

# UNMASKING THE POWERS

The Invisible Forces That  
Determine Human Existence

WALTER WINK

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**THE POWERS • VOLUME TWO**

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**PHILADELPHIA**

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For June

Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.  
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth.

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

# Preface

Much of this book emerged not from solitary research or introspection, but from group dialogues over biblical texts. Some of the most fundamental insights I owe to seminars with the Guild for Psychological Studies. The very process of communal, Socratic biblical study that I have been championing these past fourteen years is integral to the results that find their way onto these pages. I would not have come by many of them any other way. I want to thank the hundreds of you who have made contributions every bit as significant as those acknowledged in the notes. This book and its companion volumes are in a real sense your books, and I am proud to be your scribe.

Two people, Carl G. Jung and Elizabeth Boyden Howes, have had a particularly profound impact on the themes developed here. On the strength of a first reading by Morton Kelsey, Robert T. Fortna, Barbara Wheeler, Dwayne Huebner, John B. Cobb, Jr., and James A. Forbes, Jr., I redrafted the entire book. Special thanks are due to John Pairman Brown, who criticized it with a thoroughness and care that was as gracious as it was helpful. Others read parts: on Satan and the Gods, Elizabeth Boyden Howes and Sheila Moon; on the Gods, Brewster Beach; on the Demons, M. Scott Peck, Nan Merrill, and Tilda Norberg; on the Angels of the Churches, Carl Dudley; on the Angels of Nations, Coleman Barr Brown; on the Angels of Nature, David Ray Griffin and Douglas Sloan; on the Elements, George A. Riggan, Barbara Thain McNeel, and Douglas Sloan. John A. Hollar of Fortress Press again ably orchestrated the editorial process. Despite its many evident flaws, this book is immeasurably better thanks to the care of each of you, and I am profoundly grateful.

The further I have probed into the themes of this book, the more I have become aware of how little we really know. What clarity I may have achieved may even prove deceptive, since the reality may in fact be far more complex and confusing. Consider this then the work of a person describing as faithfully as possible what little comes to light on a mountain wreathed in thick fog.

# Abbreviations

- ANF*      *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951)
- ANRW*      *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporina and W. Haase (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter)
- APOT*      *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1912)
- au. trans.      Author's translation
- BDF*      F. Blass, A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
- IDB*      *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962)
- ILL*      *An Inclusive Language Lectionary, Year B* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)
- JB*      Jerusalem Bible
- Jung*      Collected Works (CW), Bollingen Series XX (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954–1978)
- KJV*      King James Version of the Bible
- LCL*      Loeb Classical Library
- LXX*      The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures)
- NEB*      New English Bible
- NIV*      New International Version of the Bible
- NPNF*      *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956)
- NT Apoc.*      *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965)
- OT Ps.*      *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1983)
- RAC*      *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodore Klauser (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1950–)

<b>RSV</b>	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
<b>TDNT</b>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964-74)
<b>TEV</b>	Today's English Version of the Bible

# Contents

Preface	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
1. Satan	9
Satan as a Servant of God	11
Satan as the Evil One	22
Satan as Chameleon	30
Satan's End	39
2. The Demons	41
Outer Personal Possession	43
Collective Possession	50
The Inner Personal Demonic	52
Dealing with Our Demons	53
3. The Angels of the Churches	69
What Is an Angel?	69
The Personality and Vocation of Angels	71
Discerning the Angel of a Church	73
Ministering to the Angel of a Church	78
An Actual Case	82
4. The Angels of the Nations	87
The Angel-Gods of the Nations	88
The Personality and Vocation of Nation-Angels	93
Ministering to the Spirituality of a Nation	99



<b>5. The Gods</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>The Gods Are Real</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>The Rehabilitation of the Gods</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Relating to the Gods</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>6. The Elements of the Universe</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>The Elements as Basic Principles of the Universe</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Idolatry of the Elements</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>The Elements as Theophanies</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>7. The Angels of Nature</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>The Angels of Nature and the         Emergent New Worldview</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>The Angels of Nature and Environmental Justice</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>The Angels of Nature and Worship</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Indexes</b>	<b>218</b>

# Introduction

One of the best ways to discern the weakness of a social system is to discover what it excludes from conversation. From its inception Christianity has not found it easy to speak about sex. Worse yet, it could not acknowledge, even privately, the continued existence of inner darkness in the *redeemed*. Because Gnosticism attempted, often in bizarre forms, to face sex and the inner shadow, it was declared heretical and driven underground, where it ironically became symbolic of the very repressed contents that it had attempted to lift up into the light. Gnosticism became Christianity's shadow.

