

William WYLIE-KELLERMANN

Naming the Powers:

William Stringfellow as Student and Theologian

“In this world as it is, in the era of time, in common history – in the epoch of the Fall, as the Bible designates this scene every principality has the elemental significance of death, notwithstanding contrary appearances. This is eminently so with respect to nations, for nations are, as Revelation indicates, the archetypal principalities... All virtues which nations elevate and idolize – military prowess, material abundance, technological sophistication, imperial grandeur, high culture, racial pride, trade, prosperity, conquest, sport, language, or whatever – are subservient to the moral presence of death in the nation. And it is the same with the surrogate nations – the other principalities like corporations and conglomerates, ideologies and bureaucracies, and authorities and institutions of every name and description...”¹

“The Fall is where the nation is. The Fall is the locus of America... Since the climax of America’s glorification as a nation – in the ostensible American victory in World War II, most lucidly and aptly symbolized in Hiroshima – Americans have become so beleaguered by anxiety and fatigue, so bemused and intimidated, so beset by a sense of impotence and by intuitions of calamity, that they have, for the most part, been consigned to despair... Racial conflict has been suppressed by an elaborate apartheid; products which supposedly mean abundance turn out to contaminate or jeopardize life; the environment itself is rendered hostile; there is a pervasive Babel; privacy is a memory because surveillance is ubiquitous; institutional coercion of human beings has proliferated relentlessly. Whatever must be said of earlier times, in the past quarter century, America has become a technological totalitarianism in which hope, in its ordinary connotations, is being annihilated.”² (William STRINGFELLOW, 1973)

William STRINGFELLOW, who was an active participant in the World Student

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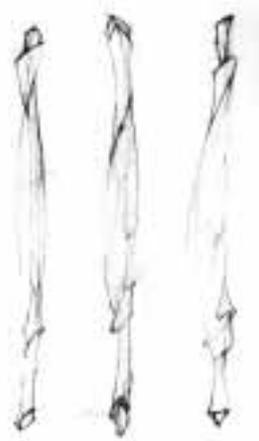
¹ STRINGFELLOW, William, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*. Waco, 1973. 67-68.

² *Ibid.* 19-20. STRINGFELLOW is employing an earlier chauvinism – using “America” to signify the United States.

Christian Federation during the post-war era, is best regarded in the US church as the theologian who reclaimed the biblical language of “principalities and powers” for social ethics. It was, moreover, his experience and conversation as a student in the WSCF that initially formed and shaped his early thinking and biblical insight concerning these powers.

For most of its history, the gods of this world have blinded the Church to its own scriptures with respect to the “principalities and powers.” In the history of interpretation the powers have been excised, suppressed and obscured. One analysis, that of ecumenist W. A. VISSER'T HOOFT, ties the effectual disappearance and demise of the powers in Protestant theology to LUTHER and CALVIN at the very beginning of the Reformation.³ STRINGFELLOW, however, locates that dissipation at an earlier juncture, with the “Constantinian Arrangement” of the fourth century. Beginning with that time, Christians had “forgotten or forsaken a worldview or, more precisely, doctrines of creation and fallen creation, similar to Paul’s, in which political authority encompasses and conjoins the angelic powers and incumbent rulers.”⁴

Walter WINK, the New Testament scholar whose stunning trilogy on the powers was seeded by STRINGFELLOW’s work and who has since become the primary and practical North American spokesperson on the theology of the principalities, concurs. “The Church soon found herself



³ See W. A. VISSER'T HOOFT, *The Kingship of Christ*. New York, 1948. 15-31. He argues that the significance of the victorious cosmic Christ was lost in their attenuated struggle with apocalyptic sects of the time.

⁴ STRINGFELLOW William, *Conscience and Obedience*. Waco, 1977. 48.

the darling of CONSTANTINE. Called on to legitimate the empire, the church abandoned much of its social critique. The Powers were soon divorced from political affairs and made airy spirits who preyed only on individuals. The state was thus freed of one of the most powerful brakes against idolatry.”⁵

On the Principalities at Harvard

When STRINGFELLOW first began to speak and write on the powers in the early sixties, he went on the road stumping in colleges and universities. He identified the powers with institutions, images, and ideologies as creatures before God having an independent life and integrity of their own whose vocation is to praise God and serve human life. In the estate of the fall, however, they are seen to be demonic powers. Their vocation is lost and distorted, in fact inverted: instead of praising God and serving human life they pretend to take the place of God and enslave human life. This exposition, which became chapter three of *Free in Obedience* (1964), met a strange mix of fascination and rebuff.

