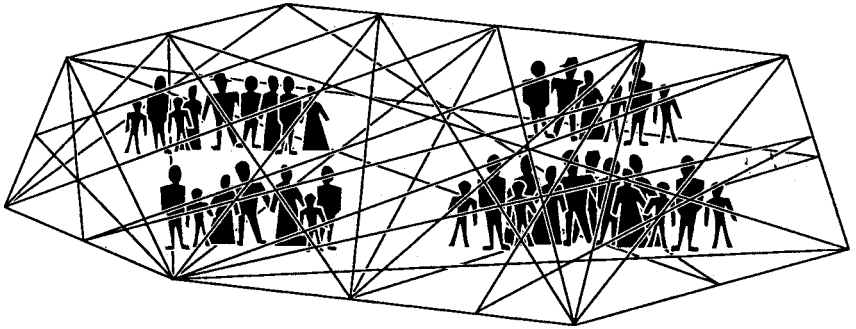
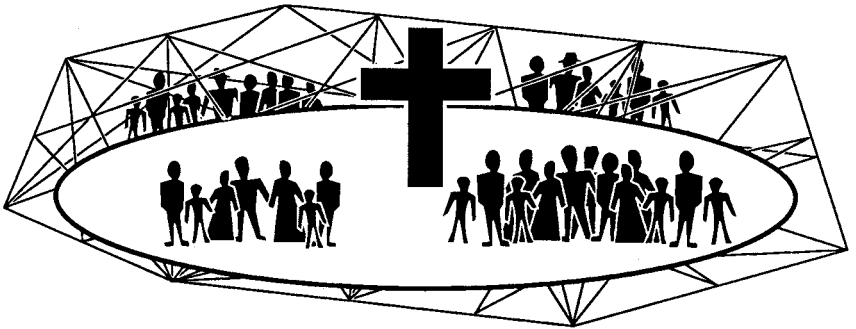


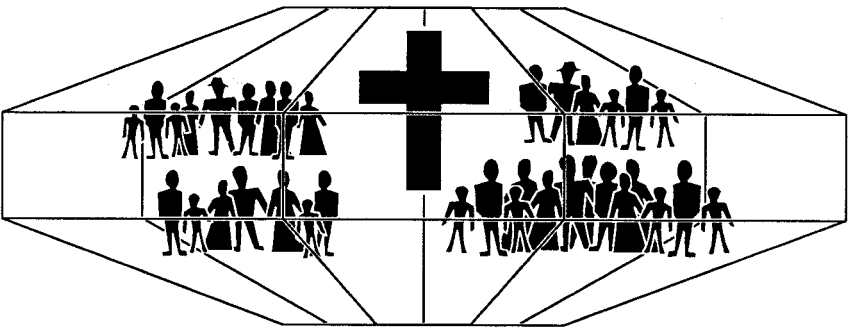
# A visualization of Hendrikus Berkhof's view



**HUMAN EXISTENCE** is captive to structures that both preserve and destroy life. We are both sinners and sinned-against.



**GOD'S SALVATION** reconciles us to God and our neighbor, freeing us from these structures by placing us in the church. (It is in this context that we can make some sense of the claim "Outside the church there is no salvation.")



**GOD HAS NOT** written off the powers; the church is tied—somehow—to their redemption.

Where are these powers at work? Green considers both the world and the church. In the world, our consumer society perverts values, and impoverishes the many for the sake of the few. Consider coffee, or infant formula. Coffee is one of El Salvador's major exports, but the deck is stacked: "a tractor which cost 165 bags of coffee in 1960 cost 316 ten years later" (1981, 101). Multi-nationals sell infant formula in poor countries where living conditions make it almost impossible to use it properly. Green asserts "the graveyards of the Third World bear silent testimony to the grip the principalities and powers exercise upon something as basic as baby foods" (1981, 102). Other examples include state torture, the arms race, the loss of moral absolutes, environmental degradation, and devalued sexuality.

In the church, Green points to secularism, denominationalism, loss of vision, officialdom, dependence on the world for moral guidance, and a consumer lifestyle. Regarding the latter, Green sees John Taylor's, Ronald Sider's, and Michael Harper's fight for a simple lifestyle to be a fight against the powers.

So what is the Christian response to the powers? Watchfulness, prayer, boldness, resistance, and involvement. Green cites Bonhoeffer, Archbishop Helder Camara, Martin Luther King Jr., and the French resistance during World War II as examples.

