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## Life Amid the Principalities

Identifying, Understanding, and Engaging Created,  
Fallen, and Disarmed Powers Today

*Edited by*

Michael Root &  
James J. Buckley



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# 1

## The “Powers and Principalities” Problems and Prospects for Christian Doctrine Today

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Paul R. Hinlicky

*In faith, we struggle against that which only truly becomes known in the light of Jesus Christ, and in the power of His Spirit, we likewise struggle for the Beloved Community of the Father.*

THE BIBLICAL “SEAT OF doctrine” for our theme comes from the Letter to the Ephesians, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12 RSV). As the epigraph indicates, however, this statement comes in the context of the early catholic development of Paul’s evangelical theological legacy in the treatise we call Ephesians. These words come *after* the historical apostle’s imminent expectation of the literal end of time had faded from view, that is to say, *with* the emergence of the church as the Spirit’s good in its own right here and now, prefiguring, as it does, the victorious

coming at the last of the Beloved Community of God. From this I derive a thesis for us today.

What we are to do as pastors and theologians of catholic and evangelical persuasion in struggle against the powers and principalities is to build up engaged and caring communities of Christ's people as knowing alternatives to the wicked lust for domination that animates the rebellious powers and principalities; these manifest as, and in the light of Jesus Christ we are to know and to name them as, structures of malice working injustice. As instrument of God's eschatological purpose and as a good in its own right (Eph 1:3–23), the renewing, realigning, and reuniting church emerging today from the ruins of Euro-American Christendom is to be built up as a structure of love working righteousness. In this new existence, the ecclesia will also serve as the stick that the Holy Spirit pokes into the spokes of the wheel (Bonhoeffer) of the unsustainable juggernaut on which Euro-America is being driven to catastrophe, be it ecological or economic if not already moral. Such ministry requires a kind of prophetic criticism of culture, far more insightful and penetrating than the borrowed bromides and bombast from our politics as usual that characterize political parties organized by greed and envy. We who are pastors and theologians in the Euro-American context are to understand that in the making and sustaining of holy community in Christ, locally and universally, we undertake the Spirit's holy struggle that protests the false choices of today's politics, even as the Spirit works finally to defeat forever the contra-divine powers.

In the space allotted, I can hardly argue this fulsome thesis, but only sketch the argument that I have made in my systematic theology<sup>1</sup> about the structures of malice working injustice within which and against which a post-Christendom church, evangelical and catholic, must arise on the soil of Euro-America to embody and so to witness in holy struggle the redemptive alternative of Beloved Community. Let me note here in passing, since I do not have time to explore it with the attention it deserves, that this struggle in our so-called First World context of Euro-American post-Christendom reflects some different cultural challenges than those confronting many of the younger churches, where, for pertinent instance, the powers and principalities show another face (2 Cor 11:14). Yet it is, per hypothesis, a common struggle against the very same spiritual forces of wickedness in high places here as there. The point is merely that we acknowledge the particularities

1. Paul R. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

of our historical and cultural location in critical dogmatics. We in Euro-America live in the unprecedented situation of post-Christendom. This has not a little to do with the juggernaut that afflicts the Two-Thirds World. But we must—urgently, also for the sake of our afflicted sisters and brothers in the global South—attend to our own struggle.

In what follows, accordingly, I will spend the bulk of my effort, first, treating the welter of issues in our context that gives rise to my thesis and, second, I will attend to the significant objection to the thesis that is voiced both from within and from outside the churches, truth be told, in defense of the modern status quo ante: namely, an objection to the demonology of our text as a mystification. The objection maintains that the enlightened world with contemporary Euro-America at the helm, with its science and technology and virtual monopoly on the means of coercion, can and should set the agenda for the church. The result is that this "secular" order—the very one which *prima facie* Pauline theology regards as *passé* (1 Cor 7:31)—claims unqualified sovereignty: is to be built up as embodying the best possible justice available here and now.

As we shall see, my thesis does not simplistically contradict this secularism or merely invert its values. At least some of the powers can be reordered to serve the purposes of the coming divine sovereignty effected and made known in Jesus Christ. Thus, in conclusion, I will have something to say about political sovereignty and its divine mandate (Rom 13:1–7) and the vocation of the baptized within it, also here in Euro-America. This will differ<sup>2</sup> from the great contributions that Stanley Hauerwas<sup>3</sup> and his students have made to our theme (see the contribution of Daniel Bell to the present volume). Yet let me acknowledge with Hauerwas and his students that it is the proclaimed gospel in the Spirit's mission to the nations that sets the theological agenda, making the making and keeping of the church as holy community the *sine qua non* of the mission. But for the present thesis (Eph 1:20–22), this includes the church as the place of formation for the ministry of the people of God within political sovereignty despite all the anomalies and paradoxes that entails.<sup>4</sup> The result is a renewed mandate "to test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1), a task of

2. Steffen Lösel, "The *Kirchenkampf* of the Countercultural Colony: A Critical Response," *Theology Today* 67 (2010) 279–98.

3. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, expanded 25th anniversary ed. (Nashville: Abingdom, 2014).

4. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1960); *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner's, 1952).

discernment that I term “critical dogmatics.” In conclusion, I will lay out a set of theological conditions for making the difficult notion of the contravine powers intelligible in our context that meet the aforementioned objection to mystification.

