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ENIGMAS AND POWERS

Engaging the Work of Walter Wink
for Classroom, Church, and World



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EDITED BY
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Enigmas and Powers IS A CELEBRATION AND ENGAGEMENT OF THE WORK OF the noted author, biblical scholar, peace activist, pastor, speaker, and workshop leader, Walter Wink. Among Wink's numerous influential works are *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*, *The Bible in Human Transformation*, *Homosexuality and Christian Faith*, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, and *The Powers* trilogy (*Naming the Powers*, *Unmasking the Powers*, and *Engaging the Powers*). This is the only volume devoted to responses by Walter's colleagues and students to the entire range of his work and its vast impact across disciplines, from biblical studies to peace studies, from theology to psychology.

"You hold in your hands an unusual book. In it you will find essays, letters, speeches, prayers, toasts, reminiscences, arguments, footnotes, and open-ended conversation. You will find addressed—and by addressed, I mean that the authors are variously talking to these persons/entities—God; the Spirit; Psyche; Walter Wink the person; Walter Wink the essay, book, theory, method, and/or argument(s); and finally, and throughout, you, the reader. Most of all, you will find, I hope, truth. Or, at least, meaningful, productive, and enticing approaches toward truth itself, and toward the world in light of truth."

—from the Introduction

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Engaging Walter Wink's Powers

—*an Activist's Testimony*

Alastair McIntosh

A Grounded Theology

THERE IS MORE TO BEING A THEOLOGIAN THAN JUST BEING A THINKER. Speaking as an activist I find myself left malnourished by those theologians who are only great thinkers. To the considerable convenience of our ego self and its love of being clever and in control, thinking on its own cultivates only the “head” part of our psyches. But the activist for social, ecological and spiritual justice in this world must be concerned equally with the “hand”—with doing things. That imperative of involvement makes things very interesting, because it forces realization that it also takes the “heart” to pump blood to both head and hand. Without such engagement of feeling, of emotion, and of metaphysically grounded values, all else is asphyxiated. That was why Jesus insisted that the realm of the divine is found not in the cleverness of all the world, but in the human heart. It is the hardest but most important spiritual lesson we can ever learn, and especially important for those of us who face the latter-day Pharisaic temptations that can go with being academics!

It is this deep engagement—firing on all three cylinders of the trika of head, heart and hand—that draws the engaged person fully into life incarnate. That is why I personally consider that to be a theologian one must be an activist, and being an activist, as I will suggest in this paper, can equally draw us in to theology. Engagement in activism forces the ego self, if I might call it that, to face up to its counterpoint in the shadow self. To put that in plain language, when we're up to the elbows

in the doo-doo of the world we have to face our own doo-doo too! We have to recognise that we're dealing with realities that can either be left to stink in the basement of the individual and collective shadow self, or be processed into rich compost from which new life can grow. And that new life is the fruit of compassion. We get there by iteratively grounding all other parts of ourselves in the deep Self or Godself— in what we Quakers call “that of God in all”—in Buddha-nature, or, as our Hindu fellow humankind would have it, in Atman (individual self) ultimately as Brahman (universal self). St Paul on one of his better days put it all in perspective when he said, “I live, yet not I, but Christ lives within me.” Jesus may have been a man in historical time and space; but Christ, in the eternal pleroma, beyond male and female, beyond Jew or Greek, beyond slave and free, is the seed of God in all things (Gal. 3:28).

What I find so exciting with activism is the way it pushes us to deepen into the *Godspace* as I call it—into the realm of God that expresses community with one another, with nature, and in the psychospiritual realm of our inner selves. It provides the power and the courage, as the Psalmist said, to fear no ill (Ps. 23). Speaking personally, I didn't start out from that position. I started out as a teenage activist thirty years ago as an agnostic. Many things transformed that position. But one of the most important was encountering the work of an American theologian named *Walter Wink*.

