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Seeking Cultures of Peace

A PEACE CHURCH CONVERSATION

Edited by
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Chapter 16

Peace in the Tiger's Mouth

Alastair McIntosh

A gentle Buddhist monk from Thailand [who had been persecuted] for organizing controversial social justice activities in his home country . . . came one day and silently left a beautiful rice paper brush and ink drawing on the floor of our simple abode in the forest. It was of a rampant tiger with the caption, "The best place for meditation is in the tiger's mouth."[1]

In this chapter I will suggest that *community* is the soil in which peace unfolds. Peace is the building of community in a triune relationship—with one another, with the creation, and with God. This is achieved not by denying power, or necessarily by renouncing it, but often by engaging with it amid conflict—in the "tiger's mouth." The calling to engage, however, must not be of this world. It must be moved by the grace of God, the preferential concern of which is for the poor of the earth and the broken in nature.

TRIUNE COMMUNITY

Community is a condition of belonging that results from living in growing consciousness of interconnection. It is, as Paul put it, the

"church" as "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Jesus said that we are all branches of one vine. If we cut ourselves off we will, as sure as a branch dies without water, wither and be good only for the metaphorical fire (John 15). Similar principles of interconnection are found in all mystical religions. "Consider my sacred mystery. I am the source of all beings, I support them all, but I rest not in them," says Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. "Thirty spokes share one hub," is how the *Tao te Ching* puts it. "All Muslims are as one person," says the *Hadith*, the oral tradition of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

In the Christian tradition, "sin" can be defined as the breaking of God's community. We might see the three temptations of Jesus on the mountain as representing pressure to break community in each of its primary fields of expression (Luke 4, Mt 4). Had Jesus used his power to change stones into bread he would have violated, and so misused, the laws of nature. For him to have assumed landed power by acquiring kingdoms would have wronged human social structures. And for him to have put God to the test by leaping from the pinnacle would have been an abuse of spiritual power.

A deep understanding of community integrates both the social and natural environments that comprise "human ecology" into an all-embracing spiritual environment. Simultaneously immanent and transcendent, such an human ecology constitutes the totality of reality. It gives humankind an integral role in a universe bound together by love. Love articulated out into the universe, made incarnate, is justice. But for this to "roll down like waters" (Amos 5:24), spiritual justice must underlie social and ecological justice.

Spiritual justice may be understood as the avoidance of spiritual delusion. If social justice concerns our affairs with one another, and ecological justice our relationship with the rest of the creation, spiritual justice concerns right relationship in worship. Worship, in the broadest and deepest understanding of the concept, is about how we fundamentally orient our lives. It is a perceptual matter, being concerned with how we *see* reality, with what happens when the scales fall from our eyes. In living life worshipfully we lift our eyes to God. We make God the measure by which all else is judged. Spiritual justice means seeing life reverentially, seeing with eyes that accord with God's love, and not with eyes set upon some lesser "god" such as money, status, or a human leader. As social and ecological justice follow on from spiritual justice, and as community and therefore peace arise at the confluence of all three faces of justice, it follows, as the prophets repeatedly saw, that the most fundamental barrier to creating a peaceful world is idolatry. In this sense the seemingly glib assertion that "all wars have religion at their heart" is deeply true. All wars idolize violence; the religion in question is idolatrous.

In being community and so becoming the church, we have to make choices of whether to become more dead or alive. If need be, we must leave the dead (note, *the dead*, not the living) to bury their own dead, shake the dust from our feet, and walk on through the desert until we come to where community is alive (Deut. 30:19; Luke 9:60; Mark 6:11). This refusal to collude with the deadness of everyday life, the "banality of evil," the idolatry of necrophilia, implies a continuous commitment to "turn back the streams of war" as peace workers.[2]

WAR AND EMPATHY

War, the antithesis and negation of community, comes about when understanding of the interconnection of all life has never been developed in the first place, is inadequately developed, or has broken down. As such, war derives from a perceptual failing, from a deficit of conscious awareness about reality. War reflects a fragmented worldview; one that considers "collateral damage" to be an acceptable possibility, rather than seeing it as an oxymoron in what is "One World" that can have no externalities to the economic or military equation. If we could but see and experience our membership, one of another, as one body, we would no more harm that which surrounds us than we would willingly cause harm to our own corporeal body. Yes, it is true that self-harm is a common psychopathology. But it is precisely that—a psychopathology. Except in specific sacrificed testimonies of witness, as sometimes expressed in making certain types of protest or in shows of mourning, self-harm is invariably connected to a loss of self-worth. As such, the resolution of war connects with the wider work of salvation that seeks to "salve" our sense of who we are.