*The holy Christian struggle is articulated in doctrine for life, not doctrine for doctrine, that is, theoretical speculation that seeks to transcend the apocalyptic battle in which we are placed by the coming of the Spirit through the gospel.*

In his influential and well-intended books of the past generation, *Naming the Powers* and *Engaging the Powers*,<sup>5</sup> Walter Wink has argued that Pauline powers and principalities ambiguously denote both “human/institutional” and “spiritual” powers,<sup>6</sup> and thus are to be taken together as simultaneous aspects of “one concretion of power.” Logically considered, this latter is, plainly, a non sequitur. It does not follow that if two things appear confusedly or ambiguously as one thing that this appearance is one thing. It does not follow that if the state, for example, appears as Stalin’s Gulag that the state is gulag. The basic contention of Wink that Paul’s language has wide scope so that under it one should critically consider and theologially evaluate all claims for an authoritative principle of origin and/or for lordship with power liberating and vengeful, I think, has withstood scholarly scrutiny.<sup>7</sup> But the other proposal of Wink, that human institution and demonic spiritual power form one concretion of power, has been subjected to, as it seems to me, withering exegetical and hermeneutical criticism.<sup>8</sup>

More broadly, as we shall see, the idea that the devil can be named and engaged concretely as some evident social formation—say, as capitalism or as communism, as patriarchy or as the present anarchy of the sexual

5. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

6. So also Chris Forbes, “Paul’s Principalities and Powers: Demythologizing Apocalyptic?,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 23 (2001) 61–88.

7. Chris Forbes, “Pauline Demonology and/or Cosmology? Principalities, Powers and the Elements of the World in Their Hellenistic Context,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24 (2002) 51–73.

8. Chloe Lynch, “How Convincing Is Walter Wink’s Interpretation of Paul’s Language of the Powers?,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 83 (2011) 251–66. Fellow evangelical theologian Gerald McDermott has argued from a different angle for the non-reducible reality of the principalities and powers as “other real supernatural powers besides God” in his *God’s Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007) 67–83.

revolution—contravenes the intention of the Ephesians text. The text rather wants to *distance* the spiritual powers of wickedness in high places from such human-all-too-human demonizing of earthly opponents; it wants to provide an insight into a true conflict behind the scenes, as is the wont of the apocalyptic genre; it does so in order to specify precisely what is new and redemptive about the action of God in Christ by the Spirit, namely, the holy struggle to make and keep a new polity in the world that is the ecclesia. Here the spiritual power of God’s righteousness on the earth is to be sought and found, not in politics as usual (Mark 10:35–45). We should follow these intentions of the text, at least if we wish to be justified in deploying its revelation of struggle for holiness and against the demonic forces as a warrant in theology today.

Moreover, I have to add, any theologian today who thinks, as I do, in the tradition of Luther must surely and with unreserved self-critical force repudiate that great man’s great sin of demonizing opponents, as I spelled out in the appendix to *Luther and the Beloved Community*.<sup>9</sup> Disastrously, Luther came to see one demonic concretion of power in the human institution of papacy, and, in the same vein, in the flesh-and-blood fellows who were angry peasants and the exotic rabbinic scholars. Indulging himself with verbal violence in manifest violation of his own Reformatory principle that the true people of God are they who bring to bear the judgment of the cross upon themselves,<sup>10</sup> Luther did not follow the intention of the Ephesians text patiently to bear with evident opponents, as per Prof. Daniel Bell’s wonderful turn of phrase, in the “refusal to cease suffering.”<sup>11</sup> Such patience with others, even apparent enemies, is the point of affirming that our true struggle is *not* with flesh and blood.

Having announced the differentiation I intend to urge against Wink, I hasten to lift up, as previously with Hauerwas’ work, the significant contribution his studies have made: naming and engaging the powers in holy struggle is an inalienable aspect of the ministry of the gospel that we discard at our own peril. We are not done with the powers when we discard them as illusory remnants from the prescientific past; rather, we become their enlightened pawns, all the more blinded because of the light we now

9. Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 379–85.

10. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. James I. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

11. Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001).

have. In any event, the theology of the powers and principalities is, if it is anything, instruction for *battle*. Wink has rightly seen this and made the theological problem of Christian demonology acute again wherever the New Testament is read and heard as Scripture.

Indeed, as every preacher who strives to be faithful to New Testament texts quickly discovers, whatever the ontology, she cannot tell the gospel narrative apart from that uncanny figure of malice, the devil.<sup>12</sup> That this rhetorical necessity creates profound problems of intelligibility is, of course, true; indeed, it accounts for the tendency in Wink's work softly to demythologize, so to say, the spiritual forces of wickedness into the human institutions they captivate as that "one concretion of power" of which he speaks. I will turn to that acute problem of intelligibility later on. But, for the moment, the point is that we are today indebted to Wink, who has rightly lifted up the holy struggle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in high places as the *raison d'être* of the theology of the powers in today's world where progress in science and technology has not ended institutional violence but all the more powerfully equipped it, indeed *entrenched* it.

Predominantly, however, the received theological tradition is marked by a tendency other than the Ephesians text's summons that we, here on the earth, struggle in the Spirit against the spiritual forces of wickedness. It has articulated angelology as a more or less disciplined speculation about the cosmic harmonies hidden beyond the veil of earthly conflict and confusion. In justified curiosity about our text's intimation that phenomenal appearances of merely human, purely social struggle do not tell the whole story, the tradition is thus tempted either to overlook the crucial assumption the Ephesians text makes, namely, that the Christian life is a *social* one ("our struggle") against forces of *malice*. Or it misconstrues the sense of this struggle as one of the individual's ascetic ascent from the earthly realm to a heavenly one, cognitively, then, beyond the "deformed imagery used by scripture in regard to the angels."<sup>13</sup> Imagining a celestial world of pure harmony behind the earthly veil of evident conflict in the Neoplatonic speculations of his *Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius thus overlooked

12. Dennis Bielfeldt et al., *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) 174–89.

13. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1987) 153. We owe to Platonism both the great mandate to think critically by distinguishing appearance and reality and the sub-Christian tendency to locate the source of human sin in individuation and embodiment. By this we divinize mind and demonize body. Platonism must be far more critically received than in Pseudo-Dionysius.

the *militancy* of the Spirit who makes holy war against the flesh, as the usual Pauline idiom has it. As a consequence, Pseudo-Dionysius construes the Pauline conflict as one of overcoming earth-bound sensuality and passions to attain to the passionlessness of angelic existence, as he imagines it.<sup>14</sup> This is simply *not* the struggle of the ecclesia on the earth for an embodied righteousness, as our Ephesians text projects.