Rethinking Christianity

I still remember the moment it happened. We were sitting in Peace House—a project of the Quakers and the Iona Community—and listening to Helen Steven, who was then Justice and Peace worker for the Iona Community. I had been drawn to Helen years earlier while on the Isle of Iona because she was open to alternative theologies including feminist, ecological and neopagan perspectives. These were important to me because the religion I'd grown up with—mostly mainstream fundamentalist Scots Presbyterianism—did not speak to my condition. I could not accept its cornerstone of the blood atonement theory of the crucifixion. To die for love—yes. That is what many great lovers of humankind have been called to do in their activism both within and outside of the Christian tradition. But to die because the God of love

required it out of angry vindication—that, as I saw it, and from an early age, was a heresy.

Since my late teens I had been on a long spiritual journey. I had abandoned Christianity and found meaning in other faiths, mainly Eastern ones. And then one day in the late 1980s I found myself sitting in Peace House when Helen said that she and Ellen, her partner, were “starting to re-think the whole Christian thing.” Why? Because, she said, they had encountered this wonderful work by somebody with the mischievous sounding name of “Walter Wink.” She said that his work was of profound importance to activism, and especially nonviolent activism, because it took the understanding of power into realms deeper than she had ever previously encountered in theological writing. “The Powers that Be are Good. But the Powers are fallen. Yet the Powers can be redeemed to their higher, God-given vocation.” That was the essence of it. And with that essence was provided a practical formula for activist application. The name of the game is to, 1) Name the Powers . . . finding the courage to break silence and simply state the abuse of power. 2) Unmask the Powers . . . revealing the social, economic, psychological, and spiritual dynamics by which they oppress. 3) And finally, engage the Powers—wrestling so as not to destroy them—not to take life—but rather, to call them back to their higher, God-given calling.

Central to this was a cosmology of power in which “spirituality” is seen by Walter Wink as being the “interiority”—or “angel”—of people, institutions and even nations. As such, the inner life or the life of “prayer” takes on new meaning. Here is how he puts it in one of the most engaging passages from *Engaging the Powers*:

Those who pray do so not because they believe certain intellectual propositions about the value of prayer, but simply because the struggle to be human in the face of suprahuman Powers requires it. The act of praying is itself one of the indispensable means by which we engage the Powers. It is, in fact, that engagement at its most fundamental level, where their secret spell over us is broken and we are re-established in a bit more of that freedom which is our birthright and potential. Prayer is . . . the interior battlefield where the decisive victory is first won, before engagement in the outer world is even attempted. If we have not undergone that inner liberation, whereby the individual strands of the nets in which we are caught are severed, one by one, our activism may merely reflect one or another counterideology of

some counter-Power. We may simply be caught up in a new collective passion, and fail to discover the transcendent possibilities of God pressing for realization here and now. Unprotected by prayer, our social activism runs the danger of becoming self-justifying good works, as our inner resources atrophy, the wells of love run dry, and we are slowly changed into the likeness of the Beast.¹

Dharma and the Battlefield

For my taste, the first two volumes of Walter's trilogy—*Naming the Powers* and *Unmasking the Powers* were too conventionally religious to speak to me at that time. But the third, *Engaging the Powers*, totally blew my mind. It is the most important activist's handbook that I have ever encountered—the one that I use as a central text with my students of human ecology who take my masters-level module in Spiritual Activism at Strathclyde University here in Scotland. What Walter's work did for me was that it opened a door on the structure of reality. I am reminded, in saying this, of the very first verse of the Hindu gospel, the *Bhagavad Gita*. Juan Mascaró's beautiful translation for Penguin Classics renders this: "On the field of Truth, on the battlefield of life, what came to pass, Sanjaya. . . ."