Nineteenth-century science could not deal with the "secondary qualities" of objects—color, taste, smell, texture—or the emotions of people, which were merely subjective and not a part of the objective, analyzable world. In reaction to this arbitrary exclusion of soul from the universe, the Romantic movement attempted to redress the balance, only to lend, by its failure, an even greater sense of legitimacy to the ideology it opposed.

What does late twentieth-century Western society exclude from conversation? Certainly not sex; at least in more "sophisticated" circles accounts of sexual exploits scarcely raise an eyebrow. But if you want to bring all talk to a halt in shocked embarrassment, every eye riveted on you, try mentioning angels, or demons, or the devil. You will be quickly appraised for signs of pathological violence and then quietly shunned.

Angels, spirits, principalities, powers, gods, Satan—these, along with all other spiritual realities, are the unmentionables of our culture. The dominant materialistic worldview has absolutely no place for them. These archaic relics of a superstitious past are unspeakable because modern secularism simply has no categories, no vocabulary, no presuppositions by which to discern what it was in the actual experiences of people that brought these words to speech. And it has massive resistance even to thinking about these phenomena, having fought so long and hard to rid itself of every vestige of transcendence.

Why then trouble secular materialism by "the return of the repressed," these "spiritual hosts . . . in the heavenly places," and all their ilk, both good and

evil? There are several compelling reasons. The first is that materialism itself is terminally ill, and, let us hope, in process of replacement by a worldview capable of honoring the lasting values of modern science without succumbing to its reductionism. In that emergent worldview, spirituality will be perceived as the interiority of material, organic, and social entities, as I have suggested in volume 1 of *The Powers* (*Naming the Powers*).

Having repressed the spiritual so long, however, we no longer have ready access to it. The wells of the spirit have run dry. We can scarcely rediscover in a few generations what it has taken the race millennia to learn by costly trial and error. So we find ourselves returning to the ancient traditions, searching for wisdom wherever it may be found. We do not capitulate to the past and its superstitions, but bring all the gifts our race has acquired along the way as aids in recovering the lost language of our souls.

A second reason for approaching these old symbols with new respect is that true individuation seems to take place only when thought, feeling and behavior are integrated around a central myth-system at the core of the self.<sup>1</sup> To a degree far beyond current recognition, the myth of materialism has served as such an integrating agent for modern society, but it has been an integration bought at the cost of what is most human, most aesthetic, and most meaningful in life. Alternative myth-systems are not easily come by, however. Western civilization has in all its centuries known as few as seven.<sup>2</sup> With the collapse of materialism, many people sense an acute spiritual hunger and are reaching out, at times blindly and in every direction, for adequate sustenance. Often, however, they react not only against materialism itself but against the Judeo-Christian myth that seems to have proven so ineffective in stemming materialism's advance. Some look to the East, not recognizing that the contents of their own unconscious are still to a great extent conditioned by the biblical myth. Even when insights of exquisite worth are discovered in Eastern thought, it is not possible to integrate them fully until they have found a niche in one's core myth, or until one's core myth has been altered to accommodate them. Since virtually all religions in all cultures have spoken of angels, spirits, and demons, the traditional religions are in some sense all natural allies against materialism and can mutually enrich each other. But mere spiritual nomadism—that aimless wanderlust that characterizes so much of the current ferment—will scarcely prove any more effective against entrenched, senescent materialism than Romanticism before it. Only the revitalization of a powerful countermyth, capable of incorporating the valid aspects of materialism while jettisoning the rest, will be capable of securing the “new age” that so many neoromanticists are heralding.