## Robert Linthicum

Robert Linthicum heads World Vision's Office of Urban Advance, which supports World Vision field offices by developing urban mission strategies for the mega-cities of the two-thirds world. Linthicum embraced the language of the principalities and powers as he sought to understand and meet the massive challenges facing him as an urban minister. His *City of God, City of Satan* (1991) picks up the Reformed themes and applies them to the city. While his language reflects his debt to Wink, he sees the powers as personal spiritual beings.

The political system of a city is infused with a spiritual essence, a "soul," unimagined and unexplored inner depths. The angel of a city is the inner spirituality that broods over that city. And that spirituality has immense power—either for good or for ill.

What is it that you feel in a Calcutta, a Moscow, a Bangkok, a Mexico City, a Washington, a Nairobi? I would suggest that what you sense is the soul of that city. The angel of each city infuses and dominates the principalities

ties and powers, systems and structures, people groups and individuals of that city.

In the urban workshops I lead around the world, I ask those in attendance to identify the angel of their city. They determine together who the angel of their city is, name and describe him, and then consider how that angel manifests himself in their city's structures, systems and people, and, finally, in their own churches. . . . to be able to name your city's angel and to understand how he is at work both exposes him and enables you to understand the dimensions the church's ministry must undertake if it is truly to confront the principalities and powers (1990, 115-17)!

What does this mean in practice? Linthicum shared some stories during an interview.

The Corn Exchange Building in the heart of Chicago's financial district is topped by the goddess of wheat. That says a great deal about Chicago, crowned by an absolute commitment to "turning a buck." It was tremendously helpful to see this, that the essential struggle in ministry was an economic struggle. In one neighborhood the battle was between the people and the economic movers and shakers of Chicago who wanted to take it over. They wanted to redline it so that property values would plummet, buy it up, raze it, and build high-rise condos. We saw as we organized around this issue that we had to make it in the self-interest of the banks and insurance companies to change their strategies.

In an urban ministry workshop in Bangkok, participants found prostitution a particularly apt symbol for making sense of their city. Bangkok was a beautiful young maiden, and remained so while the Kingdom of Siam stayed unspotted. But she has been raped by the economic powers of the first world—and was not an entirely unwilling victim. Examples include Bangkok's tourist-driven prostitution, and loss of cultural integrity. A hundred years ago, Bangkok was a sensual city, beautiful. Now she is simply sexual. What does this mean for ministry? Conversation turned to the churches of Bangkok, in which the fastest growing are those which imitate

the West. An occasion for praise, or another example of prostitution?

Further, Linthicum's model of action and reflection in community organizing highlights the role of the powers. Notice the path reflection takes in the diagram on the next page! Once one gets to the real issues, attempts to address them reveal the principalities and powers. Attempts to address these lead to recognition of the group's own complicity in these systems. The problem is not simply out there. At that point, if the group does not go into denial or legalism or some other dodge, the gospel's news of forgiveness takes on profound significance. Awareness of the powers means both more profound confession, and a search for spiritual disciplines which can sustain one in the conflict.

Notice, too, that the principalities and powers are not the first topic of action or reflection. The model strongly implies that if there are times when one should be talking about the powers, there are also times when one should not be talking about the powers.

Linthicum's work is of interest, then, for two reasons. First, he is seeking to use the language of the principalities and powers for analysis in urban situations in both the first and two-thirds worlds. Second, he is developing a ministry model in which knowledge of and engagement with the powers plays an important role.

## Walter Wink

Walter Wink, professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, spent four months in Latin America in 1982. His perceptions of the many abuses of power there forced him to rethink his theology and missiology of power. He is two-thirds of the way through his trilogy on the powers: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (1984) and *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (1986). The third projected volume, *Engaging the Powers*, is not yet in press. This partly reflects the challenge of the topic, and partly reflects the pressures of his work in South Africa.

As this trilogy represents the most sustained treatment of our theme, we treat Wink in more detail. Wink interprets the powers as impersonal and bipolar:

... the "principalities and powers" are the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power. As the inner aspect they are the spirituality of institutions, the "within" of corporate structures and systems, the inner essence of outer organizations of power. As the outer aspect they are political systems, appointed officials, the

# The Reflection/Action Cycle in Community Organizing

