

Seeing Things  
Whole

*Thinkpiece #3*

by David Specht  
February, 1995

# Seeing Things Whole

*Theological Reflections  
on Institutions*

## Note to the Reader

This is one of a series of think pieces from *Seeing Things Whole*, an action-research project focused on bridging the gap between faith and organizational life. As you will quickly gather from your reading of this and the other think pieces, our work on the theology of institutions is very much a work in progress.

As reader, then, you are entering into our conversation that is in the midst of forming and clarifying itself. These think pieces have been one way that the group of colleagues involved in this project have been attempting to surface and invite critique around some of the assumptions which underlie and guide our efforts. Some of these ideas will evolve as the exploration continues. Others will undoubtedly fall by the wayside.

What is clear, however, is that there are a growing number of friends who wish to be part of this emerging conversation — persons who care deeply about pressing our understanding of what it means for institutions to stand fully accountable to God for the faithful exercise of their gifts and resources.

Welcome to the dialogue.

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# Think Piece #3:

## Seeing Things Whole: Theological Reflections On Institutions

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### Introduction

This is the latest in a series of thinkpieces toward the development of our ability to reflect theologically about institutions. This particular thinkpiece — the third in the series — attempts to gather into one place some of the tributaries of theological thinking which are most significantly feeding our thinking and writing about the theology of institutions at this point. It's kind of lengthy, as we are hoping by the sheer volume of our words to create the impression that we know where we're heading. Which, actually, we sort of do.

We have increasing clarity, that is, about what it is we are seeking to weave together. Because, however, our work and thinking are still very much in process, this exploration of our assumptions will, like the most recent previous thinkpiece, take the shape of an imagined conversation. We've chosen the form of a dialogue for a couple of reasons. The first is that we trust that you will find it riveting. The other is that conversations are to be enjoined and, as our colleagues in this effort, we very much want you to engage us in this emerging thinking.

While there have been many participants in our emerging conversation shaping this work to date, this particular presentation will feature three whose thinking has proved essential in helping us to acquire some of the theological concepts that have become central to our effort. They are — gulp — three white guys whose biblical and theological writings are probably familiar to many of you: Gabe Fackre, Ched Myers, and Walter Wink.

Now, when you read this don't get carried away! This conversation didn't really take place. *IT'S ONLY PRETEND!!!* These guys didn't really sit down together and have a theological schmooze about organizations. The only one we've really spoken with about this is Gabe, who has been part of our effort since before it began. What you have here is simply my effort to build a theological testimony (a concept you'll be reading more about in this piece) about organizations by drawing themes from the written works (not necessarily published) of each of these folk.

Clever and discerning readers that you are, you will quickly note that the themes addressed below are not limited solely to the shape of the theological *content* of our work on theology of institutions. That is to say, we concern ourselves here not only with the question of what is theologically true about organizations. There is also considerable attention paid in the latter portion of this document to the matter of theological *process*. Increasingly, we find ourselves as much preoccupied by a concern for *how people theologically reflect on organizational life* as we are by the concern about *what theological clarities they come to*.

Even discerning reflection, however, cannot exist as an end in itself. This whole effort is driven throughout by a passion we share with each of you to shape servant institutions more faithful to God's purposes. If our best thinking doesn't contribute to this goal, we will have fallen far short of the prize.

But I am getting ahead of myself and giving away the punch line. Or at least one of them anyway.

Two last things before we actually get on with this "conversation." One is to reassure you from the outset that I have, beyond the introduction, exercised appropriate restraint around my own participation in the conversation. That is, I have for the most part muted my own voice in ways appropriate to the role of a moderator and interlocutor, limiting my comments to helpful clarifications like, "OK, but, errr ... OK" or

timely and gentle expressions of support like “YOU CAN’T POSSIBLY BE SERIOUS ABOUT THAT LAST REMARK!!!”

I hope you’ll find this limited use of my own voice helpful, and a source of some continuity.

The other matter is simply to observe that we have scudged everything over to the right-hand side of the page, leaving you an ample margin for offering questions, comments, or simply making graffiti and expressing your general dismay.

Let’s get started!

### **Round One: What in the name of God *are* institutions anyway?!**

**Gabe Fackre:** (*turning to you, his readerly audience, clears throat and begins.*) We begin with this question: Can one make a case from Scripture and within tradition for talking about social, economic and political institutions as ministers of Christ? And if there is a connection, can the lore of the Christian community show us a way to function in institutions as Christians so that *our* ministry can facilitate *their* ministry?

**Moderator:** Well put. Do you have an answer to your own question?

**Fackre:** Not *the* answer. But an offering. As for a working definition of “institution,” viewed from its empirical underside, and thus defined in the categories of social science, an institution is “a social structure of rules, resources and relationships which is organized for the fulfillment of definite ends.”

Viewed in theological perspective, an institution is such a social organism ordered toward the purposes of God, and accountable as a Power to its Creator.

**Ched Myers:** From a theological perspective, institutions are convictional communities. Convictions here are understood literally as *what one lives by*. Everyone lives by certain values (however unacknowledged) and participates in communities of conviction (for example, a church, a political party, a PTA, a peasant union, a relief organization, a Pueblo kiva society, a corporate board of directors, a black student union).

"We're all disciples of something," says Atallah Shabazz, echoing her father, Malcolm X. To the extent that we are not consciously pursuing alternative disciplines we are being socially and spiritually formed by the dominant culture.

**Moderator:** I’m struck by the relationship between *discipleship* and *discipline*. In the end, our hope is that our work will serve to enable a more faithful discipleship of institutions. And we are very much of the conviction that — like any discipleship — the faithful discipleship of an institution will be rooted in disciplines. Are you suggesting that such disciplines will be informed by an organization’s convictions?

**Myers:** Yes I am. This relates to the work of doing theology. Because the agents — not only the objects — of this theologizing are institutions which are as diverse as people, the theology itself will be pluralistic. In fact, a useful definition of theology might be: "the discovery, understanding, and

transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of the relation of these communities to one another and whatever else there is". Theology is also the "means by which those of one community encounter those of other communities ... for mutual witness and critical correction." Sometimes that encounter is a polite dialogue, sometimes a fierce war of myths contesting for hearts and minds.

**Moderator:** Walter, do you want to enter the conversation regarding this question of how we ought to regard institutions from the perspective of our faith as Christians?

**Walter Wink:** Institutions are, from a perspective of biblical faith, one expression of the Powers and Principalities. My thesis is that what people in the world of the Bible experienced and called "Principalities and Powers" was in fact real. They were discerning the actual spirituality at the center of the political, economic, and cultural institutions of their day.

Every organization is made up of human beings who make its decisions and are responsible for its success or failure, but institutions tend to have a suprahuman quality. Although created and staffed by humans, decisions are not made so much by people as for them, out of the logic of institutional life itself. And because the institution usually antedates and outlasts its employees, it develops and imposes a set of traditions, expectations, beliefs, and values on everyone in its employ. Usually unspoken, unacknowledged, and even unknown, this invisible, transcendent network of determinants constrains behavior far more rigidly than any printed set of rules could ever do. This institutional momentum through time perpetuates a self-image, a corporate personality, and an institutional spirit which the more discerning are able to grasp as a totality and weigh it for its relative sickness or health.