There is at least one more reason for dusting off these old terms and asking what they might have designated in the actual lives of real people. Teilhard de

Chardin<sup>3</sup> has eloquently evoked the picture of human evolution as no longer physical but social, no longer the product of random events but increasingly the consequence of choice and invention. Humanity has gradually begun to become aware of itself as an entity. Two world wars, in all their horror, illustrate this infolding of humanity upon itself, this shrinking of the world through communication, economic and military dependency, scientific cooperation and even tourism. What our century has thus far survived to witness is the staggering speedup of this socialization process. But this global totalization has been going on for several thousands of years. We see a sharp increase in critical consciousness in classical Greece, and simultaneously in Israel, India, and China. We observe the spread of Greek culture and its intersection with Israel and the East through Alexander the Great and his successors, and then the pervasive establishment and institutionalization of this culture under the Pax Romana.

Hellenization: the term has hitherto referred to the imposition of Greek culture, the collapse of the Greek city-states and their replacement by a cosmopolis, and the breakdown of traditional religions and their incorporation in religious forms and cults capable of universal vision. It is time that we also see Hellenization as a large groundswell in the rising tide of human destiny, when for the first time—in the West at least—this infolding process, due to sufficient density of population and a sufficiently universal vision of humanity, *began to be perceived*. And it was perceived the way artists and seers always perceive the dark new shapes of things—through the language of symbol. They spoke of angels, of demons, of principalities and powers, of gods and elements of the universe, of spirits and Satan. This was not simply a hangover from an even more remote antiquity. Much of this language was new, and what was not new was altered.<sup>4</sup> It was the amorphous, vague but descriptively accurate language of a new awareness, the awareness of powers operative *among and between people*: not transcendent like God, but higher than humans. “Intermediate beings” they seemed, and the names for them mattered little, *so long as one knew they were there*.

That rough and ready phenomenology of the infolding social dimension of reality served well for almost two millennia. Its survival and even revival today (in fundamentalism, Satan cults, tongue-speaking, visions, exorcism, and renewed belief in the devil) is testimony to both its descriptive effectiveness and its profound symbolic power. If the modern age saw fit to renounce such categories of experience, it was because they were thought to be insufficiently precise, and because their residual symbolic power was experienced not as helpful but as a tyranny. Between the use of the Satan image to excuse irresponsibility and its use to terrify people into compliance to sectarian mores, there was little left to commend it. But the modern world threw out the reality with the words, and

now finds itself without an adequate vocabulary for powers even more real today than two thousand years ago, due to the ever-tightening compression of the human infolding. *Without a vocabulary*—yes, we have no single language for speaking of the total phenomenon the ancients knew as “the Powers”; but also, *too many vocabularies*—the languages of quite unrelated disciplines each vie in a Babel of technical, esoteric tongues to account for their own discrete sectors of reality. It would be my hope that as more comprehensive languages are developed for describing these intermediate powers which so largely determine personal and social existence, we will recover a degree of respect for the monumental spiritual achievement of our forebears—an achievement that we have not yet overtaken. With a proper humility, perhaps we can more soberly ask ourselves what it was that came to expression in these archaic terms, and what we might be able to learn from them today.

In *Naming the Powers* I developed the thesis that undergirds all three volumes of this work: that the New Testament’s “principalities and powers” is a generic category referring to the determining forces of physical, psychic, and social existence. These powers usually consist of an outer manifestation and an inner spirituality or interiority. Power must become incarnate, institutionalized or systemic in order to be effective. It has a dual aspect, possessing both an outer, visible form (constitutions, judges, police, leaders, office complexes), and an inner, invisible spirit that provides it legitimacy, compliance, credibility, and clout.