As Indian commentators tell, there is just so much packed into those few words. The battlefield is metaphorical. It is "of life," and it rests in Truth or "Dharma" as the Sanskrit has it. Dharma is the opening of God's way; the unfolding of reality such as we recognise in Christian process theology. If one imagines the "Word" or *Logos* of John's gospel, "in the beginning," and booming out to roll through all time—well, that's like the Hindu Dharma. That is what composes the big picture, the stage on which all our worldly activities are played out. And Sanjaya in the Hindu epic is the eagle-eyed charioteer to the blind king, Dhritarashtra. That symbolises the same point that Walter repeatedly makes: the political power of the world is invariably fallen and therefore, to varying degrees, blind. The king—which is to say, I and thou in our small selves—need the charioteer's inner vision of the Godself. This was what Walter's work woke up in me—this radical grounding of reality in Truth that seeks to animate, inspire and guide our action in the world.

1. Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 297–98.

It lifted me from seeing spirituality as being something transcendent and made it real and effective as something immanent too. It gave new meaning to the sayings and witness of Jesus, and like my friend Helen, helped me to embrace afresh the depth of what it can mean to be "Christian." That didn't mean dumping all the insights gained from other faiths. It just meant recognising that the Holy Spirit may have worked in many ways in many places and times in history, and that wherever love is, God is, too.

Real-life Application

Part of my struggle with Christianity as a younger man is that I always was, and still am, impressed with the empirical claims of science. However, the discovery of mysticism showed me that spiritual life is profoundly empirical too. Even if I myself had never had a direct experience of God, there are plenty of anecdotes around, and when you collect enough anecdotes together they become "data." This recognition helps to silence the bickering of the "head" and allow for an experimental opening of living from the "heart" in the activism of the "hand." For me, this came about in a number of sustained bouts of activist work, the most important of which have been my work with land reform, with environmental protection, with the military and with consumerism. I shall describe the first two of these and briefly mention the others, but let me, first, cite another piece of Walter's insight. It's a passage from *The Human Being*—a book whose importance I was alerted to by my friend, James Jones, the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool. For me, coming from a Scottish bardic culture, this passage profoundly deepens my grip on the tangibility of the spiritual. It helps to legitimise the reality of inner life such as a secular world would otherwise dismiss as being "imaginary."

Feuerbach had himself said, "Imagination is the original organ of religion," but he was unable to grasp the positive meaning of his insight. . . . The realm of the imagination, or what I prefer to call, following Henry Corbin, the imaginal realm, produces a third kind of knowing, intermediate between the world of ideas, on the one hand, and the object world of sense perception on the other. The imaginal possesses extension and dimension, figures and colours, but lacks full materiality and hence cannot be perceived by the senses. In dreams and visions, for example, we perceive the action *as if* it were staged on the physical plane, but

it is not. This intermediate world of images and archetypes can be known only by the “transmutation of inner spiritual states into outer states, into vision-events symbolizing with these inner states” [Corbin]. Concrete symbolization, such as temples, rituals, and myths, may help us to find our interiority outside ourselves, as Henry Corbin puts it. We may falsely assume that these images are subjective creations of our psyches, or pseudo-objective delusions, like hallucinations. But we do not make all of them up. We imagine them, to be sure, but something real evokes our imagination. . . . Unless the imagination is recognized as autonomous to a high degree, we trivialize the divine encounter. We do not simply create God with our images; rather, our images are precipitated not only from deep within us, but from beyond our personal unconscious. Medieval Jewish mystics called that place “the roots of the soul”—a deep, underground world of archetypes that has encoded the experience of the species from the beginning. It is the recovery of the imaginal that makes possible both the reenchantment of nature and the recovery of soul, in ourselves and in things.²