**Moderator:** When you talk about institutions as Powers and Principalities, you're speaking then, I take it, about much more than bricks and mortar.

**Wink:** Very much so! We must learn to break the habit of taking a merely visible part for the whole. No one has ever seen a company, a school, a state, or a system of ownership. What they *have* seen are the physical elements of such institutions, that is to say, the building in which the school or business functions, or the people who are its operatives. The institution, however, is the totality of its activities and as such is a mostly invisible object.

The consequence of such confusion is always slavery to the unseen power behind the visible elements: the spirituality of the institution.

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.

**Moderator:** In this sense, institutions, from a faith perspective, represent a manifestation or incarnation of power — or perhaps I should say "Power."

**Wink:** Very much so. But remember, the spiritual and physical aspects of the Powers are inseparable but distinguishable components of a single phenomenon—power in its concretions in this world. What we are arguing

is that *the Powers are simultaneously the outer and inner aspects of one and the same indivisible concretion of power.*

**Myers:** I believe that this is what Paul meant when he cautioned us to remember that we are contending not simply with flesh and blood, but with the Powers and Principalities. He is speaking here about how we press up against the spirituality of institutions, against the ideologies and metaphors and legitimations that prop them up.

**Wink:** These Powers and Principalities are not simply evil, however. They are a bulwark against anarchy, and a patron, repository, and inspirer of art.

**Fackre:** As institutions they also provide goods and services that are essential to supporting life and enhancing its fulfillment.

**Wink:** Yes. They inculcate values that encourage interdependency, mutual care, and social cohesiveness. They encourage submission of personal desires to the general good of everyone.

**Moderator:** (*Fit to be tied, boils over, blurting out ...*) PUHLEEZ! GIVE ME A BREAK! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THE LAST GZILLION YEARS?! Excuse me. What I mean to say is, well ... I know that institutions are not *all* bad, but this seems like an unduly optimistic reading of them. From my experience and reading of history, these Powers in their institutional expression have been as dramatically the agents of suffering and oppression as they have benevolent service. How do you reconcile this with the picture we were just painting?

**Wink:** I had not yet completed my thought. I was about to say that their evil is not intrinsic, but rather the result of idolatry. Therefore, they can be redeemed. The New Testament presents this insight as a drama in three simultaneous acts:

The Powers are good,  
the Powers are fallen,  
the Powers will be redeemed.

**Moderator:** Slow down for a second. I had assumed that any clues the Bible might offer us in our attempt to theologically understand organizations would be by way of inference and extrapolation at best. Are you suggesting that scripture actually speaks about institutions?

**Wink:** Oh yes!. Although the word “institution” itself is not part of the idiom. Beginning with the creation narratives, scripture speaks of the Powers throughout the Christian drama.

**Moderator:** I wonder then, if you might say a word about each of the “acts” of this drama. I’m particularly eager to hear you make connection to the biblical narrative..”

**Wink:** (*looks to Gabe*) You can tell this story as well I can.

**Fackre:** All right. I’ll begin, but let’s tell it together. Let’s start at the beginning — with what Walter referred to as Act One. “In the beginning”

God had a dream. The divine vision was of a world dwelling in *Shalom*, a life together of Creator and creation. All that was brought to be in creation was oriented to the divine End. The visibilities of nature and human nature are pointed toward their Purpose of life together with each other and their Maker. “In him, everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities and powers, the whole universe has been created through him and for him.” (Col 1:16)

**Wink:** Gerhard von Rad points out that the creation stories of Genesis do not end with the creation of humanity in chapters one and two, but with the creation of the nations in chapter ten. Human beings, that is to say, cannot exist in isolation from their larger social and political units.

The Powers are, in fact, created good. In the hymn of the cosmic Christ which Gabe alluded to the Powers are described as having been created in, through, and for Christ. This hymn is the brash assertion, against the grain of human suffering, that the Principalities and Powers that visit the world with so much evil are not autonomous, not independent, not eternal, not utterly depraved. The social structures of reality are creations of God. Because they are created by God, they are mortal, limited, responsible to God, and made to serve the humanizing purposes of God in the world.

**Moderator:** You’re suggesting that institutions are not simply a necessary evil. They are rather an integral part of God’s created order.

**Wink:** Very much so. These Powers are the necessary social structures of human life, and it is not a matter of indifference to God that they exist. God *made* them. And all this is asserted—chanted, intoned, sung—into the teeth of the everyday experience of institutional and structural evil.

Without institutionalization, ideas never materialize into action. Institutions are indispensable for human existence, and they have a right to be concerned about their own survival. But they must keep this concern penultimate, not ultimate.

**Moderator:** In this sense, however, doesn’t the passage from Colossians paint a rather benign picture of the relationship of the Powers to the rest of the created order?

**Wink:** No. I don’t think so. The point of the Colossians hymn is not that anything goes, but that no matter how greedy or idolatrous an institution becomes, it cannot escape the encompassing care and judgment of the One in and through and for whom it was created. In that One, “all things hold together.” the Powers are inextricably locked into God’s system, whose human face is revealed in Christ.

But we are, it seems, inevitably perhaps, jumping ahead in our story, anticipating as we do the fall of institutions along with the rest of the created order.

**Fackre:** Yes, this is true. All things have come apart. Creation stumbles, falls, and is fractured. The orders that were brought to be, the powers designed for God’s purposes, the institutions that are formed to fulfill the wisdom of God, do not serve the purposes of sustaining a livable life together any more than do persons. Powers are subject to the same

corruption as we are. Just as sorrow attends the pride of persons, so also does it attend the arrogance of power.

Judgment there is for the abuse of God's purposes, the scattering of the haughty and the mighty. However, we meet also the strange grace that sustains creation. Neither persons nor powers are abandoned. God does not give up on the creature with the human face and the great story begins to unfold — the pursuit by the implacable love of the Creator of a rebellious creation. This long-suffering love sustains the world by the very orderings that have gone amok. As orders of *preservation* they continue to be necessary to make and keep life human, even in their ambiguity. Political governance is needed “after the fall” for the restraint of sin and the enlargement of possibilities, economic stewardship of the earth's resources for health and humanization; the family for paradigmatic bonding and replenishment of the earth.

**Moderator:** Here you *do* appear to be speaking about fallen powers as a necessary evil. But I notice that you are using the terms “orders” and “orderings” in reference to the powers. Are they the same things?

**Fackre:** You make two points. I'll try to address them both. Let me begin with your question about my use of the term “orders”. I'm referring here to the Colossians reference to the “orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities and powers.” The orderings of creation fulfill the divine intention for a human life together: human partnership, amity with the land and in work, faithfulness to the divine governance. These orders take shape and are particularized as powers. Here, as I indicated earlier, is the social world of both persons and powers as purposed in Christ, one in which “all things are held together in him.” (Col 1:17)

As for your suggestion that these powers have become necessary evils with the Fall, I would agree that they are both: evil and necessary. Or, perhaps, evil *and* good. The social, economic and political mandates of God's Vision come to expression in proliferating principalities that structure human life and serve to keep the Great Narrative moving forward even in the state of hobbled creation. Servants these powers are called to be, but subject as well they are to the Fall that scars all creation. Home, field, mine, palace, forum are corruptible powers that break as well as make human life. Orders of preservation become *disorders* resisting their Author and End.