In the ancient world people discerned and described the interiority of things by the only means available to them: symbolic projection. They were able to monitor the actual impact of the spirituality of an institution like the Roman Empire or the priesthood by throwing it up against the screen of the cosmos in the form of visual images in which the interiority of the social entity was perceived as a personal entity: an angel, demon, or devil. For many this approach still works, but at the cost of considerable mystification. The material or institutional sources of distress often escape notice while the actual spirituality is split off and fought as a separate demonic agency “in the air.” Some analysts of this phenomenon have tended to debunk the spiritual as a smokescreen masking the real material determinants: the economic system, the state apparatus, the power elite. This was no doubt often the case. But a proper understanding of the dynamic of symbolic projection leads to quite a different conclusion: every economic system, state apparatus, and power elite *does* have an intrinsic spirituality, an inner essence, a collective culture or ethos, which cannot be directly deciphered from its outer manifestations (they, in fact, may be deliberate attempts to deceive people through propaganda, image making, and advertising). The corporate spirits of IBM and Gulf+Western are palpably real and

strikingly different, as are the national spirits of the United States and Canada, or the congregational spirits (“angels”) of every individual church. What the ancients called “spirits” or “angels” or “demons” were actual entities, only they were not hovering in the air. They were incarnate in cellulose, or cement, or skin and bones, or an empire, or its mercenary armies.

In the present volume we will be focusing on just seven of the Powers mentioned in Scripture. Their selection out of all the others dealt with in *Naming the Powers* is partly arbitrary: they happen to be ones about which I felt I had something to say. But they are also representative, and open the way to comprehending the rest. Nor are they the end of the story. For while the Powers dealt with in this volume—Satan, demons, angels of churches, angels of nations, gods, elements, angels of nature—are instances of the hidden interiority of reality, volume 3 (*Engaging the Powers*) will provide an occasion to look at some of their more visible, institutionalized forms. The list of possible candidates for examination there is virtually endless: economics, militarism, propaganda, education, language, ideologies, rules, roles, values, the legal system, politics, sports, religion, families—all of social reality falls under the category of the Powers, and a good slice of physical and psychic reality as well.

We will begin in this volume with the more immediate personal experience of evil (the devil, demons) and gradually bring into focus the issue of worldview or cosmology. It is not my intent to defend the biblical worldview, for it is in many ways beyond being salvaged, limited as it was by the science, philosophy, and religion of its age. This very relativity of the biblical cosmology to its historical epoch led many theologians earlier in our century to discount cosmology as unimportant altogether, a husk to be stripped from the kernel and cast aside. We can now see, however, that such an approach simply meant acquiescing without a struggle to the worldview of modern materialism. That uncritical capitulation is the cause in large part of the split that runs through so many religious people today, who want to hold two utterly incompatible things together: belief in God as the Creator of the world and Sovereign of the Powers, and belief in the materialistic myth of modern science, which systematically excludes God from reality.

Cosmology is not gospel. It is not the core proclamation, not the revealed truth of human existence. But cosmology certainly determines how that message can be spoken and how heard. It is not the Word made flesh, it is its cradle. But it is a very important cradle. It is not a matter of indifference that the New Testament proclamation was couched in the language, thought-forms and concepts of the Greco-Roman world, even as it poured new and finally shattering contents into them. At one level, Christian evangelists sought only to convert people, but at another, they sought to claim an epoch, to take captive an entire

culture, to mediate a new way of seeing the world. They accomplished these objectives so thoroughly that the question of cosmology could be dropped from the theological agenda for fifteen hundred years. *The gospel had become its own cosmology.* With the rise of the worldview of scientific materialism, however, that cosmology became first problematic, then dubious, and finally unintelligible. And because the gospel had become indistinguishable from the cosmology in which it was couched, it faced compounded difficulties in addressing the whole life of modern people meaningfully.

What increasing numbers of people are now realizing, both inside and outside organized religion, is that Christianity's lack of credibility is not a consequence of the inadequacy of its intrinsic message, but of the fact that its intrinsic message cannot—simply, categorically, cannot—be communicated meaningfully within a materialistic cosmology. Some, sensing the irresolvable contradiction, have simply abandoned religion. Others have dismissed modern science altogether—a sacrifice of the intellect made all the sadder by the fact that modern science need not have, and never should have, wedded itself to the mechanistic images and materialistic philosophy of Democritus in the first place. Still others have attempted a desperate compromise, in blind faith that two things that seem so true, science and religion, must be finally reconcilable, even if it is not yet evident how.