Deplatonizing Paulinism in favor of apocalyptic as the "mother of Christian theology" (Käsemann)—to mention one of the previously criticized Luther's abiding contributions—we should know that the Pauline conflict between the Spirit and the flesh is the conflict between reliance on the God who has come to us in Jesus Christ by the Spirit's preaching of the gospel and creaturely reliance on its own brainpower or muscle-power to do what this God alone can do and does for creatures. It is thus a struggle of faith, over what is first of all and over all to be trusted, believed, obeyed, hoped and loved with ultimate concern. Precisely when we recall and hold fast to that usual Pauline way of speaking, our theme text makes the crucial clarification about this holy militancy as the struggle to believe the God of the gospel rather than idols and demons, indeed, positively to disbelieve the idols and demons (as I learned many years ago now from my *Doktorvater*, Christopher Morse<sup>15</sup>). Christians do not struggle with swords of steel or, more subtly, with the verbal violence of political propaganda against fellow human beings similarly armed in the usual contests in the *libido dominandi* of this present age. But by the Word of God and in the mode of critical thinking that tests the spirits Christians struggle against supra-individual, trans-human forces of incorrigible *wickedness*. To know *this* enemy is not a matter of ordinary observation or curious speculation; it is a matter of learning God by the coming into the world of the One sent to break into the strong man's house to bind him and plunder his goods (Mark 3:27). It is revealed knowledge, not least, because that strong man fights back. "What

14. This judgment does not express in the first place a Lutheran judgment on Eastern Orthodoxy, but an Orthodox self-critique. See ch. 3, "The Origenist Crisis of the Sixth Century," and ch. 5, "Pseudo-Dionysius," in John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975) 47–68, 91–111. It does, however, correspond to Luther's considered opinion. Mickey L. Mattox, "The Ordered Cosmos: The Mediation of God's Word in the Midst of Conflict" (unpublished paper) explores Luther's critical reception of the Dionysian cosmological speculation along these lines.

15. Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24).

In our Western tradition, as John Milbank's seminal book has taught us,<sup>16</sup> contemporary sociology is the secular offspring of the Christian theology of the powers and principalities in that it apprehends the social and historical modes of organized life on the earth that form the human mind with mandates, rituals and final purposes, whether anyone is conscious or not of these supervening social forces. Insofar as it describes these as *heavenly* forces of *wickedness*, however, our text does not permit the common contemporary sociological reduction to impersonal structures that we, as scientifically informed social engineers, might tweak with better public policy or more radically transform by revolutionary action. Social structures can be wisely or stupidly designed; they can be anachronistically maintained or helpfully modernized, but they cannot per se sin. Only persons, human or otherwise, can sin. Structures can be sinful, then, in that persons maliciously organize themselves and other persons into structures of injustice. (Think, for recent and concrete example, of the Wall Street manipulators who cynically bet on massive mortgage defaults five years ago and thus nearly brought the entire global economy into a catastrophic depression. Think of the ensuing politics that then bailed out these sinners as too big to fail rather than question the injustice and reform the structure that enabled and indeed actualized such abuse.)

From the radical Christian theological perspective of the Apostle Paul, however, that judgment will fall in varying ways and degrees on *any* and indeed *all* social formation that exists in the spirit of self-reliance rather than in reliance of the Spirit on the heavenly Father who gave His Son precisely for such blind and bound sinners. Thus, our text speaks of structures of malice working an injustice so profound and comprehensive that apart from the Holy Spirit's intervention through the gospel we are in the dark, blind to the wickedness that is going on over us but also in us; so powerful is its grip on our own interiority in captivating our desire that apart from the breaking of Jesus Christ into our captivity by the gospel we cannot be freed or even want truly to be freed. Thinking of the Gospel of Mark's opening depiction of Jesus's battle with the demons, we might round out the apocalyptic picture this way: as the *Holy Spirit* falls upon Jesus in the river Jordan to send Him forth from the waters to do battle with the

16. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

*unclean* spirits who captivate mere flesh and blood, so also those baptized by the same Spirit into the crucified but now vindicated Jesus Christ take up their crosses and just so rise up in new lives of holy *struggle*, following their liberating Lord whom they meet anew right back in workaday Galilee, the site of battle.

Do we so struggle? Do we meet Jesus in Galilee? Do we struggle so to preach and teach and thus lead others in this holy Christian struggle? Or do we flee from battle? On the dubious assumption that these dangerous biblical images of militant struggle—properly interpreted, to be sure, as in our Ephesians text—incline us to religious violence and hatred of the other, my denomination's recent hymnal rigorously censors out any and all language of the struggle that once structured Christian self-understanding as the Spirit's holy war against the world, the devil and our sinful selves.<sup>17</sup> As a systematic theologian who thinks, well, systematically, I fail to see how the Lutheran tribal anthem, "Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott," survived this purge; but it did (no doubt for a combination of reasons: sentimentality, marketability and useful pretext for continuing the habitual anti-Catholic smear). As a surd, then, erstwhile Lutherans still sing about hordes of devils filling the land, eager to devour us, until a champion of God's own choosing enters the field to win the victory on their behalf. Presumably, as a result, at least several times a year otherwise peaceable Lake Wobegoners empty from the churches itching for a fight. Surely "Children of the Heavenly Parent" would be the better choice for Hymn of the Day.