The created Powers are rebellious Powers.

**Wink:** Yes, these Powers are indeed Fallen. Curiously enough, however, this recognition is simultaneously part of the good news and a source of immense relief.

**Moderator:** How on earth can the fallenness of the Powers be good news or a source of relief?

**Wink:** From my perspective, the doctrine of the Fall is good news in this sense: it provides an account of the evil we all experience which acknowledges its brute reality while nevertheless affirming the sovereignty and goodness of God and the creation. The gladsome doctrine of the Fall does not say that people and institutions are utterly sinful or basically wicked or incapable of good. It teaches quite the opposite: people and the Powers are *not* evil by nature; evil is, on the contrary, unnatural, a disorder, a perversion.

**Moderator:** So the biblical notion of the Fall enables us to acknowledge the present destructiveness of many institutions while still seeing through to their intended goodness as divine creations.

**Wink:** Yes. We and the Powers are the good creations of a good God. Many people are surprised to discover that there is, by contrast, no account in Scripture of the creation of the demons. Unlike the Powers, the demonic or evil is not a constituent part of the universe.

**Moderator:** It reminds me of the T-shirt I occasionally see worn by children: “God doesn’t make junk.” Evil, then, must not be understood to be a creation of a good God. But I suspect that your reminding us of this has *less* to do with an impulse to protect God’s reputation, and *more* to do with cautioning us against any possible inclination we might have to destroy institutions as a way of interrupting their evil use of power. Is that right?

**Wink:** Yes. The Powers were not created evil. The emergence of evil is always an event in time, the consequence of wrong choices. An institution becomes demonic when it abandons its divine vocation for the pursuit of its own idolatrous goals.

So this is the good news of the Fall: evil is surely real—often brutally so. But its existence is not fundamental to the created essence of the Powers. Rather it is an expression of choosing to serve other idols rather than God. And what has become perverted in time can be redeemed in time.

**Moderator:** I want to tag something and then let you continue. I was simply struck by your association of the notion of “vocation” with institutions. It may be that discernment or rediscovery of divine vocation is one of the disciplines that undergirds faithful institutional discipleship.

You’ve been speaking to the “good news” of the Fall. You also suggested — if I heard you correctly — that the notion of the Fall is for us a “source of relief”. This too I find intriguing. Will you say more about this?

**Wink:** This same doctrine of the Fall is also a relief, in that it frees us from delusions about the perfectibility of ourselves and our institutions, and from the diabolical belief that we are responsible for everything that happens.

**Moderator:** I’m worried that acknowledging that we cannot be responsible for everything potentially puts us on a slippery slope that leads us to become passive and complicit in the face of evil.

**Wink:** To the contrary. Understanding the fundamental nonperfectability of the world and the Powers does not make us passive. When we fully realize that both we ourselves and the Powers participate simultaneously in the profound goodness of creation and as well in its profound fallenness, we are *enabled* to each successive sincerity, each new utopian solution or structural arrangement — but now with dispassionate realism. This understanding can prevent our being swept away by new visions of transformation that as yet have no history of failures (as they surely will). It leads us to expect each new intervention for good to bring in its wake unintended consequences, some of them evil. We can join in struggles for change without being suckered by slogans promising what cannot be delivered and without crumbling under the inevitable setbacks and reverses.

**Moderator:** An important piece of what I hear, then, is that we shouldn't underestimate the Fall and how thoroughly it pervades creation, including the Powers in their institutional expression.

**Wink:** Exactly. William Stringfellow, a lay theologian and attorney, spoke to this when he observed that: "Americans particularly persevere in belaboring the illusion that at least some institutions are benign and viable and within human direction or can be rendered so by discipline or reform or revolution or displacement." This "virtually incredible view" he finds both theologically false and empirically unwarranted. "It really asserts that the principalities are only somewhat or sometimes fallen and that the Fall is not an essential condition of disorientation, morally equivalent to the estate of death, affecting the whole of Creation in time."

In the midst of this, we still act by the best lights we have. It only makes us modest, so that we can be expectant toward God. And modesty is an enormous relief. It is the infallible sign that one has been awakened from dreams of perfection. The Powers can be redeemed, but not be made flawless. And when we no longer have to believe that we must make everything happen ourselves, we are well-positioned to live in anticipation of miracles.

**Moderator:** A couple of questions. One is regarding a statement you made earlier that evil is a function of "wrong choices". Speaking from personal experience as one who at times seems to make more than my share of "wrong choices," it led me to wonder if you were suggesting that the Fall was not a one-time event.

My other question is simply to ask whether the biblical narrative of the Fall also includes institutions.

**Wink:** Good questions. Let me start with the first. Another matter essential to our understanding of the Fall is the realization that it is not a temporal event, the reach of whose effects we might someday, by sheer perseverance, outrun. It is mythic, which means it is always present. Whatever redemption, social change, improvement of working conditions, or restructuring of our institutions that takes place within history will take place under the conditions of the Fall.

The shape of our own particular understanding of this mythic reality, as Christians, flows from the narratives of the Fall in Genesis. Here we read that the first fall is that of the man and the woman: human sin existed prior to all social systems and structures. (Genesis 3)

The second fall is that of the angels: there is a rupture in the very spirituality of the universe (Genesis 6:1-4). Human sin cannot therefore account for all evil. There is a "withinness" or spirituality in things that is capable of covetousness and insatiable greed.

The third fall is that of the nations—what you have been referring to in your work as institutions. As Gabe indicated earlier, the systems and structures that exist to protect human life become idolatrous and unjust, and subordinate the people they exist to serve to ends not ordained by God (Genesis 11).

**Moderator:** This reminds me of story I read recently about an investment banking firm. Apparently the modus operandi of this particular firm is to take over companies, and then seek to turn a profit for its investors by selling

off divisions or operations, irregardless of the impact on employees or the effect on the quality of the goods and services which that division provided to the public. So too the biblical record includes word of the Powers defaulting on their divine vocation.

**Wink:** Yes, but the point is that the Powers are not alone in their fallenness. Together, we ourselves, the angels and these Powers are good, fallen, and redeemed, all at the same time. We do not escape into utopia. The doctrine of the Fall keeps our feet anchored firmly in the harsh reality of the one and only real world.

**Fackre:** But the pervasiveness of the Fall is not the last word either. For “the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Purpose of God comes among the people of God. Now the struggle to turn the world around is waged first-hand. With regard to the powers, the One who brought them to be, the One to whom they belong, confronts them in their own arena.

So Jesus Christ lives amidst the powers in his carpenter shop, in his and other’s homes, in the affairs of the city and countryside, among the authorities — military, political, economic, educational, religious. In his teaching, preaching and healing Christ held before the Powers the vision for which they were made, proclaiming the rule of God in the very language of the thrones and sovereignties — “the Kingdom of God”.