This book attempts to go beyond these alternatives. It is not simply a commentary on New Testament cosmology, though that is inevitably our starting point, but an attempt to contribute toward a new, postmaterialist cosmology, drawing on biblical resources. I will not argue that all of the Powers featured in this volume are equally weighted in Scripture. Satan holds a prominent place in most of the books of the New Testament, but demons are more frequently encountered in the Synoptic Gospels, and gods, elements, and the angels of nature, nations, and the churches make only infrequent appearances. It is not my purpose to argue that they were central aspects of the gospel. What I wish to argue, however, is that recovery of these concepts and *a sense of the experiences that they named* can play a crucial role in eroding the soil from beneath the foundations of materialism. At the same time they can provide a language for naming these experiences in the new worldview that is emerging. Just as the materialist paradigm cannot tolerate the mere *possibility* of ESP, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, or spiritual healing, even when scientific evidence is piled up in their favor, so it cannot account for the kinds of spiritual experiences identified by the traditional terminology of Satan, demons, gods, and angels. It is precisely their incompatibility with the dominant scientific mind-set, their incomprehensibility within its rubrics, that makes these biblical categories so important today. They are a scandal, a stone of stumbling, a bone in the throat



of modernity. They represent a worst-case test of its capacity to give an accounting of the whole compass of human experience. Properly understood, they expose the soft underbelly of a philosophical system which has attempted to banish God from the earth; and not God only, but all spirits from the earth; and not spirits only, but our own spirits as well.

More intimately, a reassessment of these Powers—angels, demons, gods, elements, the devil—allows us to reclaim, name, and comprehend types of experiences that materialism renders mute and inexpressible. We have the experiences but miss their meaning. Unable to name our experiences of these intermediate powers of existence, we are simply constrained by them compulsively. They are never more powerful than when they are unconscious. Their capacities to bless us are thwarted, their capacities to possess us augmented. Unmasking these Powers can mean for us initiation into a dimension of reality “not known, because not looked for,” in T. S. Eliot’s words. In the new world of quantum physics and the new sciences of life and consciousness, these antiquated, repudiated, and neglected Powers can open new awareness of the richly textured plenitude of life, its abysses as well as its ecstasies. The goal of such unmasking is to enable people to see how they have been determined, and to free them to choose, insofar as they have genuine choice, what they will be determined by in the future.

We are living through a watershed period intellectually, a vast sea-change in the metaphors with which we describe and make our home in the world. This work is but one of many that are questioning the adequacy of the materialist metaphor and groping for its replacement. As is so often the case with things that are new and thus have no history of failures, there is in many of these attempts a naive utopianism, as if all that is faulty is the old metaphor and not me. Such approaches lack seriousness about the intractability of evil, and believe that education, or meditation, or a new worldview, or an ecological attitude, or the application of science to human values, is all that it will take to bring in a time of peace and plenty. Once again, the deep wisdom of the past must figure in the emergence of the new, or else we will be consigned to repeat or even augment the evils of the past.

One note on method. In attempting to recover the inner meaning of the first-century worldview, one is not limited to New Testament texts. Virtually any scrap of papyrus, however dubious its literary or religious value, can help us recover the basic cosmology of the epoch. A cosmology is quite different from ideas, beliefs, or opinions. It represents the largely unconscious assumptions and shared images held by parties on *all* sides of a debate. It is enshrined in their presuppositions and premises, not their declared convictions. There is scant reference to the angels of nature in the Bible, for instance, but they abound



in the intertestamental writings and in later Christian apocalypses, and where they are mentioned (in the Book of Revelation), the references are so offhand as to make it clear that they are assumed to be part of the background belief of the age. My preoccupation with noncanonical literature should not be construed as lack of commitment to canonical Scripture. On the contrary, I have the highest regard for canon—so high, in fact, that I refuse to elevate any part of it, such as the indubitably Pauline writings, to implicit supremacy as the “canon-within-the-canon,” as so many scholars do, or to write off Colossians or Ephesians, Hebrews or Revelation as irrelevant because they might be un-Pauline.

The real test of the canon of Scripture is whether it has the power, in each new age, to evoke life, to strike fire, to convey the stark reality of God’s hunger to be known. This book is a wager, taking the worst of odds, by virtue of the very alienness of its subject matter, that Scripture still has that power.