More seriously, with this shallow anthropology and ham-fisted social engineering, we move away from the creative ferment that comes from the recovery today of Paul's christologically modified apocalyptic theology<sup>18</sup> in exchange for the thin gruel of liberal Protestant progressivism *redivivus* with its "stillborn God," as Columbia University professor Mark Lilla so acutely diagnoses in his timely analysis of the modern separation of religion and politics in secular, "democratic" regimes. Lilla's brief, to be sure, is against the recurring outbreaks of christologically *unmodified* apocalyptic theology, as in crusades, inquisitions, and wars of religion, where demonizing opponents lends political conflict an unmanageable fanaticism and intractable dogmatism. "Liberal theology began in rational hope [of Kant],

17. See the analysis of Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Peace, Peace, When There Is No Peace," *Lutheran Forum* 42 (2008) 3-6.

18. *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and Beyond J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2012).

not fevered dreams. Its moderate wish was that the moral truths of biblical faith be intellectually reconciled with, and not just accommodated to, the realities of modern political life [separating church and state institutionally]. Yet the liberal deity turned out to be a stillborn God, unable to inspire genuine conviction among those seeking ultimate truth. For what did the new Protestantism offer to the soul of one seeking union with his creator? It prescribed a catechism of moral commonplaces and historical optimism about bourgeois life, spiced with deep pessimism about the possibility of altering that life.<sup>19</sup> Lilla thus wistfully describes, I venture, exactly where most of us tired Euro-American Christians are at today, especially in the old Protestant denominations. There is no change we believe in. We are the end of history. And we acquiesce to renditions, waterboarding, government spying on citizens and predator drone strikes to keep it that way.

Even if my denomination thinks itself progressive in returning to the theology of the nineteenth century to preach Lilla's "stillborn God," Christians have long known from Paul that we are living in a fragile place, a bubble about to burst, an interregnum, an interlude between the coming of the Messiah in the flesh and His Parousia. "In the now time," as post-Marxist philosopher Giorgio Agamben translates Paul's Greek,<sup>20</sup> the Spirit by the Word is engaged in struggle for hearts and minds in calling and sustaining the Beloved Community, Augustine's *civitas Dei*, breaking in by the Word concerning Christ crucified to bind the strong man and redeem his captives. Apocalypse now! Freed in this way, Christians have known that this "now time" is the time of the struggle of the Spirit through the Word against the contra-divine powers of sin, death, and devil, a time for witness, a time of confessing Jesus as Lord in a world awash with crises and corresponding messages of liberation, as may be seen, for instance, in the Little Apocalypse of Mark 13.

As commentator Joel Marcus has it, "If Mark 13:22 ['False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect'] is taken seriously, the majority of the Markan Christians will be enmeshed in the realm of demonic delusion—perhaps not only a tendency to follow false Christs (13:22) but also a related propensity to despair over the return of the true one (cf. 4:38, 6:48 . . .)." But

19. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2007) 301.

20. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

the true Messiah by his passion and death on the cross has already fulfilled the prophecies of the end time in Mark 13: "The elect fall asleep (14:37, 40–41) and go astray (14:50–52, 66–72), the sun is dimmed (15:33), the temple suffers damage that portends its destruction (15:38), and the Son of Man passes through an all-night vigil until finally, on the other side of cosmic death, he returns as the herald of new life and a new age."<sup>21</sup> "Apocalypse now" comes by the gospel that reveals the crucified One as the Son of God or does not reveal Him at all, beginning such judgment within the household of God. Apocalypse now comes, not as the literal end of time so much as the time of the End breaking into the strong man's house. Christians therefore may struggle too, holy if so liberated to follow their Lord in bearing their own crosses, not only against the external world but even also within the church, *semper reformanda*, because their Lord has already struggled, pioneering the way, winning the victory. In His light and His truth as the *crucified* Messiah (1 Cor 2:2), they know the holy way forward (Luke 22:24–27)—true progress and Christian progressivism, if you will.

This, then, is what is revealed "in the now time"—not the literal "end of time" but the "time of the End" pressing in by the Spirit through the Word—under the name and knowledge of "theology of powers and principalities": there are many so-called gods and lords; they have no real existence (1 Cor 8:4–6; Jer 10:1–10) other than the mysterious forces of wickedness in higher places that make use of them (1 Cor 10:14, 21) to oppose the coming of God's reign, the Beloved Community of God. Their time draws near; the bubble is about to burst; the demons are flushed from their hiding places in direct proportion to the Spirit's coming by the gospel. In such times, the demons fight back: counterfeit revelations abound and urgent imperatives sound: "Lo! Here is the Messiah"—or, "There!" We hear new gospels telling us what must be done to save the situation: technological imperatives, market imperatives, imperatives to maximize personal freedom or social equality, imperatives for revolutionary praxis or sectarian separation from this dying world. This list of urgent calls to saving action could be multiplied, each registering intensity in direct proportion to the impending sense of crisis, yet in sorry truth each expressing only some immanent aspect of the common predicament rather than resolving it definitively, as each one falsely claims.

21. Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 2:922–23.

Woe, then, to all who actually fall for such would-be "final solutions"!<sup>22</sup> What then? For those with eyes open and ears alert among our contemporaries—I would especially lift up and recommend the aforementioned Agamben—the Euro-American bubble is about to burst. Here the philosopher appears as biblical prophet. Have we ears to hear? In this situation, we will rebuild engaged and caring communities of Christ's people by penetrating criticism of this culture that interprets the impending experience of the end of our comfortable world of affluence better than the usual alternatives—which have no solutions but offer only more of the same (more government spending, more economic growth, more, more, more . . . the politics of insatiable greed at war with insatiable envy).