**Moderator:** Jesus, then, is challenging the institutions of his time to become, once again, servants of another Kingdom. Clearly this was not a Word they were eager to receive.

**Fackre:** No, this Prophet among the powers of his own creation reaped the consequences of their rebellion. The claims of the Kingdom evoked the hostility of political, religious, military, and economic authorities. Their sovereignty could tolerate no rival. So they signed the cross of this pretender with the mock superscription “King.”

In the cross, however, the powers — created in Christ and turned away from their intended way in the Fall — are reclaimed by him. Their threat to the divine purpose by the abuse of their calling is rendered null by a death and resurrection.

**Moderator:** I’m struggling again. I don’t see how one can look out on the world and believe that the threat of the rebellious Powers has been rendered null.

**Fackre:** I understand. There is no doubt that such ‘principalities and powers’ *do* yet exist in their fallenness. But at the same time, it is written, and we can and must hold on to this even today: that although at present the glory of the Kingdom of God is held out to us only as hope, yet even now the rule of Christ extends not merely over the Church as the congregation of the faithful, but regardless of whether we believe it or not, over the whole of the universe in all its heights and depths. This rule of Christ also confronts and overrules with sovereign dignity the principalities and powers and evil spirits of this world.

**Moderator:** What you are saying sounds more like a statement of faith more than a description of anything I see or experience.

**Fackre:** Yes. It *is* a statement of faith. Christ, according to the teaching of the whole of the New Testament, has already completely disarmed those ‘principalities and powers’ It is only as shadows without real substance and power that they can still beset us. We Christians have no right whatsoever to fear and respect them or to resign ourselves to the fact that they are spreading throughout the world as though they knew neither bounds or Lord.

**Moderator:** I find this very challenging. The image I have is that of Dorothy, surrounded by her friends cowering in the face of the great Oz, pulling back the curtain to expose a small and harried man tugging away at the levers that create the effects of power. From the perspective of the cross, you are saying, these Powers can no longer command our despair or allegiance.

**Wink:** Exactly. But part of what Gabe is saying relates to the redemption of the Powers themselves. Act three of our drama. The Jesus who died at the hands of the Powers died every bit as much for the Powers as he died for people. The gospel is not a message of personal salvation *from* the world, but a message of *a world transfigured, right down to its basic structures.*

Redemption, for us, means actually being liberated from the oppression of the Powers, being forgiven for one’s own sin and for complicity with the Powers, and being engaged in liberating the Powers themselves from their bondage to idolatry. The good news is nothing less than cosmic salvation, a restitution of all things (Acts 3:21), when God will “gather up all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). This universal rectification will entail both a healing and a subordination of rebellious structures, systems, and institutions to their rightful places, in service of the One in and through and for whom they exist.

**Moderator:** Are you suggesting that as individual persons we have a role to play in the redemption of the Powers?

**Wink:** Very much so. Working for the redemption of the Powers requires neutralizing their proclivity to evil and bringing them into subjection to Christ. The Powers *will* enter the heavenly city, redeemed, transformed, bearing as their “glory” all the artistic, cultural, political, scientific, and spiritual contributions whereby they have enriched the world.

**Moderator:** Not in their present state, however.

**Wink:** No. On this side of the New Jerusalem they will remain relatively good and evil, none perfect, none totally depraved. But some will become so destructively demonic in their self-idolization that they must be resisted with all our might.

**Fackre:** But there is more to be said about orders and powers and institutions than hope in the face of tyranny. As grounded in the Christ of creation, and as led in the victory train by the same Christ in redemption, there are *possibilities* to be reckoned with as well as impossibilities. The Easter grace of Christ opens up horizons for institutions. Hobbled by sin, they yet are empowered to stumble toward their intended end. We have a right to hope for signs of the Reign of God in both persons and powers in this time between the times.

The hope for both persons and powers along the way is a sober hope. It knows of the power that corrupts and the sin that persists in the best of persons and the most responsible of institutions. Our history with God is ambiguous to the End, yet with the eye of faith the Christian sees that the victory has already been won in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we live with “the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Of such is the hope that mobilizes for ministry — that the institutions, powers, orders, kingdoms of this world shall become a just and peaceable Kingdom where “God is all in all.”

**Moderator:** Your description of this three-act drama of the Powers has been helpful in orienting me toward my biblical moorings concerning institutions. It does, however, leave me a little confused about just how I ought to regard the Powers as a person of faith. Perhaps Gabe’s word of “sober hope.”

**Wink:** This New Testament understanding that the Powers are created, fallen, and redeemable gives us a broad continuum of possible emphases, adaptable to every situation. This is important, because there are no prepackaged answers that tell us how Christians should engage the Powers.

**Ched Myers:** May I offer a thought at this point?

**Moderator:** Please do!

**Myers:** As we begin to turn our attention to the question of how we ought to engage these Powers, I want to think out loud for just a moment about why the Kingdom of God discourse has circulated at such a low rate of exchange within modern Christianity. Clearly this tension between the Fallenness of institutional powers and the promise and hope for their redemption implies this question. But it is a problem that preoccupied our ancestors of faith long before New Testament times.

**Moderator:** Are you suggesting that our forebearers were engaged in the struggle to redeem institutions in Old Testament times?

**Myers:** Something like that. The ancient vision of the Jubilee Year appears to have been an attempt to ensure that society and its institutions traveled this road from Fallenness to Redemption. The practice of the Jubilee Year was not offered as an unattainable ideal but as a practical hedge against the inevitability of the stratification of wealth and power within human societies.

**Moderator:** It’s difficult to imagine actually instituting the practice of Jubilee in our own time.

**Myers:** That’s just the point! A critical problem we contend with today is that we who have been socialized within the womb of the dominant culture dismiss such notions as utopian. True and universal economic justice, if it is contemplated at all, is done so as an eschatological home; a noble ideal, but impossible to realize. But this attitude is precisely what is at issue. For what is altogether impossible within *our* historical constructions is altogether possible within the reconstructive purview of God.

**Moderator:** Perhaps. But in many cases, institutions would need to undertake radical change — do an about face.

**Myers:** Of course. But remember, repentance is at the heart of the gospel; take it away and you have something other than biblical faith. The problem is, repentance represents *discontinuity* with the established order. But for those entitled within the system, the greatest social value is *continuity*.

The noun “repentance” denotes a deliberate turning, a coming to one’s senses resulting in a change of conduct. And this challenge is directed to the people collectively, not only to individuals.

**Moderator:** Repentance, then, would be another discipline essential to the faithful discipleship of institutions.

**Wink:** Yes, related to that of vocation. To repent also means to recover vocation. To recover a sense of call requires acknowledging the sovereignty of the One who calls over the falsely exalted sovereignty of the nation.

**Myers:** (*nodding his head*) Absolutely. A biblical theology of repentance, then, gives people permission to acknowledge that they and their institutions are captive to demons of self-destruction, that their historical project has arrived at a dead end, and that they can, and must, change directions in order to continue.