The ability to experience interconnection with the other derives from *empathy*. Empathy is the fruit of spiritual presence. War can only be sustained in an absence of empathy. It results from a deficit of presence, which is to say, of connection with wider and deeper reality in consciousness. Empathy is the capacity to feel for and with the other. It is a gift of grace. It is revealed and not something that can be forced. It can only be opened out to, asked and waited for, by becoming confessionally more present to our lack of presence with the other.

Peace is therefore built from the recognition that war has a socially emergent property. War derives from lack of mutual presence in

a society's members. Its presenting symptoms may be geopolitical, but its roots are psychospiritual. "Do you know where wars come from?" asks the Indian Jesuit Anthony de Mello. "They come from projecting outside of us the conflict that is inside. Show me an individual in whom there is no inner self-conflict and I'll show you an individual in whom there is no violence." [3] This is what makes deep peace work spiritual work. We should not despair at having to undertake peace work, or at the hugeness of the task. We should not fear when we find ourselves in the mouth of the tiger, because that is where God needs us to be. That is where presence will be sharpest. That is why conflict, spiritually understood, can be so good for meditation. It challenges us to seek the strength that can bring us spiritually alive through unthinkable situations. It challenges us to work out our own salvation in the context of the troubled social and natural environments in which we find ourselves living. It brings liberation.

Gustavo Gutiérrez sees liberation as a threefold process. First, he says, there is "liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization." That is to say, liberation at levels that affect family, community, and political and economic institutions. Next there is the need for "personal transformation by which we live with profound inner freedom in the face of every kind of servitude." This is psychological and spiritual development—liberation from our internal blockages, hang-ups, and various uptightnesses. And thirdly, there is what he calls liberation from "sin." Gutiérrez describes this level of liberation as that "which attacks the deepest root of all servitude; for sin is the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings." Liberation, he concludes, "gets to the very source of social injustice and other forms of human oppression and reconciles us with God and our fellow human beings." It sets us free at social, psychological, and spiritual levels of experience. "Free for what?" Gutiérrez asks. "Free to love," he concludes, adding that "to liberate" means "*to give life.*" [4]

CONFESSING POWER

Power is germane to conflict; therefore, the dynamics of power must be faced by peace workers. Too often in justice and peace movements, power is denied, forgetting that power denied is power abused. This is the cause of much strife within our movements.

Power is the capacity to bring about change in the structure of reality. As such, power and the making of community cannot be separated. Power, including our personal power, must therefore be confessed. We must live in conscious acknowledgment of it so that we are fully accountable to one another and can yield power when that is appropriate. Our communities must be *confessional communities*, predicated on mutual psychological honesty.

In his trilogy, *Naming the Powers*, *Unmasking the Powers*, and *Engaging the Powers*, [5] the American theologian Walter Wink explores the principle that power is central to the spiritual expression of life. Power constellates or crystallizes reality. It might be seen as *the will to be*. We are familiar with power's exterior expressions in people, institutions, buildings, nations, and natural processes such as the growth of a tree. But it has also, according to Wink, an interior dynamic.

This interiority is, Wink suggests, "spirituality." Such spirituality underlies the outward manifestation of things. Outward forms of reality are shaped by their inner spirituality. This is not to deny the importance of molecular structures, genetic sequences, and the laws of physics. It is simply to say that spirituality is at their root. Spirituality accounts for their emergent properties—features that arise from systems that would not have been predictable from only the sum of their component parts. Consider, for example, the Periodic Table of the Elements as a template for the material world. Spirituality, can be seen as the difference between an aggregation of carbon, water, and a few other components, and what constitutes an human being. It is the difference between C_2H_5OH, the chemical formula for alcohol, and a cup of wine sacramentally representing the spirit of life.