Such penetrating prophetic criticism of ideology was the vision in 1964 of Harvard professor Amos Wilder, who described the recovery of the biblical kerygma in its eschatological dimension—what I previously termed "christologically modified apocalyptic" (Mark 14:33–39) that proclaims, in J. Louis Martyn's striking words, the cross of the Messiah as "the best of news in a still unredeemed world."<sup>23</sup> Wilder called this recovery an "exhilarating" rediscovery of "the deepest levels of Christian understanding . . . [with] momentous insights and affirmations" for articulating a timely Christian social ethic.<sup>24</sup> A brief extraction from this rich but forgotten essay permits me to bring this first part of my presentation to a conclusion in that it specifies the kind of *holy struggle* in which today we are to engage in battle with the principalities and powers.

In the aftermath of Hitler, Hiroshima, and Stalin, Wilder wrote of an "almost unparalleled demand upon the Church for ethical guidance. Those same totalitarian pressures which have forced Christians to clarify their faith and its biblical ground, have similarly compelled them to search the Scriptures for light on fundamental decisions as to the nature and limit of the State, the political witness of the believer and ultimate questions as to the relations of the Church and world." In want of such guidance, however, "many modern men with important responsibilities in society have

22. Paul R. Hinlicky, *Before Auschwitz: What Christian Theology Must Learn from the Rise of Nazism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013) 14–43.

23. J. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5:16," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 269–87.

24. A. N. Wilder, "Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics," in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology: Studies in Honour of C. H. Dodd*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964) 509.

despaired of finding clear light for conduct and policy in the Bible, whether as regards law, politics, business, labour, marriage or property. In absence of such light they turn to secular moral philosophy or the great rival views of man which today oppose themselves to the Gospel, or, in private dilemmas, to a secular psychiatry or some esoteric cult." But "if we put at the center of our Christian message the theme that God has visited and redeemed his people, that in the Cross God dethroned the powers which hold men in bondage, that in the redeemed community there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, black nor white, but all are one in Jesus Christ . . ." a genuine and timely engagement with the powers becomes possible today. Drawing on Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Bultmann (though critical of Bultmann's existential reduction to the individual's decision of faith that eclipses the social dimension of corporate faith), Wilder especially lifted up the problem of the Church's biblical-prophetic role of "watchman" over the city and the nations, asking how "aggressive" this guardianship is to be.<sup>25</sup>

That is perhaps a misleading formulation. The question is not about degrees of aggressiveness, but whether Christian cultural criticism accomplishes the Spirit's work "to prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). This is a "spiritual" battle, a battle *of the spirits*, addressing *conscience*. Christologically modified apocalyptic does not think, as does modern secularism in either its capitalist or socialist modes, of a battle of human spirit against indifferent nature, in the process liberating natural self-love from considerations of conscience and transforming natural envy and greed into positive motives for human action. "Flesh" for Paul designates humanity, not in its base animal emotions or motives but in its highest, "spiritual" powers, brain-power no less than muscle-power. Flesh is the spirit of self-reliance over against reliance on the Spirit of Jesus and His Father. The biblical battle is a battle of spirit against spirit. Thus prophetic critique in the Spirit is not to be measured by its level of "aggression," but by its capacity to lighten our darkness with a critique that necessitates the crucified Messiah as the God's forward to the Beloved Community of God (Gal 2:21).

Wilder does better in answering his own question. He notes that "no political authority in the ancient world was devoid of religious and metaphysical connotations," so that "the hostile rulers and angelic powers in question include transparently what we would speak of in non-mythological terms as structural elements of unregenerate society, the false

25. *Ibid.*, 515.



authorities of culture." While this formulation is still too vague and we have to question, with Milbank, whether or not our modern sociological way of thinking is as demystified and non-mythological as it claims, Wilder derived from this basic insight the important mandate for theology: "The dethroning of such authorities and the weakening of such power-principles constitute the central task of Christian social action."<sup>26</sup> That is to say: the central social-ethical task is *public preaching* and theological reflection that makes such proclamation precise, pertinent, and powerful in destabilizing the metaphysical, or more precisely, the *soteriological* claims of political sovereignty.<sup>27</sup>

I take from this the important insight that Christian social action is anything but mute; it is public and articulate kerygma and liturgy and works of mercy (cf. 2 Cor 10:4) that as such and only as such contests the thrall-dom and wins hearts and minds to the Beloved Community by liberating them from idols and demons. Who, so to say, gets to demythologize who? Who, indeed, sets the agenda? Unlike Barth (though he does not mention it), yet following Paul, Wilder realizes that the reconciliation of the world to God in Christ is incomplete, that battle still rages, that the coming Christ in glory still has work to do in subduing the powers, that last of which is Death—a power, let me emphasize, to be *destroyed* (the Greek verb is *katargeo*) like Sin—not reconciled or reordered (1 Cor 15:26)—"death of death and hell's destruction," as we used to sing ("Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah").

In this light, today's contextual theologies are not wrong, as we see in Wink, to demand that we name and engage the powers here on earth, now in this situation of dire need; but who names who and how we so identified are to engage in a struggle that is *holy*, not more of the same old violence, is for Paul, and should be for us, a matter of knowing the sovereign work of the Spirit who is holy. This Spirit is the One who proclaims the crucified Jesus as Lord to the glory of the Father who sent Him, even to us undeserving. This Spirit's final horizon consists in nothing less than the defeat of Death, that "death of death and hell's destruction." The sovereignty of the Spirit of Jesus and His Father entails, accordingly, this firm specification of the politics of gospel: the gospel forms holy communities of Christ the crucified but vindicated Lord to whom at last every knee will bow when Death

26. *Ibid.*, 528.

27. Robert W. Bertram, *A Time for Confessing*, ed. Michael Hoy, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

is forever swallowed up in Life, provided only that in the interim this new existence of the ecclesia in the world is not mute but itself proclaimed and understood as the divine alternative to the politics of the *libido dominandi*.