**Moderator:** It sounds straightforward when we speak of it here. My experience, however, is that institutions resist confession and repentance every bit as much as we do as individuals.

**Myers:** Unfortunately, as we have seen at great length we do not have “ears to hear” this invitation to repentance because we are so deeply entrenched in Denial. Wendell Berry puts the matter plainly: “The great obstacle is simply this: the conviction that we cannot change because we are dependent upon what is wrong. But that is the addict’s excuse, and we know that it will not do.”

We have become so internally and externally reliant upon our illusions and excesses and appetites that we simply cannot imagine the world differently. So our response to Jesus’ insistence that the Kingdom of God — or the Great Economy as Berry refers to it — is discontinuous with our addiction is, like the disciples, to despair: “Who then can be saved?”

**Moderator:** Your suggestion that the idolatries that lure our institutions away from their intended vocation might well be understood as a form of addiction is intriguing. It helps me to understand why confession is a necessary prerequisite for repentance. Does your thinking about the relationship between the notions of fallenness and addiction extend further?

**Myers:** Yes, it does. I think that perhaps we should experiment with a theology that merges prophetic and pastoral insights: understanding repentance as a *strategy of intervention* and conversion as a *strategy of recovery*. Recent therapeutic work has shown that the journey of recovery cannot be an exclusively individual one because of the systemic nature of addiction within families. Similarly repentance must be more than a private religious experience because of the systemic character of our economic-political-cultural pathologies.

**Moderator:** This suggests that it would be difficult for an institution to repent, undergo conversion, but still remain woven fully into the fabric of an idolatrous institutional culture. On the other hand, systems theory acknowledges that while a system tends to resist disruption, a change in any part of the system *does* in fact impact the rest of the system.

**Myers:** We should be sobered — no pun intended — to recognize that the majority of these strategies for recovery, including that of the Twelve Step Process, assume that because the dysfunctional system cannot be reformed, it must be disengaged.

Daniel Berrigan captures well this imperative to disengagement in this verse from one of his poems:

In the house where all cry out “I see!”  
and continue to do the works of darkness  
there is only one classic action open to the wise  
strike yourself blind and explore that Kingdom.

**Moderator:** (*slumped down in my chair*) Oh boy ... now I’m really depressed. Anybody have a word of false hope that I might clutch on to?

**Fackre:** Not *false* hope. Barth, however, in a letter to the Church in Great Britain in 1941—in the midst of their struggle—wrote that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and has taken captivity captive. These powers still rant and rave and do terrible damage but they have already been defeated by cross and resurrection. Therefore, resist them. Be empowered to contend with them by the knowledge that the power has been drained out of them.

**Moderator:** Yikes! Sorry I asked. It does, however, remind me of a sermon I heard several years ago in Washington DC. during the midst of the South African anti-apartheid struggle. Alan Boesak was the preacher, and his message that evening was characteristic of much of his preaching during that time. “The victory has already been won,” he assured us. “I’m not here to ask for your help,” he continued. “I’m here to invite you to join us in the victory celebration, even in the midst of the struggle.”

*(We’ll be back in a minute, following this brief station identification)*

**Round Two: What the heck does it *mean* to “join in the victory celebration, even in the midst of the struggle”?!**

**Moderator:** What!? What!? ... Oh ... hello again. I was just thinking for a moment. Anyway, where were we? Oh yeah. OK. Institutions — or the Powers — as we have been calling them. Seems we can't live with them, can't live without 'em. What, then, as people of faith *do* we do?

**Wink:** We engage them.

**Moderator:** OK. Next?

**Wink:** No! I'm quite serious, and I choose the word “engage” very intentionally. I entitled the third volume of my trilogy on the powers and principalities: Engaging the Powers . In it I address at length just this challenge: the struggle to faithfully engage the Powers in their fallenness. My choice of the word “engaging” in the title was not a casual one. Originally I had planned to entitle the volume *Confronting the Powers* because, as the volume's subtitle suggests (“*Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination.*”) I am concerned about the serious business of confronting demonic powers. Instead, however, I chose to frame the challenge as that of “engaging” these Powers in their fallenness. This was because of my conviction that our wrestling would be most faithful if it was formed deeply by an awareness that these powers were, in the first place, created good, and will, in the last place, be once again redeemed so that they resume their rightful place in God's created order.

In this spirit, while we may well feel compelled to resist the powers and principalities in their more evil or fallen expressions, it can never be with the goal of annihilating them.

**Moderator:** Could you be more specific? Perhaps offer an illustration? How, then, *should* we engage them?

**Wink:** Surely. The night before Richard Nixon's second inauguration as president, William Stringfellow preached to an ecumenical gathering of twelve hundred people in Rhode Island. He concluded by reading a prayer of exorcism, importuning God to free Nixon from demonic possession. The audience sat in stunned silence, then began to stand and applaud. It was their way of confirming the prayer, or saying yes to the exorcism. Their applause was intercession. Stringfellow had perceived, in a time of political frenzy, that our first responsibility toward those in the grip of evil is pastoral.

**Moderator:** That's an attention-getter. Are you really suggesting exorcism is a way of engaging institutions?

**Wink:** I am indeed. One strategy anyway. George McClain, in developing a service of exorcism for members of the United Methodist Church outside of the South African Embassy in New York City, distinguished these elements

1. Explicit naming of the institution embracing and possessed by evil.
2. Declaration of its subjection to the power of Jesus Christ.
3. Renunciation of its power over us.

4. Public confrontation with the institution, in which the institution is boldly called from its idolatry to its new vocation.
5. Performance of these acts with authority; that is,
  - a. believing that power to do this is given by Christ, and
  - b. confidence that our prayer and casting out is not just symbolic but will make an objective difference.

**Moderator:** It's intriguing, but it seems like an extreme example. I think also, however, about engaging institutions who are moving out of their more redeemed possibilities. In addition to the rite of exorcism, might we also speak of the institutional equivalents of baptism, commissioning and ordination? Each of these entrust an individual to God and affirm their calling to serve a divine vocation on behalf of the community.

**Wink:** Surely we must. I lift up this particular example, however, for an important reason. Humans *can* help to change things in institutions, but not if they are so naive as to think that they are only changing other human beings. By virtue of their greater duration in time and their immense magnitude of power, institutions take on a momentum of their own. They have their own spirits and tend to preserve themselves through all the shifts of personnel. They can be changed, but genuine change is a function of the change of both structure *and* spirit. It is not pious talk to say that to affect an institution you must touch its soul; it is shrewd advice. Otherwise, the more things change the more they stay the same. There must be a "conversion" of the spirit to the vision of its place in the larger Whole.

**Moderator:** This is clearly one of your important words to us — the necessity of awakening to the spirit of an institution. Do you want to say more about this?

**Wink:** This spiritual aspect of the Powers is not simply a "personification" of institutional qualities that would exist whether they were personified or not. On the contrary, the spirituality of an institution exists as a real aspect of the institution even when it is not perceived as such. Institutions have an actual spiritual ethos, and we neglect this aspect of institutional life to our peril.