The implications of understanding the interiority and exteriority of power are profound for the peace activist. The following matrix illustrates this. It was developed for a lecture I give annually at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Britain's foremost school of war. The matrix suggests a spectral relationship between conventional applications of military force, and the Gandhian "truth force" that spiritual activism employs. It acknowledges that both the peace activist and the serving soldier may be participants in a connected process. As a generalization, and one that is not always valid, both the soldier and the peace activist think of themselves as working for peace, and each knows that this involves engaging with power. The difference between us, and it can be a decisive life-or-death difference, lies in how we go about it. At the end of the day, we might remember, God told David that he could not build the temple because "you have shed so much blood in my sight on the earth" (1 Chron. 22:8). [6]

Based on Wink's theology, the matrix on the opposite page suggests that power has an interior, spiritual, or intrinsic face and an exterior, physical, or incarnate face. This interior/exterior "dynamic," as I have called it, is shown on the downward *y* axis.

Through these dynamics, power can be expressed at levels of being that are capable of being physical, psychological (of which I distinguish two types), and "spiritual."[7] This is shown moving right along the horizontal *x* axis. Peace, I suggest, is a process by which the expression of power in the human world shifts left to right along this spectrum.

Just as persons are, in terms of Christian theology, "fallen," in the sense that they fall short of their God-given potential, so too the "powers that be" (Rom. 13:1, KJV) governing the inner spirituality of institutions and nations are "fallen." They therefore necessitate constant calling back to their God-given potential. At the level of nationhood, Walter Wink consequently distinguishes between the fallen *personality* of a nation and the higher *vocation* or "calling" of nationhood—a nation representing a community of people at the macro level. Wink says that

> In a little-known essay of 1941, [Martin] Buber acknowledges that every nation has a guiding spiritual characteristic, its genius, which it acknowledges as its "prince" or its "god." The national spirit unfolds, matures, and withers. There is a life cycle for every nation. Every nation makes an idol of its supreme faculties, elevating its own self as absolute, and worshipping its own inner essence or spirit as a god. But to be limited to oneself is to be condemned to die. When the national spirit decays and disintegrates, and the nation turns its face to nothingness instead of participating in the whole, it is on the verge of death. . . . Whenever the state makes itself the highest value, then it is in an objective state of blasphemy. This is the situation of the majority of the nations in the world today, our own included.[8]

Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung saw the ideologies and symbols of nationhood as important because they mediate power from the collective unconscious of a people into political action. In one of his last essays, *The Undiscovered Self*, he wrote of the danger that, "Where love stops, power begins, and violence, and terror." And, he maintained, "The individual who is not anchored in God can offer no resistance on his own resources to the physical and moral blandishments of the world." Jung continues,

Level of Power	Physical	Psycho-logical Type I	Psycho-logical Type II	Spiritual
Dynamic	Coercion by hard sanction of terror—death, torture, loss, detention, injury, shock.	Persuasion through soft sanction of fear—prison, fines, social conformity, obedience.	Persuasion through convincement leading to empowerment, especially at community level.	Transformation—empowerment from within, satyagraha, autopoesis—comes from the soul.
Interior Face	Power over others by use or threat of brute force, violence against the person or property—authoritarian.	Power over others by strength of rules, law, ideology, governance, motivational manipulation—authoritarian to authoritative.	Power with others—solidarity, education as "leading out," courtesy, trade, governance, advocacy, conscientisation—auto-authoritative.	Power from within—grace, vocation, self-realization, a prophetic and liberation theology—spiritual authority, as self-authored from beyond mere ego.
Exterior Face	Armed forces, violent revolution, monkey-wrenching, saboteur action, industrial action such as strikes and boycotts.	Police law & order, tax authorities, institutional discipline, manipulative marketing, sects, threat of industrial action, whistleblowing, social conditioning.	Democratic political processes & open government, schools & universities, industry lobby groups, trade unions, religious & non-governmental organisations.	Touching of hearts, creativity/art, wholistic worldview, joy, nonviolence, witness, martyrdom, fun—both individual and collective through community.

