it of relevance to describe or define these powers in any detail.¹³

I am very disappointed with Dunn on this point. He seems to forget that when we examine Paul’s epistles, we’re only gaining access to a small part of his overall teaching and theology. Perhaps Paul didn’t feel it necessary to define the powers in his letters because he had already done so in person. As to the strength and clarity of the apostle’s beliefs, all we can say is that his epistles don’t give us enough information so that *we* can get a clear picture of Paul’s angelology. It’s quite another thing to claim that Paul *had* no clear idea of what he meant by “powers” and “principalities.” Dunn is thus free to fill in the blanks of Paul’s incoherent “power” babblings and define them himself as “existential more than ontological realities.”¹⁴

There is one other point which I haven’t found discussed yet in the literature. These studies which argue that Paul had no interest in literal angels and demons completely ignore the Paul in Acts, who is himself an exorcist (16:16-18; 19:12-16) who has visions of angels (16:9-10; 27:23-24). Far from being a de-mythologizer, Luke’s Paul is himself a miracle worker, blinding Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-11), healing a cripple (14:8-10), raising Eutychus from the dead

¹²Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers,” 67.

¹³Dunn, 108-9.

¹⁴Ibid., 110. Despite his criticism that “Wink overpresses his argument” (110, n. 42) Dunn seems to follow Wink’s interpretation to a “T,” including lengthy quotations from *Naming the Powers* and *Unmasking the Powers* in his footnotes.

(20:9-12), surviving a viper bite (28:3-6), healing people at Malta (28:8-9), and doing other signs and wonders (14:3; 15:12; 19:11-12). If Luke's Paul has any relation to the Paul of the epistles (and I believe he does), then Paul can hardly be re-written in the mold of a modern de-mythologizer.¹⁵ His version of spiritual warfare did not exclude rebuking demons in the name of Jesus.¹⁶

In my view, the answer to Paul's supposed lack of interest in demonology is a result of the nature of his letters. He is writing to Christian churches, and among the saints these concepts are already understood. Acts shows Paul laying the groundwork for his churches – doing healings and exorcisms to pave the way for the Gospel message. The epistles show Paul's subsequent ministry to those who have been freed from the powers of the Devil. His message to them is that they need not fear anymore, for they belong to Christ. Instead, the Spirit will work through his people to redeem all of God's creation, including the (temporarily) hostile powers.

So, I have argued that Paul in no way de-mythologizes the “powers” in his epistles. Instead, the apostle never leaves the “apocalyptic” thought-world of first-century Judaism. But now, can one also detect elements of Greek philosophy in Paul's “power” language? At this point it becomes necessary to look closely at the words themselves.

Space does not permit a thorough analysis of Paul's power terminology, but here are the basics. In early medieval Christian literature, the thrones, powers, and principalities became identified as various levels of the angelic hierarchy. For example, around A.D. 500, Pseudo-Dionysius listed nine triadic choirs of angels between God and earth: seraphim, cherubim,

¹⁵I am arguing here that it would be very surprising if Paul's thought-world was different from that of Luke, his associate and biographer.

¹⁶Keith Ferdinando finds a theodicy problem associated with demythologization. In other words, if there are no spirit beings beside God, then all evil must come from God. See “Screwtape Revisited” in *The Unseen Word*, Anthony Lane, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 109. Stephen Noll (123) likewise notes that in postmodern readings of Satan (such as in Wink), it is God who is actually given the role of adversary. For my part, I don't see how the existence of Satan takes the problem of evil out of God's hands. In the biblical world, the Creator still remains sovereign over the Accuser, and bears ultimate responsibility.

thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels (with seraphim at the top and angels at the bottom).¹⁷ Is this the sort of thing that Paul meant? The problem is the lack of clearly pre-Pauline literature that evidences such a use of “principalities and powers.”

Chris Forbes had published a two-part study devoted to the origin of Paul’s power terminology, taking issue with the assumption that his words were derived from Jewish apocalyptic.¹⁸ “Parallels to the Pauline terminology are few and far between in demonstrably pre-Pauline apocalyptic.”¹⁹ Instead, “Greek philosophy is precisely where we find the closest analogies to Paul’s conceptual framework,”²⁰ with the closest parallels existing “in the ‘Middle Platonism’ of Philo and Plutarch.”²¹ *Arche*, *dunamis*, and *stoicheia* “are standard terms of Greek philosophy, which by Paul’s time had been in use for over five hundred years.”²² Paul would then likely hold the same view as the Jewish philosopher Philo, who said that

[God] has around him numberless potencies (*dunameis*), which all assist and protect created being. . . Through these Potencies the incorporeal and intelligible world was framed. . . There is, too, in the air a sacred company of unbodied souls, commonly called angels in the inspired pages, who wait upon these heavenly powers. . .²³

¹⁷Noll, 15.