If, then, the church must now make known the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, it cannot be content with addressing the material aspect of an institution alone. It must speak to the spiritual reality of the institution as well.

**Moderator:** When you speak of the spirituality of an institution, aren't you simply referring to the human ambitions and aspirations that have given shape to the organization?

**Wink:** No. Not at all. No doubt human institutions are humanly formed, and it is a great advance to recognize their human origin. But that is only half the truth. These institutions are not simply subject to human fiat. They possess a spirituality, an inwardness, that is highly resistant to change. The heavenly powers are *not* mere projections that mystify real power relations. They are, quite the contrary, the real interiority of earthly institutions, systems and forces.

The real issue is the degree to which the spirituality of a specific historical institution is, at any given moment, either faithful or idolatrous.

**Moderator:** I must be more a product of this scientific age and materialist culture than I had imagined. I can feel myself struggling to get my head around what you are suggesting.

**Wink:** (*nodding sympathetically*) Some have tended to debunk the spiritual as a smoke screen masking the real material determinants: the economic system, the state apparatus, the power elite. And this is no doubt often the case. But the Powers cannot be treated as “nothing but” the personification of human institutional and cultural arrangements, since these institutions and cultural arrangements are just as much the creation of the Powers as their creators. Reductionistic explanations are inadequate because they omit the one essential most unique to the New Testament understanding of power: its spiritual dimension.

**Moderator:** Perhaps an illustration would help me.

**Wink:** 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.

**Moderator:** How do we go about recognizing the inner spirit of an institution?

**Wink:** Origin had a quaint way of speaking about the invisible dimension of an institution. He spoke particularly to the institution of the church. “When the saints are assembled, there will be two churches, one of people and one of angels.” For they “each have their own angel encamped beside them.”

It is not easy for those of us who have been schooled in the Western outlook to discern the angel of a institution. We are faced with two hurdles. First, our worldview is individualistic to an extreme; consequently, most of us regard a group of people as a mere aggregate of individuals, with no organic properties of its own. We do not perceive it as a Gestalt or whole, with its own history, character, and calling. Second, our way of seeing the world is materialistic, and denies that a group could have a spirit. Consequently, we do not perceive the angel because we have been trained not to live as seeing the invisible.

The angel encompasses both what the church is and what it is called to be. The angel of a church is the coincidence of what the church is—its personality—and what it is called to become—its vocation.

**Moderator:** This relates back to our notion of “repentance” as the working of returning to one’s true vocation.

**Wink:** Precisely! Let's stick with the example of the institution of the church. Indeed, it is precisely those institutions that have the highest task that are capable of becoming the most demonic. The angel of a church becomes demonic when the congregation turns its back on the specific tasks set before it by God and makes some other goal its idol. At times the angel behaves something like an alcoholic who knows what is right, knows that what it is doing is destructive and wrong, but is powerless to stop.

The angel, it is important to stress, *is not an agent of change*. That role, John's letters make clear, belongs to the "one like a human being," the Christ. The angel, because it can be nothing less than the sum total of all its parts, may be paralyzed by discordant factions in the church. It may be rendered impotent by the lack of commitment among its members. But no matter how far the congregation has deviated from the divine will, the knowledge of that will is still encoded in its "higher self," the angel.

**Moderator:** In this sense, the angel of an institution seems to represent an expression — perhaps even a source — of continuity in its life over time.

**Wink:** Very much so. Because of this, angels can be extremely helpful in trying to comprehend institutions. Corporate structures have a remarkable resilience through time. Change all the employees at General Motors and replace them with new ones the next day, the GM would probably go right on doing the same kinds of things it has always done, and in something of the same manner. Like a river which is never made up of the same water molecules from one moment to the next, yet remains the same river, or the human body, which changes all its cells over a period of seven years, institutions also undergo the perpetual turnover of their employees without *necessarily* changing their essential nature.

Enlightened and humane corporate executives *can* make a difference in the tone, morale, and profitability of a business, but even the most sincere work under the severe constraints of the market, competition, and limited resources. The frequently heard complaints by executives that they feel relatively powerless simply attest to the sheer inertia that an institution achieves as it courses along its trajectory through time. There is an almost homeostatic quality, as if the angel acted like a gyroscope to resist rocking. Improvements can occasionally be brought about by removing obstructive personnel, but all too often, as we see in family systems therapy, someone else who had previously been cooperative suddenly assumes the vacated role of obstructionist *as if the system required it*. Real change must therefore affect not just the visible forms an institution takes, but somehow must alter the spirit, the core essence, of the entity as a whole.

**Moderator:** Apart from exorcism, what are some of the other ways that people of faith might seek to engage the spirit or angel of an institution with which we are wrestling?

**Fackre:** We must, from the perspective of the Kingdom — or the Great Economy as you have referred to it — place our story into conversation with their story.

**Moderator:** What do you mean by that?

**Fackre:** Barth said that Christian faith questioned the culture's questions. This is essential because the culture may not be asking the right or ultimate

questions. Barth would caution us to “Beware of the issues and idiom of the *Zeitgeist*” (the spirit of the age) — don’t let that provide the content and defining norm. Christ is the defining norm. I think that Bonhoeffer came out just right on this, because he tried to balance the impulse toward a religionless Christianity (which put aside the public use of the idiom of the Church) and the arcane discipline, which sought to ensure that the secular didn’t have the last word in defining our posture and outlook on the world.

**Moderator:** But what does this *mean*? We have spent a fair amount of thought and worry over this in our work to date. So far, our best effort has found us trying to take familiar theological categories — the description of Christ’s work as the threefold offices of Prophet, Priest and Royal (King) — and attempting to correlate them with categories familiar to the world and experience of organizations.

**Fackre:** I know you’ve been working on that front. At this point how are you representing the threefold office in an organizational idiom?

**Moderator:** In an institutional setting we believe that Christ’s Priestly Office presents as the Office of Identity. This office is preoccupied with how the organization structures the character and quality of its life so as to meet the full range of human needs of those who constitute its work force.

**Fackre:** I can see how that might connect to Christ’s priestly work of intercession for and solidarity on behalf of others. What about the Prophetic Office?

**Moderator:** We believe that Christ’s prophetic work expresses itself within organizations as the Office of Purpose. This office is focused on the way the organization justifies its existence through the products or services it offers to the larger society. Included in this would be an organization’s relationship to its mission and vision, the way it evaluates itself, and how it shares information with others.

**Fackre:** That connects with Christ as visionary and courageous truth-teller. This is also the office, though, that calls the people and institutions to repent, challenging them to realign themselves with God’s new Order. How does the Royal Office find expression organizationally?

**Moderator:** As the Office of Stewardship. This office is preoccupied with how the organization utilizes its resources (human, financial and material) so as to sustain its viability while balancing the legitimate needs of each of its stakeholders and the wider community.

**Fackre:** Fundamental to the Royal Office is the task of moving in ways that exude and engender confidence in Christ’s rule, even in the face of daunting evidence to the contrary.

**Moderator:** We’ve refocused this in the Office of Stewardship as the work of stewarding resources so as to model and nurture confidence in the sustainable viability of the organization and its host community.