SPECTRUM OF SOCIALLY EXPRESSED POWER

> We are living in what the Greeks called *Kairos*—the right moment—for a "metamorphosis of the gods," of the fundamental principles and symbols. This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is the expression of the unconscious man within us who is changing. Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science. . . .
>
> So much is at stake and so much depends on the psychological constitution of modern man. Is he capable of resisting the temptation to use his power for the purpose of staging a world conflagration? Is he conscious of the path he is treading, and what the conclusions are that must be drawn from the present world situation and his own psychic situation? Does he know that he is on the point of losing the life-preserving myth of the inner man which Christianity has treasured up for him? Does he realize what lies in store should this catastrophe ever befall him? Is he even capable of realizing that this would in fact be a catastrophe? And finally, does the individual know that *he* is the makeweight that tips the scales?[9]

REDEEMING POWER

What are the implications of redeeming power for those who acknowledge that we work in a "fallen" world? Based upon a biblical exegesis of the "principalities and powers," Wink derives the following formula:

> The Powers are good.
> The Powers are fallen.
> The Powers must be redeemed.[10]

We can illuminate the challenge of this if, as Wink intends, we substitute for "the powers" the name of a person, institution, or nation that we know. Conflict between others and ourselves can then be seen in a framework that understands strife both as inevitable but also potentially as mutually redemptory. It can help us to face our enemies without hatred, with love; to search for ways to free their higher God-given vocation while, at the same time, allowing them to challenge ours. After all, Jesus never said not to have enemies. He had plenty himself. He only recommended trying to love them.

In Wink's schema of naming, unmasking, and engaging the powers, the first stage—naming—aims to place handles upon psychospiritual processes that are otherwise difficult to see. In the Bible, these processes had names like *Moloch, Mammon*, and the *Golden Calf*. Wink suggests that such principalities, "angels," or "gods" remain present in the idolatry of modern life. We do not notice them because we have been persuaded to think that they belong to a bygone age, yet they dominate many of the structures of our lives. We see them in the worship of such obsessions as war, money, power, drugs, corporations, and sex.

"Naming the powers" entails recognition and, therefore, the restoration of a *visible* power dynamic. This is because naming calls into presence—it makes features of reality manifest in consciousness. Once that is established, once we are more spiritually awake to that which is, we can proceed with "unmasking the powers"—that is to say, stripping off the disguises and camouflage to expose the means by which the psychodynamic principles in question cause degradation and corruption. For example, nuclear weapons and their massive cost can be seen as being psychologically similar to the worship of Moloch, that Old Testament fire-filled stone god into whose arms the children were sacrificed to purchase prosperity. Or to take another example, it can sometimes be useful to *personify* the spirit of a greed-led economy by using Jesus' Aramaic term, Mammon—the worship of which, he said, was incompatible with loving God.

Only after naming and unmasking can we attempt "engaging the powers." This aims not to destroy power, which was originally a God-given organizing force, but to *redeem* it from a "fallen" or degraded state. Wink sees nonviolence as central to this task. If violence is used to combat what he calls the "domination system" of oppression it will ultimately fail, because the domination system actually feeds on violence. More violence is how violence clones itself. Wink, therefore, refers to the theory that violence can be redemptive as the "Myth of Redemptive Violence." If social transformation is to be effective, he says, it has to avoid being sucked back into the cycle of violence.

For these reasons, if peace is to become a long-term condition of society and not merely the temporary absence of war, it is imperative to shift along what I called, above, the "spectrum of socially expressed power." It is necessary for nations to learn how to evolve from coercive forms of governance that express "power over" others, through persuasive techniques that express "power with" them, and on into the autopoetic transformative mode of "empowerment within." This spectral shift is required to achieve effective consensual governance. As it raises the application of power from a physical level

of being, through psychological ones, to the spiritual, it moves toward progressively greater degrees of recalling the world to a higher vocation. This is the practical work of redemption. The former U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, understood this very clearly. He writes:

> Historically and currently, we all realize that religious differences have often been a cause or a pretext for war. Less well known is the fact that the actions of many religious persons and communities point in another direction. They demonstrate that religion can be a potent force in encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict.
>
> Personal experience underlies my conviction that religion can be significant for peacemaking. The negotiations between Menachem Begin, Anwar el-Sadat, and myself at Camp David in 1978 were greatly influenced by our religious backgrounds. . . . [Such] cases suggest that the world's religious communities possess moral and social characteristics that equip them in unique ways to engage in efforts to promote peace. . . . [We] must recognize the growing importance of religious factors for peacemaking and develop ways, both informal and formal, to cooperate with religious leaders and communities in promoting peace with justice.[11]

These arguments are not to belittle the insightful views of our Mennonite friends against constantinianism. They do, however, suggest that if a nation can be understood as a community at a macro scale, it is difficult to see how the church, as the body of membership one of another, can or should avoid having an impact upon it. There are various ways in which that can be achieved and the discredited model of the "Holy Roman Empire" is but one.