¹⁸Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities” (op. cit.) and “Pauline Demonology and/or Cosmology?” *JSNT* 85 (2002), 51-73. Forbes grants that “apocalyptic ideas form the best background against which to understand Paul generally,” yet finds the closest parallels with Pauline power language in Platonic philosophy – “Paul’s Principalities,” 74.

¹⁹Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities,” 86. In fact, “with the exception of 2 Macc. 3.24, which only uses the term *exousia*, there is *only one probably pre-Pauline usage* (*Testament of Abraham*) of these terms as descriptions of spiritual beings in inter-testamental literature” (80).

²⁰*Ibid.*, 63, n. 8.

²¹*Ibid.*, 88.

²²“Pauline Demonology,” 52.

²³Philo, *Conf. Ling.* 171-75, cited in Forbes, “Pauline Demonology,” 64. According to Forbes, “this tendency to create such personified abstractions for and around God is not idiosyncratic and peculiar to Philo: it is common throughout Middle Platonism” (67).

Modern interpreters have developed a similar view of the powers, through Pauline exegesis.

So, what is going on with Paul's mixture of "angels, principalities, powers, and elements?" Middle Platonism had a propensity for personifying the abstract features of God or the universe into beings such as gods, demigods, and *daemons*. In addition to abstract forces being personified, it was also common for Middle Platonic thinkers to re-interpret the characters of mythology (such as Homer's poems) allegorically as personifications of abstract forces.²⁴ In other words, these terms can encompass both the visible and the intangible, the personal and the abstract. They are both in the world, and yet other-worldly at the same time.

Synthesis

I believe Walter Wink is correct in his "preliminary" observations on the powers:

The language of power pervades the whole New Testament. . . [this New Testament language] is imprecise, liquid, interchangeable and unsystematic. . . [yet] clear patterns of usage emerge. . . Because these terms are to a degree interchangeable, one or a pair or a series can be made to represent them all. . . These Powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural. . . These Powers are also both good and evil.²⁵

It is clear from the Pauline passages quoted above that the powers were created by God (Col. 1:16). Yet they must be fallen, for they are now portrayed as antagonistic toward Christ

²⁴Ibid., 71.

²⁵Wink, *Naming*, 7-12. What I take issue with are Wink's subsequent interpretations, such as that "the Powers are the inner aspect of material reality," and that "heaven is the transcendent "within" of material reality." This is postmodern process theology, not biblical theology (see *Naming* 124, n. 19 for Wink's endorsement of Whitehead's panentheism).

and his church (Eph. 6:12). But Christ has won a decisive victory over the powers through the cross (Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 2:15). The powers still control the unconverted (Eph. 2:1-3),²⁶ but in the end, Christ will be acknowledged as Lord over all (1 Cor. 15:24-26). In his ministry and death, Christ exposed the world powers (be they Roman, Jewish, etc.) for what they really are – pawns of the devil’s kingdom. And now, part of the church’s role in the world is to convert or redeem the powers, to turn them (through the power of the Spirit) into instruments of good rather than evil (Eph. 3:10). In this way, God is at work in Christ to “reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col. 1:20). So, Gospel proclamation and the pursuit of social justice not only redeem individuals. They redeem social structures, as well.²⁷

The powers have an earthly manifestation (Rom. 13), yet they also exist “in the heavenly places,” which identifies them (according to the biblical world-view) as supernatural beings.²⁸ For the ancient Jews and Christians, events on earth affected events in heaven, and vice-versa. Nations and institutions not only have metaphorical “souls” (as Wink asserts), they also have angels (good or bad) influencing them in the spiritual dimension.²⁹ We can allegorize these angels, as the Platonists allegorized the Greek pantheon. But the New Testament writers never did this.

Perhaps the best brief biblical treatment of the powers is found in Stan Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God*. He perceives how the cosmic spiritual forces (angels, demons, Satan)

²⁶The language of “the world” in John and the Johannine epistles is suggestive of power language, and the idea that secular culture is Satan’s playground. See Noll, 135-37.

²⁷I would clarify that this redemption of the powers is largely an eschatological hope. The self-evident reality is that most hostile structures would rather die than become vehicles of justice and the Gospel. To the extent that the eschatological reality has broken into the present through Christ and the Spirit, some of the structures can be redeemed. But if the apocalyptic texts of the Bible tell us anything, it is that there will still be plenty of enemies for Christ to defeat on the Last Day, including death itself (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

²⁸See Ferdinando, 108, 120-21. “It is indeed difficult to see how the New Testament writers could have communicated more clearly than they did, in their references to Satan, demons and powers, they had in mind personal spirit beings” (108).

²⁹See Wink, *Naming*, 26-35 for more on the “angels of the nations” biblical motif.