I suppose that the importance of that passage for one with a disposition for Jungian psychology is that it provides flesh to the activist dictum that “the personal is the political.” It allows us to bridge inner and outer space, and as Walter suggests in the first passage that I quoted from him, it renders seamless “outer” activism and “inner” prayer life. This helps to keep open the doorways of compassion. As the American spiritual teacher Ram Dass says, it helps us to do what we have to do with people but to keep our hearts open to them. Put another way, Jesus saw that as activists we would make many enemies, but he recommended trying to love them. Such an attitude renders our adversaries “worthy adversaries” because, not least, they become participants with us in a cosmology of interconnection. Shakespeare said that “all the world’s a stage,” and this kind of thinking empowers us to see our activism as being not just social, political, environmental, doctrinal or whatever, but more importantly, to see it as a kind of medieval mystery play in which the name of the game of what gets played out before people during a campaign is nothing less than the revelation of God. Our activism in issues of ordinary life therefore becomes a form of mission: the articulation of spiritual vision. In other words, spiritual activism both sustains

2. Wink, *The Human Being*, 40–41.

those of us who engage in it and teaches those around us some of the meanings of spirituality.

In 2003, thanks to the very great thoughtfulness and kindness of my friend, James Cashen, in upper New York State, I had the privilege of meeting Walter and his wife June. It was clear to me during this meeting at his home that part of Walter's strength comes from his spiritual marriage, and the sense of the divine feminine that June embodies both in her presence and in her beautiful work as a potter. The morning that we spent together gave me the opportunity to ask Walter to clarify something about how he uses the word, "spiritual." I put it to him that he tends to use it mainly to imply the "interiority" of things, but that another use would be to imply that of God in things—the meanings of love as the process of coming alive to the aliveness of life. He agreed that both usages are valid and that, at a deep level, they connect. For me, such radical "spirituality" is the ultimate ballgame on the activist stage. Let me now briefly describe some of these applications.

Case Study 1: Scottish Land Reform

The work for which I am best known is my contribution to modern land reform in Scotland. In 1991, four of us set up a psychological challenge to landed power. Land ownership is an issue in Scotland that goes back to the 18th and 19th century "Highland Clearances" in which the people were forced off land that had been turned into a commodity—valued no longer for how many people it could support, but for the profit it could generate. Today, nearly two-thirds of the private land in Scotland is controlled by just 1,000 owners. The challenge that we levelled was to set up a land trust with the stated aim of bringing the Isle of Eigg into community ownership. We had no money at the outset—simply a vision, and an understanding that even more than being a legal hold, land ownership is a psychospiritual one on the resources and minds of the people who live on the land. Many big landowners in Scotland see the land, according to my analysis, not just in economic terms but also as a way to bolster their ontological insecurity. They have land in order to be somebody. As such, and consistent with the second temptation of Christ in Luke's rendition, big landowners take on kingdoms idolatrously (Luke 4:5-8). This damages community integrity.

The owner of Eigg had been forced by the courts to place the island on the market in the aftermath of divorce proceedings. He described the island as “a collector’s item” and we reasoned that we could challenge the “interiority” of that perspective, thus causing a bit of market spoiling. Consistent with Gutiérrez’s emphasis on liberation theology being conducted from the underside of history—by telling the story of the oppressed—we created a situation where the typical rich buyer, looking for a hideaway place of retreat—would be put off. The natives were restless, so who’d want to holiday there! It was a very simple formula and one that I sought to legitimise by overtly using land-based liberation theology, such as I describe throughout my book, *Soil and Soul*.³

The outcome of this and many other contributions from a great many other people, and primarily the island residents themselves, was that the island stuck on the market. The community increasingly grew in its own confidence and reclaimed hope. Eventually, it raised three million dollars from some ten thousand donations from around the world, and Eigg was brought into community land ownership in June 1997.

More than that, Eigg also set a pattern and example for others. Its success contributed to the Scottish Parliament passing the Land Reform Scotland Act as flagship legislation in 2003. At the time of writing in summer 2007, we now have an astonishing 367,000 acres of Scotland that have been brought under community control, and this represents fully 2% of the Scottish land mass.

Mainstream Scottish churches played an important role in the legitimisation process that led to this transformation, or, as its critics like to call it, “the Mugabification of Scotland”! For example, the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office all set up commissions that provided input to the land reform process by developing an applied land theology. My voice was only one of many, but it was a voice that was heard, and behind it lay the applied theology of our dear friend and venerated teacher, Walter Wink.

3. McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*.

Case Study 2: the Isle of Harris Superquarry

At the same time as the Eigg Trust was getting going, a multinational corporation announced that it had acquired mineral rights in the National Scenic Area on the Isle of Harris, near my home area in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.

I had recently returned from working in Papua New Guinea. There the Bougainville crisis had alerted me to the problems that massive mining projects can cause for indigenous communities and fragile ecosystems. I therefore joined those who were opposing the quarry, though it looked like a hopeless task.

My role was publicly to name, unmask and engage the principalities and the powers behind the quarry. Naming meant making visible the scar that this would create on both the landscape and the community, including invocation of such designations as Mammon and Moloch to describe the "spirit" behind what was proposed. Unmasking meant exegeting, in articles and public talks, why this was being done and how it might affect the life of the community. And engaging was tackling the corporation, especially through the media but also through their local supporters, asking if a quarry was really the God-given calling for the exquisite beauty of the Isle of Harris.

For the first three years these arguments cut very little ice. But in 1994, the government public inquiry opened. Its terms of reference included cultural considerations. I argued at the pre-inquiry meeting that this should include spiritual considerations as Harris is a profoundly Presbyterian community. I pointed out that in the *Institutes* Calvin refers to the "beautiful theater" of creation that reveals the majesty of God (*Inst.* III:XIV:20).

There was a need to bring zest into the campaign. We needed something that would make more visible the inner spirituality of the situation. This crystallised when an American friend introduced me to the then Warrior Chief of the Mi'kmaq Nation in Nova Scotia. He had prevented a similar superquarry on *Kluscap*—their sacred mountain on Cape Breton Island. As again is described in *Soil and Soul*, I managed to persuade him to come and testify in the Scottish inquiry and to do so not just with myself, but also with the Rev. Professor Donald Macleod of the Free Church College—one of Scotland's leading theologians.⁴

4. McIntosh, *Soil and Soul*, 196–247.

The combination of a Calvinist professor, a Quaker heretic and a pagan Indian chief (as the newspapers put it) was just too good to be true for the media, and the sleepy public inquiry was catapulted into the international limelight. But more than that, while the media were bemused by the theology, they nonetheless reported reasonably accurately on it. That got a lot of people thinking more deeply about values.

The outcome was that all this and more than I can relate here caused long procedural delays. The corporation's flagship project started to founder, and with it, their share price fell. This caused the English company as it was, Redland, to be taken over by an even bigger French one, Lafarge. In 2004 I was able successfully to broker Lafarge's withdrawal from what, by that time, was a nearly-wrecked flagship. But there was one further irony to all this. Lafarge came back to me and challenged me on my own complicity with the powers! "We all use quarry products," they said to me, "so will you help us to do so more responsibly?" The consequence is that I now sit, unpaid, on their environmental advisory board and meet regularly with the top management of a company that as the world's biggest manufacturer of cement, is responsible for fully 1% of the world's emissions of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. I am proud to be able to report that they are now winning acclaim for having reduced the level of these emissions per ton of cement produced by 14% on 1990 levels. It may not be enough to save the world but, to me, it suggests something about human nature. It suggests, as Walter tells us, that the Powers are Good; the Powers are fallen; but the Powers can be redeemed to a higher, God-given vocation.

Other Examples of Application

These are just two of the ways that Walter's insights have inwardly fortified and informed my own work. Another example is my work with the military. Every year for the past decade I have been invited to lecture on nonviolence to four hundred senior officers from some seventy countries on the Advanced Command & Staff Course at Britain's foremost school of war—the Joint Services Command & Staff College. They get a full on blast of Water Wink, and at times I have been given standing ovations and told that they are now able to respect nonviolence even if they do not agree with it. Some 4,000 senior military have thereby been

exposed to the idea of naming, unmasking and engaging the Powers that Be!