RENEWING THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS

I opened with a discussion of the triune nature of community—community with nature, community with one another, and community with God. I paralleled these with the three temptations of Christ, and followed that through with an exegesis of power. I will close by suggesting that a further parallel can be drawn with the so-called "Evangelical Counsels"—poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Poverty calls for right relationship with the earth, including the richness of enjoying the fruits of Providence. It is about cultivating the simplicity of sufficiency rather than the obesity of surplus. It means frugality rather than destitution. As Jesus showed when he

made the equivalent of 900 bottles of wine in John's gospel, or when he accepted the costly anointing oil, and when his parents (presumably) accepted on his behalf the wise men's gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense, poverty does not mean the compulsive-obsessive denial of serendipitous luxury. It simply means having good things in right proportion, in right relationship, and as Jesus clearly saw in his parables about feasting, it is actually the poor who can most appreciate good things!

Chastity strictly speaking means "purity." It is only synonymous with celibacy if, for some reason, sex is inappropriate. Chastity might be thought of as right relationship with one another—for example, through cultivating psychological honesty. As such, chastity is a prerequisite for rich sexual fulfillment.

And obedience is simply obedience to God, to the deepest life-force within. It is also worth noting that this is not the same as obedience to any worldly power. Rather, it is relationship to the deepest level of our inner selves—to that of God within, as the apostle Paul pointed out (Gal. 2:20). Earlier English usage better captures a Taoist or Dharmic sense of the word, as when Shakespeare speaks of "floating . . . obedient to the streame." Obedience is thus a rhythmic process of moving in harmony of Being with Creation's continuous unfolding.

Field of Community	Temptation of Christ	Evangelical Counsel
Community with the Creation—"Soil"	Turn stones into bread (Abuse natural power)	Poverty—simple lifeways
Community with one another—"Society"	Take control of kingdoms (Abuse social power)	Chastity—honest relationship
Community with God—"Soul"	Force divine intervention (Abuse spiritual power)	Obedience—seek God within

Poverty thereby protects against the abuse of nature's power; chastity against the abuse of social power; and obedience against the abuse of spiritual power, as the preceding matrix summarizes:

Lastly, the power of community to build peace and give life can be very real. On January 25, 2002, as I edited the publication version of this chapter, Scotland's *Herald* newspaper ran an obituary of Church of Scotland minister Ernest Gordon, Dean Emeritus of Princeton University. Gordon had nearly died during World War II from beatings in a Japanese POW camp on the River Kwai. But it was through creating community in the camp that his life, and humanity, remained intact.

"It was awful," he testified, "yet it helped to reaffirm your faith in humanity. . . . All of us had experienced something approaching grace. I think we all began to realize that bitterness was not an option. Although no one would ever forget what happened, some of us discovered we could forgive."

NOTES

1. Katrina Shields, *In the Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide for Social Action* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1994), xiii.

2. This expression is associated in Celtic tradition with St. Bride. It is substantially from Celtic perspectives on spirituality that I draw the triune schema presented here. I explore this in a less condensed way in *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum Press, 2001.)

3. Anthony de Mello, *Awareness* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1992), 182.

4. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (London: SCM, 1988), xxxvii-xxxviii, 24.

5. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament; Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence; Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Philadelphia and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984, 1986, 1992).

6. God, of course, had been skeptical from the outset about the feudal, patriarchal, and militaristic consequences of Israel acquiring for itself a king (1 Samuel 8:10-22).

7. The danger of this schema dualistically separating the spiritual from the material can be avoided by seeing each advancing level of awareness as incorporating the earlier expressions, thus the spiritual would incorporate both the physical and the psychological levels.

8. Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 95-96.

9. Anthony Storr, *Jung: Selected Writings* (London: Fontana, 1983), 360, 402-403.

10. Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 10.

11. Eds. Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), vii-viii.