“continually and universally affect humans” through the “structures of human existence,” which are defined as “those larger, suprahuman aspects of dimensions of reality which form the inescapable context for human life.” These structures would include things as abstract as social mores, and as concrete as churches, bureaucracies, businesses, and educational institutions. Such structures “undergird human life and society so as to preserve them from disintegration and chaos.”³⁰ Although created by human beings, these structures become both “quasi-independent” and “quasi-personal.”³¹

I have argued that allegorizing the spiritual powers of the New Testament into mere personifications of human social systems or Jungian archetypes is exegetically suspect. But in terms of Christian attitude and practice, the results are the same. Whether the powers are angelic or systemic (and I argue that they are both), they are nevertheless exposed by the Gospel as hostile forces in need of redemption.³²

The sinful perversion of humanity thus expresses itself not only in individuals, but in the corporate structures of society. Human society as expressed in the state, for instance, thus has a built-in tendency to perversion. While the state is in some sense the ordinance of God (Rom. 13), yet it has a tendency to take the form of the Babylon of John’s Apocalypse, ‘drunk with the blood of the saints’ (Rev. 18:2).³³

³⁰Stan Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 228.

³¹Ibid., 230. Grenz associates personhood with “existing beyond the control of another, or being mysterious or incomprehensible at one’s core” (Ibid.).

³²By asserting that the apocalyptic and the Jungian readings of Paul yield the same result, I am not thereby letting Wink, Dunn, &c. off the hook. Eisegesis is a crime in itself. By re-creating Paul into a de-mythologizer like themselves, his modernist interpreters are committing an act of intellectual violence – violating Paul’s right to speak on his own terms. For more on postmodern Jungian demonology, see Robert Cook, “Devils and Manticores,” *The Unseen World*, Anthony Lane, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 165-84.

³³Noble, 214. According to Noble, to deny this corporate dimension of reality is to succumb to “the individualism of classic nineteenth-century theological (and political!) Liberalism” (Ibid.).

Although the powers were created to quell chaos and were put in place so human society could flourish, in their fallenness, the powers “have become gods (Galatians 4:8), behaving as though they were the ultimate ground of being, and demanding from men appropriate worship.”³⁴

Governments, religions, political parties, and economic structures behave as if they hold the meaning of life.³⁵ The Christian message of Christ’s lordship challenges their dominance, and thus forces them to expose their true antagonism toward God and usurpation of his authority.

Conclusion

In this era of war, terrorism, and secret surveillance, the powers that be have become the object of study for people besides theologians. Documentary film director Eugene Jarecki got the idea for his new movie, “Why We Fight,” while working on a documentary on “The Trials of Henry Kissinger.” Jarecki ultimately decided that Kissinger was not “in some way a villain any more than the system itself.”

When I went around with the Kissinger film and when I talked to audiences I was struck over and over by how much people were captivated by Henry Kissinger as a man, rather than looking through him at the system that employs him. . . That was unsettling to me because I really wanted to make a film about what makes the United States tick in these military misadventures like Vietnam. Once I saw how audiences were responding to that

³⁴Berkhof, 30.

³⁵ The state, politics, class, social struggle, national interest, public opinion, accepted morality, the ideas of decency, humanity, democracy – these give unity and direction to thousands of lives. Yet precisely by giving unity and direction they separate these many lives from the true God; they let us believe that we have found the meaning of existence, whereas they really estrange us from true meaning (Berkhof, 32-33).

film, I vowed that whatever the next film I would make, it would look more deeply at the system itself, and not stop at the door at some patsy who is just a decision maker. Because the decision makers are replaceable, and had it not been Henry Kissinger it would have been someone else. But the machine has a life of its own.³⁶

One pioneer in unmasking the powers of the modern world is William Stringfellow, whose exploits include a public exorcism of president Richard Nixon. A formative experience was when he delivered an identical lecture on the powers to students at both Harvard's Divinity School and Harvard Business School:

The divinity students felt the language of "principalities and powers" was archaic imagery with no contemporary relevance, but the business students, who lived and worked within the spheres of great corporate institutions, understood. . .³⁷

Stringfellow thus diagnosed the seminary students as subjects of another invisible power, the historical-critical method. To him, ideology, sport, fashion, religion, and sex all functioned as powers.³⁸ He was especially critical of racism, which was not just "an evil in human hearts or minds," but "a principality, a demonic power. . . over which human beings have little or no control."³⁹

To work effectively in the world, Christians must know their enemy. We cannot look to

³⁶Eugene Jarecki, "Copernicus Interviews the Director of *Why We Fight*," interview by Copernicus [pseud.], <http://www.aintitcool.com/display.cgi?id=22198>.

³⁷Charles Campbell, "Principalities, Powers, and Preaching," *Interpretation* 51:4 (Oct. 1997), 392. Cf. Bill Wylie-Kellermann, "Not Vice Versa," *ATR* 81:4 (Fall 1999), 669.

³⁸Wylie-Kellermann, 669-670.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 673; Campbell, 392.

governments, church organizations, or other institutions for salvation. Instead, we must look with suspicion upon human culture and all its institutions because of their vulnerability to satanic influence. We live in a world that is invested with spiritual significance. And as soldiers of Christ, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers, both visible and invisible. We know that the ultimate victor is Christ, and we are winners to the extent that we are identified with him.

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