Another example is with my work on advertising—especially that of tobacco companies. This has been featured in the front page lead article of the *Wall Street Journal* as well as the *Sunday Times*.⁵ Basically, my technique has been to inquire into the nature of the powers underlying Gallaher's advertisements. My conclusion—as can be read online by Googling “cigarette adverts” or “Silk Cut”—is that the spirit of death itself has been recruited to market the ecstasy of destruction. In a book that I am currently writing about the psychology and spirituality underlying climate change, I am using this work as an icon into the spirit of consumerism and what J. K. Galbraith referred to as “wants creation.” I am suggesting that if we want to live sustainably with our planet, we need nothing less than a new heart and a new mind, redeemed to higher God-given vocation from the fall into the idolatry of consumerism. Again, Walter's guiding hand in where I am coming from will be evident.

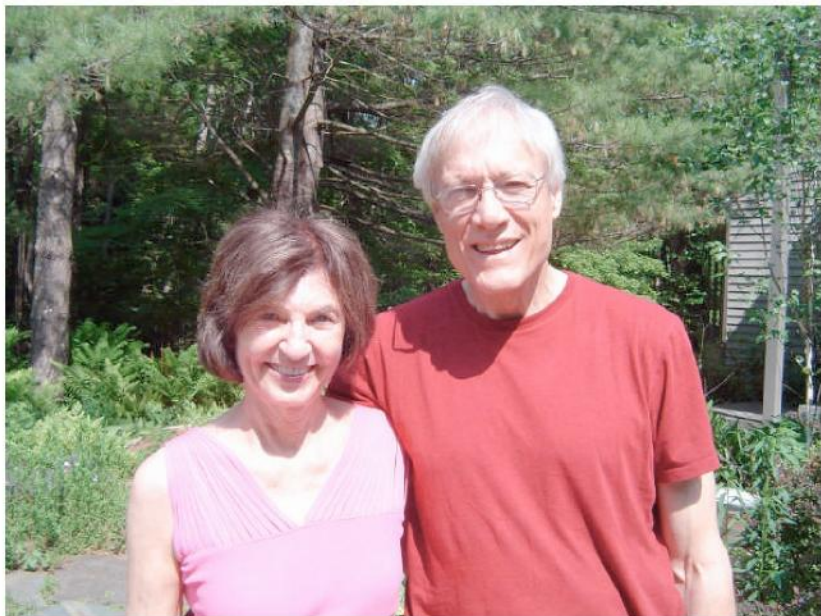
Gratitude

I always think that there is a direct relationship between a student's ability to feel gratitude to a teacher and that student's capacity to learn. In the East it is encoded as “respect for the teacher,” but that is too rigid a construct to capture the imaginations of most of us in this post-sixties era. I think we need to go deeper, and I remember seeing a review of Walter's work where some bishop or another had said, “God has blessed the writing of this book.” For me, sitting at the feet of Walter's work from across the other side of the great Atlantic Ocean has been to receive a very profound blessing. In my campaigns, and especially during the difficult times and during all the failures, I have felt Walter's hand on my shoulder even before I ever met him face to face. I have felt touched by the spirit of God in what Walter has revealed unto me (and that use of Biblical language is deliberate). All this has moved onwards and outwards into the world. It has taken many different forms, dressed up variously as activism, academia and just the simplicity of ordinary life. And so, thank you, dear June and dear Walter, for what you have

5. Parker-Pope, “No Butts About It”; Mega, “Cigarette Ads May Induce Death Wish.”

given to me and to us all. You have helped to kindle the fire of love made manifest. You have touched the lives of many who you will never know nor they you. But all, whether they know it or not, have been touched by the divine. Again, thank you, and God bless you both.

Alastair McIntosh is Visiting Professor of Human Ecology at the Centre for Human Ecology, University of Strathclyde, Scotland. Walter Wink describes his "Soil and Soul" as "a beautiful book, a fantastic book, a book that will help reconstitute the world."



June Keener Wink & Walter Wink at their home, summer 2003