### The Problem of Intelligibility

If the foregoing discussion succeeds in its modest purpose of fleshing out what is at issue in the thesis that dethroning the powers comes by the formation of the church in the Spirit's gospel mission to the nations, we are confronted with an immediate and formidable objection. This is not an objection to the mixed record of Christianity in its two thousand years of history, as for contemporary example, Ephraim Radner has so acutely analyzed.<sup>28</sup> Nothing human, including the church, has other than a mixed historical record; as Augustine knew, precisely as a Catholic Christian, in this life our righteousness consists for the most part in the forgiveness of sins. Thus the only true problem in this regard is triumphalist resistance to acknowledging penitently the sinfulness of the church.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the salient objection in connection with our theme does not stem from within the church, properly considered, though in the churches it finds many notable exponents today. It stands behind Bultmann's existential reduction of the mythology of the powers and principalities to the individual's decision of faith to which Wilder took exception; it stands as well behind the softer demythologizing in Wink to human political and institutional powers that are to be identified as demonic in his "one concretion of power." But this objection at its root stems from a Feuerbach or a Durkheim who would expose the theological thesis about spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places as a mystification. And indeed, it is the case that we are now confronted with an acute problem of interpretation to which I alluded at the outset but set aside, namely, that according to our text appearances do not tell the whole story, or perceive the true roots of its apparent conflicts, and accordingly settle for a salvation less than the Pauline eschatological defeat of the trans-individual, supra-human apocalyptic powers of Sin and Death.

The distinction between appearance and reality is, of course, the basis of critical thinking. Theology too is a form of critical thinking. If differs

28. Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

29. See my response to Radner: Paul R. Hinlicky, "On the 'Sacrifice of Conscience,'" *Syndicate: A New Forum for Theology* 1/1 (2014) 11–17.

from philosophy in holding that epistemic access to the root conflict of human experience is not available to what Paul calls "the natural man" (1 Cor 2:14), but rather must rather be apocalypted, revealed. If for a Feuerbach or a Durkheim, however, the very notion of God, let alone the revealing God of the Bible, is already a mystification of purely human-social aspiration, how much more so, then, must the notion of contra-divine powers be a mystification of human conflicts and struggles! Marx put it famously in speaking of religion as the opiate of the people. As Nietzsche said about the forgiveness of sins—an imaginary solution to an imaginary problem—so we might also say about sin, death, and devil as apocalyptic powers: an imaginary problem evoking an imaginary solution.

I admit to having at least a little sympathy with Feuerbach or Durkheim in this regard. When I was a college student in the Midwest years ago, a blizzard was predicted for the day of our travel back east for Christmas break. We respectfully asked our excessively pious dean for permission to take an exam early in order to drive in advance of the storm. Despite our pleas, our "all in good order" dean wouldn't violate the sacrosanct rules and grant our request for an exception. His parting words in all seriousness advised us to call upon the holy angels for protection, assuring us that if we prayed they would ride shotgun on all four fenders to keep us safe. The dean's appeal to the holy angels, like the "Devil made me do it" of the superstitious preacher's wife Geraldine in Flip Wilson's comedy routine—such are indeed mystifications that evade ethical responsibility, that maintain order at the expense of love and law at the expense of wisdom, and that invoke mystery to conceal muddles in thinking. Conversely, such mythologizing surrenders agency and makes victimhood a badge of personal identity: "I was only following orders." Christian theology of the powers and principalities today cannot go forward without wholehearted acceptance of the Enlightenment's critique of such superstitious mystification. But the Christian point of this is not so much to demythologize as to render all flesh accountable to God for that to which their hearts cling in every time of trouble.

Having acknowledged that, we also acknowledge after the enlightened century of Hitler, Hiroshima, and Stalin that the Enlightenment tradition suffers with its own superstitions and mystifications. As theologians we must go forward with the intention of the Ephesians text for today, which, as mentioned, is to deliteralize the Christian metaphors of military struggle by removing them from the human plane of politics as usual, where, as

history shows, Christians too can readily be misled into the bloody fanaticism of crusades, witch-hunts, persecutions and inquisitions, captured too by the lust for domination that always animates the struggle for power in politics as usual, whether by the Religious Right or the Religious Left. Again, as mentioned, the intention of the Ephesians text is to direct us to the ecclesia as the Spirit's new community in the world where politics are not to be as usual, just so, providing the alternative to structures of malice working injustice. Needless to say, this thesis implies a thoroughgoing realignment in the churches in order to align the holy remnant in Euro-America's ruins of Christendom. Here is a practical test of such fresh Christian theology of the powers and principalities: it should trump the Enlightenment's abiding challenge that devil talk amounts to a mystification of what is really going on by displaying a critical power of insight that out-enlightens the enlighteners (as Oswald Bayer has suggested in his interesting study of Hamann<sup>30</sup>).

But to meet the objection substantively, we have to ask: what in the world are we actually talking about when, in the light of Jesus Christ, we expose what we name and engage here on the earth as manifestations of the powers and principalities? That is the *crux intellectum*. It confronts every preacher every time she is required to make intelligible to her audience the kinds of biblical texts we have considered in this presentation. If this presentation is at all on target, moreover, we cannot give a glib answer to this question, for we have learned that the powers and principalities are a revealed mystery, that they disguise themselves as angels of light, that they are masters of deceit at work with super-human cunning. What is revealed, in other words, is the *mystery* of evil (2 Thess 2:7). Entering into this *mystery* for understanding is thus a matter of ongoing discernment. In conclusion, I am going to suggest that biblical texts that figure Satan in various guises give consideration to this *mystery*, and that just this consideration makes these texts about powers and principalities intelligible, so far as the *mystery of evil* can be made intelligible at all.