**Fackre:** Interesting. But there’s an important difference here between engendering confidence in the present and future viability of God’s

Kingdom on one hand, and inspiring confidence in the future of an organization.

**Moderator:** The definitions of the institutional threefold office are more fully developed and substantial than I've related them in brief here. But your point is well-taken. It makes sense to me that if our fundamental allegiance is to, before all else, God's vision of Shalom, or the Great Economy — if this is the case, we wouldn't want to let the terms of the conversation be set by the dominant culture. Especially given our understanding of the implications of the Fall for all of the created order. But how do we “beware of the issue and idiom of the Zeitgeist”, and still engage it in conversation?

**Fackre:** Well, I suppose, for one thing, that it might mean that we would be less hesitant to use the categories of scripture and tradition to inform the dialog with those working within institutions. Now I know this is utopian, because if you really want to communicate there, you've got to use the language of that workplace. Coming in with all this jargon, risks being off-putting. I recognize that.

Still, at some juncture, might it not be possible to draw more directly on the richness of the lore here, the classical Christian tradition? I know you don't want to dump it on people. I know you want to avoid the lapel-grabbing tendencies of people who want to just impose our categories on culture, but at some moment of Kairos, there might be an occasion where you can observe the roots of this organizational threefold office.

**Moderator:** There are 2 dimensions of this problem. One is that much religious language is bankrupt in the workplace because of its popular purveyors. So it's seen not only as an imperialistic imposition, but one that carries with it so much baggage that it's totally disconnected to people's experience of what they face in everyday life. That's part of the problem. The other side of the problem is that for those who are really wanting to do thoughtful theological reflection, who are self-consciously Christian, if those connections are not made, the process of reflection loses its power and richness. This is the dilemma that we wrestle with: Can we develop a non-religious idiom that is clearly faithful to the tradition, even though it doesn't use theological language, without cutting people off from the sense of power and authority they draw from the explicit relating to their faith? This is particularly critical if this process of thinking theologically is to be a resource not only to individual persons of faith, but also in fact, a resource for engaging with their coworkers in critical reflection and evaluation on the life and direction of their organization. In this instance we must take seriously the problem of what I have called the bankruptcy of much religious language. That's why we're struggling to do work on both sides of this equation.

**Myers:** I'd like to shift the focus away from the particular words we choose to use, and pick up on Gabe's counsel that part of engaging the Powers has to do with questioning their questions. It also addresses your allusion to the bankruptcy of much religious language. I agree with you both. The Jesus we encounter in the gospels is portrayed not as the *answer* to our private questions but as the *question* to our public answers.

**Moderator:** I think I resonate to what you are saying, but I'd like to hear more.

**Myers:** Jesus' questions open up painful and awkward uncertainties for disciples: "Do you have eyes, and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember?" But this does not mean that he is merely playing the Grand Inquisitor or the Devil's advocate. His teaching and practice are meant to provoke the incredulity of his disciples. This is his pedagogical strategy — to break the spell of the credulity the dominant order casts over its subjects, to force a crisis of faith. Jesus problematizes the worldview of his followers and his opponents because it is problematic from the vantage point of the Kingdom.

**Moderator:** The notion of Jesus being the one who breaks the spell of credulity connects with your earlier observation that one of the most stubborn obstacles to repentance is the difficulty of breaking through the denial of addiction. What does this suggest about our role as people of faith seeking to engage institutions? That we should seek to offer fewer answers and more questions?

**Myers:** Mark's gospel is perhaps the prototype of Christian narrative theology, and features a Jesus whose life and words pose the question to our public answers. It is no coincidence, I believe, that Mark's author is also preoccupied with what it means to enter into the Way of discipleship. Perhaps this suggests that the church's own theological discourse should also be interrogatory. Particularly if our hope is to develop a theology of institutional discipleship.

Any theology of discipleship must give primacy to practice over the traditional theological rhythm of discourse-critique. For this, we need a discourse not of answers but rather of questions. If we wish to recover such a discourse, however, our reconstructive task is formidable, for ecclesial doctrine long ago buried the voice of Jesus the Interlocutor.

**Moderator:** I find what you are suggesting compelling. With our preoccupation on articulating theological orthodoxies, we are prone to making our confession too quickly and realizing our denial too late.

Frequently we sit with people who are, in some fashion, institutional stewards. These people care about the faithful discipleship of their institutions. They are not seeking for the shape of theological truth about faithfulness in organizations *in the abstract*. Rather, they come together as men and women who are up to their necks in the complexities and ambiguities of real institutions. The decisions they face in these places are often high-stakes quandaries whose outcomes significantly impact countless persons both within and outside of our organizations.

I think they would be well-served by an interrogatory theology of institutional discipleship. Having said that, I don't have a clue about what such a discourse might look like. Any ideas?

**Myers:** Well, one possibility worth considering might be the discourse of "Testimonies, Advices, and Queries" which takes the place of doctrine among Quakers.

**Moderator:** Could you describe it for us?

**Myers:** I'll try. Leonard Kenworthy calls this a "cluster of practices intended to encourage Friends, individually and as groups, to hold up their

lives to the Light." This discourse, according to Quaker historian T. Canby Jones, first appeared in 1682 in three questions posed by London Yearly Meeting to determine the "state of the Meeting."

What friends in the Ministry, in the respective countries, departed life since last Yearly Meeting?

What friends imprisoned for their Testimony have died in prison since last Yearly Meeting?

How has the Truth prospered among friends since last Yearly Meeting and how do they fare in relationship to peace and unity?

Meant to inspire reflection on costly discipleship, these *Queries* were institutionalized in 1723, and others were added over time. A century later London Yearly Meeting developed *Advices*, which Jones calls "short counsels and positive suggestions for the improvement of the life, conduct and witness of Friends . . . conceived of as supplementary and subsidiary to the *Queries*". *Testimonies* were in turn developed to articulate "corporate convictions, concerns which we are committed to put into action as a community of faith".

Jones defines the three elements of this discourse as follows:

- A *Testimony* is a standard of faith, ethical behavior or Gospel Order which a group of people covenants together to observe ...
- A *Query* is a sharply focused question designed to challenge persons or a group to live up to a corporately adopted standard of faith and behavior ...
- An *Advice* is friendly counsel from the group on what it means to live by a commonly accepted testimony.

Friends look to *Queries* to help clarify the meaning and requirements of the various *Testimonies*. "Meetings were asked to read out the *Queries* and have their members examine their consciences in regard to such questions as the taking of oaths ... the witness against paying tithes ... the keeping of slaves ... the penal system ... [and] whether they held their lives free enough from the excessive cumber of acquisitive vocations".

**Moderator:** The *Queries* sound like rhetorical questions to me. They almost imply judgment.

**Myers:** Clearly *Queries* contain a bias, but they are not "loaded" questions; their purpose is to facilitate an examination of the community's conscience. Suited to the searching mood of Friends at their best, they are broad, open-ended questions to promote self-examination under the leadership of the Spirit. They are non-dogmatic, non-hortatory ... not intended to discourage but to encourage.