A lot of contemporary theological thinking based on responsible biblical scholarship,<sup>31</sup> but insufficiently hermeneutical and systematic

30. Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

31. E.g., Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). The continuity of Christian theology with its "mother," anti-imperial Jewish apocalyptic, is qualified by the *unexpected* cross of the Messiah, as the manner by which the heavenly powers and principalities

in method, seeks a different kind of intelligibility, along the lines of the soft, but finally incoherent demythologizing proposed by Wink. This work suggests that under the "code language" of the principalities and powers we are talking about empire, about imperialism. The most sophisticated contemporary advocate of this view is N. T. Wright.<sup>32</sup> In my view, however, this thesis has been decisively qualified, both methodologically and substantively, by John M. G. Barclay.<sup>33</sup>

In his *Auseinandersetzung* with Wright, Barclay articulates the thesis that "Paul's gospel is subversive of Roman imperial claims precisely by not opposing them within their own terms" since "even turning Roman values on their head entails a kind of confinement within the ideological system in which those values are defined."<sup>34</sup> "Opposing them within their own terms" is precisely what happens when we demythologize the powers and principalities by reducing this reference to the mystery of evil to the mere fact of *imperium*, as if short of the eschaton there could be any secular state that was not in some way animated by the *libido dominandi*; the sinful desire to dominate animates not only the powers-that-be but also the powers-that-would-be. While discriminate and as such highly fallible political judgments are required of Christians in such contests for power, it is academic child's play not to reckon with these realities, known by reason from historical experience<sup>35</sup> if not by faith from revelation. By the same token, Paul's God institutes and thus employs also empire as a structure for rough justice that militates against the kind of nationalistic zealotries that tormented Palestine in the first century and, likewise, the Europe of the twentieth century in the guises of fascism and Nazism, and, painful truth be told, some forms of Zionism today. Empire, by contrast with fascism, can represent a multicultural cosmopolitanism that forces diverse peoples to live together in a tolerable peace. That empire *forces* peoples to do so

behind imperial oppression are exposed and defeated. This *skandalon* brings about a division of the division, retooling the biblical legacy and its categories as well.

32. N. T. Wright, "Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans," in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. Craig Bartholemew et al. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002) 173–93.

33. John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) criticizes Wright's "reading between the lines" to discover a "hidden transcript" (379).

34. *Ibid.*, 386.

35. Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

as a monopoly on the means of coercion is, to be sure, its fatal flaw as but another form of political sovereignty. That is why, theologically, the state is but a temporary order and one that is eminently reformable. Whatever its historical failures, however, empire's best aspiration for cosmopolitan tolerance is not simplistically to be demonized, especially when the political alternative, as we saw in the twentieth century, is the bottomless pit of ethnic-group self-determination over against other ethnicities.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the Paul who also authored Romans 13, according to Barclay, "reads political history according to a different script" such that "his stance towards the Roman Empire is neither simple opposition or obedience: it is a field of human reality criss-crossed and contested (like all others) by the opposing forces of Flesh and Spirit, and is subject to powers far greater than itself in the battle created by the gospel."<sup>37</sup> In this way, Paul "more radically reframes reality"; he demythologizes political sovereignties and reduces them to a "bit-players in a drama scripted by the cross and resurrection of Jesus." This does not mean, according to Barclay, that Paul's gospel is "apolitical, only that the political is for him enmeshed in an all-encompassing power-struggle which covers every domain of life," that is, neither separating the personal from the public nor reducing politics to the contest for the reins of power. Accordingly, "his theology concerns *the subversive and redemptive power of divine grace in Christ, which creates and empowers new communities of social (and therefore broadly political) significance.*"<sup>38</sup> As we have urged in our thesis, then, what we pastors and theologians are to do today, precisely as cutting edge political praxis, is to create and sustain engaged and caring communities of Christ's people as the knowing and articulate alternative to politics as usual, based on the customary separations of the private and the public.<sup>39</sup> Just this, as I shall now note in conclusion,

36. See Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010). Leithart's "defense" is rather more nuanced than the (intentionally) provocative title indicates. What is troubling, however, even in Leithart is the habitual lack of Western historical awareness that locates Constantine, rather than Charlemagne, as the source of our Euro-American problems. See David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570–1215* (New York: Norton, 2008). Greater awareness of Western particularity in this regard, incidentally, might provoke Western theology to a thorough-going reconsideration of the filioque controversy; see Richard S. Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians: The Trinitarian Controversy* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1975).

37. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, 386.

38. *Ibid.*, 383, emphasis added.

39. The dualism of public and private that arises with Cartesian-Kantian subjectivity

opens up a freed place in the world for the formation within the nations of new vocations, including the political vocation, of the baptized.

### Ways Forward in the Christian Theology of the Powers

Still the question cannot go begging: if the powers and principalities are not reducible to political sovereignties, even if they manifest in this way by deviation from God's institution and purpose, what in the world are we talking about? The mysteriousness of evil makes it a matter of discernment. Reference to fallen angels or elements of creation claiming the power and principle of origin but gone astray by asserting autonomy over against their Creator, do not much illuminate the question; they merely state it in mythological form. What concerns us is the mystery of genuine evil, that is, of knowing, willful, personal rebellion against the Lord and Giver of life. That conundrum remains unclarified in the biblical depictions. I suggest, then, by way of conclusion the following principles drawn from the foregoing that may help in our deliberation.