As a vehicle for community self-assessment, then, *Queries* try to preserve a delicate balance. They are questions to our life, not accusations, yet they are hard questions, not merely rhetorical ones. *Advices* grow from the community's experiences of fidelity (and infidelity) to its *Testimonies*. They are eminently practical encouragements, not legalisms.

**Moderator:** It sounds like a practice with real possibilities for our work. I think that the threefold office of institutions which we have been developing

potentially forms the basis for a provocative and balanced cluster of Testimonies. Even in their present form, there are Queries that flow quite naturally from them. The notion of institutions standing under Queries designed to encourage them in their discipleship path is exciting.

**Myers:** It's well worth looking into, but not without its problems. One is the fact that this tradition, like any other, can and has degenerated into a formalized discourse that inspires the memorialization of discipleship rather than the reproduction of it. . . just what you are hoping to avoid. A second problem is the tendency of contemporary liberal Quakers to disconnect their discursive tradition from its biblical moorings. The result over time has been theological ambivalence, followed by confusion of identity, followed by ethical drift. When our Queries arise only from within ourselves, there is a danger they will be confined by our own fearful horizons, cut off from the unboundaried questions of Jesus the Interlocutor and the radical biblical vision of the kingdom of God. This, of course, was Barth's reminder to us, which Gabe mentioned earlier.

**Moderator:** That's a sobering reminder that we should not presume that *any* discourse will inevitably ensure a faithful wrestling with the discipleship issues before an institution.

**Myers:** Yes. Having acknowledged that however, we *can* note characteristics in the discourse of Testimonies, Queries, and Advices that can serve as a help for interrogatory theology of institutional discipleship. First, it puts the concrete before the theoretical; like liberation theology, it seeks unity in orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. Second, it puts the communal before the private. Indeed it depends upon the vitality of corporate discernment, which is why Friends have developed a patient (if painfully slow) process of coming to "unity." Third, this discourse relies on the reflective rather than the declarative and is thus open to constant rearticulation. Testimonies, Queries, and Advices represent "landmarks, not campsites." Testimonies endure but should be reinterpreted into new contexts. Queries stand ever in need of honing so they do not become rote or irrelevant. Advices, by definition, must be revised as the times change so they will be practical, not rhetorical.

Of particular interest to me is the way queries offer a pastoral corrective to the negative prophetic negations of Critical Theory. Self-examination prevents us from imagining we can somehow stand apart from the ambiguities of the world, smugly reproaching the compromises of practical politics, and reminds us how compromised we ourselves are. We who would seek to engage the institutions of our world should center our discourse above all around queries, because we all stand under the questioning — at once prophetic and pastoral — of Jesus the Interlocutor.

**Moderator:** There's one additional question that has been nagging at me. I am persuaded that we ought to emphasize a theological practice which enables us to stand under questions together. At the same time, however, I still wish that we could discover a theological image which suggests the general contour of what a healthy and faithful institution might look like. Is there any such image?

**Fackre:** I believe that there is. A sign of Christ's hope for the world has been left in history: the church.

**Moderator:** (*incredulously*) You can't possibly be suggesting that the institutional church as it exists today is a model of what we would wish for all institutions!?

**Fackre:** No. Not exactly. I point instead to the New Testament image of the church: the Body of Christ. A portent is given in the Body of Christ on earth of God's ultimate intention for a redeemed world and for human institutions.

**Moderator:** What, in particular, about the Body of Christ image do you find theologically instructive for contemporary institutions?

**Fackre:** What I'm getting at is the way in which the contemporary Body of Christ continues the threefold work of Christ. I believe that your decision to develop an institutional understanding of this threefold ministry is helpful.

**Moderator:** You're referring again to the description of Christ's work as including the ministries of Prophet, Priest and King — whoops! — Royal?

**Fackre:** Exactly! Christ's ministry continues in the threefold ministry of the institution of the church.

As the Body of Christ on earth is called to continue the threefold ministry of Christ in servant style, *so all the bodies on earth that sustain its life are claimed for the same threefold ministry in the same style*. The powers of this world instituted in creation to order human life are therefore ministers of their Creator and Redeemer. Out of the threefold ministry, the Body of Christ points toward the threefold stewardship of every human institution, so that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be now made known to the principalities and powers." (Eph 3:10)

**Moderator:** One of the things about the threefold office Christ that strikes us as instructive for institutions is the simple fact that all three offices exist in it together.

**Fackre:** Say more about that.

**Moderator:** In order for Christ's work to be whole, none of the three expressions of his ministry can stand alone. The Royal, ruling office of Christ apart from the accountability to the Prophetic passion for God's just order would not be faithful. Neither would Prophetic rigor apart from the Priestly compassion and solidarity with the people. All three together are part of Christ's work, and the Body of Christ cannot faithfully continue this work today without holding these same three dimension together.

We believe that the same is true for other institutions as well. Faithfulness in their discipleship has much to do with holding in healthy balance all of the dimensions of the threefold office so that none dominates and none is neglected or undernourished.

**Fackre:** Used in this way — or perhaps some other way yet to be discovered — I believe that. that the threefold work of Christ offers corrective to institutions which are presently living out their fallenness or rebelliousness, pointing them instead toward a redeemed living out of their

true vocations in service to God's created order. In this sense it really does offer one way of thinking about what faithful discipleship might look like.

**Moderator:** A last word, anyone?

**Wink:** A penultimate word, perhaps. Just to remind ourselves that the Powers are no less the good creations of a good God than we are, and they are no more fallen than we. If we can experience redemption, so can they, though by virtue of their greater complexity, far less simply. Clearly this is what we have been speaking about together.

Radical pessimism about the Powers needs to be balanced by a view of grace more radical still. But whether this redemption can take place in history is an open question, which only historical deeds themselves can answer.

**Moderator:** Your counsel to combine a radical view of God's grace with a readiness to undertake historical deeds recalls to me another strategy which you have suggested must part of our repertoire of engaging the Powers.

**Wink:** What is that?

**Moderator:** The work of intercessory prayer. Will you speak of it here? I believe it is a helpful last word.

**Wink:** Yes, historical deeds are essential, but action is no substitute for prayer. For some, action is a cover for unbelief. We simply do not believe that God is able to act in the world. Since God cannot change things, we must. For others, who feel called by God to establish justice, prayer seems a waste of precious time. But long-term struggle requires constant inner renewal, else the wells of love run dry. Social action without prayer is soulless; but prayer without action lacks integrity. Why should we choose between them, when neither is valid without the other?

**Moderator:** Will you say a word, then, about the role of prayer in engaging the Powers?

**Wink:** History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being. Intercession is spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current contradictory forces. It infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present.

No doubt our intercessions sometimes change us as we open ourselves to new possibilities we had not guessed. No doubt our prayers to God reflect back upon us as a divine command to become the answer to our prayer. But if we are to take the biblical understanding seriously at all, intercession is more than that. It changes the world and it changes what is possible to God. It creates an island of relative freedom in a world gripped by an unholy necessity. An aperture opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom.

The change, then, in even one person thus changes what God can thereby do in that world.

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