First, following a suggestion of Gregory of Nyssa in his *Great Catechism*, might we not be helped today by thinking of the mystery of evil under the concept of *envy*?<sup>40</sup> You may recall Augustine's more familiar (to us in the West) account: he spoke of Lucifer's rage upon learning that the lowly earthlings were elected as God's covenant partner and so resolved to destroy the creation and the covenant. Just so he seduced humanity with the false promise, *sicut Deus eritis*, that tickled their pride. Thus Augustine predominantly discusses this sin under the concept of *superbia*, pride. But notice that the false promise, "You shall be as God," is not premised on a false estimate of human power. It is precisely because they *lack* power, and know they lack it, that they are willing to eat the forbidden fruit that bestows it. Rather, the devil tempts them with his own sin, envy; he captures their desire with envy. The sin of pride that violates the First Table thus forms a circle with the sin of envy at the conclusion of the Second Table. Of course, Augustine knew this as well. Disordered love, *concupiscentia*, dominates the sinner who in pride, as the latter-day Augustinian Martin

is what most contemporary theologians think of under the term "the doctrine of the two kingdoms," as if this supposedly represented Luther's political theology. I disentangle this confusion in *Luther and the Beloved Community*, 301–57, and *Before Auschwitz*, 183–87.

40. *Great Catechism* 6 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 5:481).

Luther put it, "wants to be God and does not want God to be God."<sup>41</sup> Envy, as I argue in my systematic theology,<sup>42</sup> is ontologically prior to greed; greed is but the envy of the rich. As it seems to me, envy is the malice on which the contemporary world turns.

With either accent, however, our bondage to the tyrannical powers at work in human concretions of power but not reducible to them is not innocent victimhood but *sinful*. This easily misunderstood claim is meant in the precise sense of the *ordo caritatis*, where sin refers to the person's relation to God (*coram Deo*), not, then, to its relation to other creatures in political life (*coram humanibus*, *coram mundo*) where there are indeed significant degrees of guilt or criminality and equally significant differences between victims and perpetrators. But envy is the sin that seduces us to the powers (think, illustratively, of the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme: while he sinfully abused his victims they just as sinfully, though not criminally, became his victims in their own greed for a disproportionate financial bonanza). Envy and greed are sinful in the way that yielding to a seduction captivates the heart of human desire that rests truly only in the God of love; and this sinfulness that becomes second nature in fallen humanity in turn requires the patient pastoral work of the ecclesia for its repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, healing and re-ordering in those who are now slowly learning to have in them the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5–6), who did not envy His divine status but rather gave Himself for lesser and morally unworthy beings.

Second, then, against the tendency in Wink and Wright (let alone lesser imitators) to underplay the reconciliation of the holy God with the sinful creature in the thrall of pride and envy in favor of the liberation of the innocent creature from political tyranny, we might better hold these New Testament atonement motifs, along with the call to cross-bearing discipleship in imitation of the Lord who thus shows us His way, tightly together. As it is stated in the Apocalypse: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them night and day before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rev 12:10–11). Here we see an indication of the

41. *LW* 31:10.

42. Paul R. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

unity of all three atonement motifs found in the New Testament: liberation from the tyrannical powers, forgiveness of sin, and freedom to follow Jesus through the cross to the crown.

Commentator Joe Mangina insightfully remarks, "The devil is the original bearer of false witness. His lies are legion, like his multiple personalities. At the social level, they include all the stratagems of deception and doublespeak by which corporations, governments, and the vast enterprises of technocracy seek to keep people from a knowledge of the truth."<sup>43</sup> The devil's lie, that is, his moral fault (I am now adding to Mangina's commentary by way of amplification) is not that we are sinners. That we are sinners is the truth. The lie is that we have not been victoriously befriended. Luther helps here:

There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on us because of our misery and distress and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers have not been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, righteousness, and every good and blessing. He has snatched us poor lost creatures from the jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace. As his own possession he has taken us under his protection and shelter, in order that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life and blessedness.<sup>44</sup>

Note how all three atonement motifs combine here. By winning our forgiveness before God at the cross, Christ dethrones the evil powers whose only real power is the half-truth they possess in accusing sinners, making them unworthy of God and so submissive to their tyranny. But making us worthy of God by His action of generosity, Christ gives His own Spirit to free believers from the threats of death temporal and eternal. The ultimate sanction of the tyrannical powers, the power of Death, is thus contested in the holy battle of the faith of public witnesses, the martyrs.

Third, if political sovereignty is not as such the enemy of God, but is, as Paul affirms in Romans 13, instituted to be God's servant for our good, and as such, is a place of conscientious obedience to God (Rom 13:5), by the same token, the state is all the same, as the same text indicates (Rom 13:4), nothing but an ambiguous monopoly on the means of violence (1

Sam 8:4–22) by which at best some sinners deter fellow sinners from spiraling one and all downward into anarchic violence. If that is right, Agamben is right, contra Hobbes, to describe political sovereignty, not as the social contract on which civilization is built but as an abiding emergency order that lawlessly enforces law in the time between humanity's fall and its redemption. Likewise, then, Marx was not wrong to imagine that in the coming of the Beloved Community, the state, like the temple, will wither away. In the interim, however, the nations to which the gospel is addressed in the Spirit's mission find themselves under political sovereignty of many kinds that may, or may not, serve according to God's institution. If the ministry of pastors and theologians is *to* the Word and sacraments that they be faithfully and aptly spoken, making in the world a zone of freedom for such discernment, the ministry of all the baptized is *from* the Word and sacraments to the suffering world in need and under thralldom.

Engaging the powers does not happen by preachers abusing the pulpit to indulge in the partisan bromides and bombast of politics as usual, but in the very serious business of empowering the laity for political vocations.<sup>45</sup> Amos Wilder, for pertinent precedence, lifted up in 1964 the great work of the postwar Evangelical Academies in Germany bringing together "jurists, philosophers and sociologists as well as theologians" in *die Zone der Freiheit*, that is, as the ecclesia, to brainstorm the problems of public life in the task of postwar reconstruction.<sup>46</sup> That kind of engagement of the "whole church," as Wilder put it, will be, I submit, the theological method that empowers us to see and to say what in the world we are talking about when we take up, not only Paul's words, but his program of holy struggle "against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

43. Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010) 154.

44. Luther, Large Catechism, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 434.

45. Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

46. Wilder, "Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics," 510.