He loved to tell the story of an early presentation, in fact two of them, given in Boston. Scheduled for similar talks the same day at Harvard Business School and at the Divinity School, he debated with himself about excising, from the business school version, any explicit biblical reference or language, but decided in the end to let it stand intact. The business school students it turned out, engaged him thoroughly, bending his ear long past the hour appointed, with numerous examples from their own experience of dominance and possession with respect to corporations and the commercial powers. Their experiences verified his own observations.

Later at the seminary, however, with the identical speech, he was ridiculed and written off. Ruling authorities, principalities, world rulers of the present darkness! Come now! These were but the incidental vestige of a quaint and archaic language, Greco-Roman astralism, an esoteric parlance now obsolete, with no real meaning in history or human life.⁶

Hermeneutics and Historical Crisis

Happily, things have changed with respect to the theological academy, but it took a series of historical crises to effect it. In Europe it was virtually the gathering storm of World War II, the rise of National Socialism, which urgently broke the hermeneutical impasse with respect to the powers. As Dietrich BONHÖFFER wrote in 1932, “how can one close one’s eyes at the fact that the demons themselves have taken over rule of the world, that it is the powers of darkness who have here made an awful conspiracy?”⁷

One crisis would inform another. In STRINGFELLOW’S time and place – the United States in the sixties and seventies – it was urban crisis and the utter resilience of

⁵ WINK Walter, *Naming the Powers*. Philadelphia, 1984. 113. The other volumes in his powers trilogy are *Unmasking the Powers*. Philadelphia, 1986. and *Engaging the Powers*. Philadelphia, 1992.

⁶ STRINGFELLOW William, *Free in Obedience*. New York, 1964. 51-52.

⁷ Quoted in DAWN Marva, *The Concept of the “Principalities and Powers” in the Works of Jacques Ellul*. PhD dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1992. 12.

racism which prompted the awakening to the powers. (That, and profligate war in Southeast Asia). STRINGFELLOW, upon graduation from Harvard Law School in 1956 had made a singularly “bad career move,” straight to the New York ghetto of East Harlem to do street law, before there yet was such a thing. And he claimed it was from the people of East Harlem that he got put onto the powers.

“Slowly I learned something which folk indigenous to the ghetto know: namely, that the power and purpose of death are incarnated in institutions and structures, procedures and regimes – Consolidated Edison or the Department of Welfare, the Mafia or the police, the Housing Authority or the social work bureaucracy, the hospital system or the banks, liberal philanthropy or corporate real estate speculation. In the wisdom of the people of the East Harlem neighborhood, such principalities are identified as demonic powers because of the relentless and ruthless dehumanization which they cause.”⁸

Stringfellow Faces the Powers in Oslo

His eyes to see and his ears to hear had been formed, however, years earlier substantially through his participation in WSCF. STRINGFELLOW’s first real dose of powers theology came at the World Conference of Christian Youth in Oslo, Norway which he attended in 1947 as a college sophomore. There he joined twelve hundred students from every continent, from seventy different nations, and from every major communion (including thirty-five denominations in the US alone). Under the banner of “Christ is Lord”, no flags, even that of Norway, were allowed in Filadelfia Hall.

Sadly, however, the delegation from Japan, their bags already packed, were prevented by the Allied occupation from leaving their country⁹. They forwarded a word of gratitude to say what a grace the invitation itself had been. The German delegation meanwhile was permitted in, but only after extensive negotiations with the Norwegian government. In the course of the conference they held several (informal and unofficial) joint meetings with youth from Czechoslovakia, France, and the Netherlands to bridge the chasms of war and occupation.

WSCF in Solidarity and Resistance

During the War, the European SCMs had tasted the acidity of death and their stories were being now openly shared. SCM leaders had been murdered and imprisoned. Groups were banned and went underground. In Germany, dissolved by the Reich, SCM member groups reconstituted themselves as student congregations within the Confessing Church, which was the ecclesiastical focal point of Christian resistance to HITLER.¹⁰

Forbidden previously to have international contact or send money out of the country, they smuggled out tiny lapel crosses to be sold as their WSCF contribu-

⁸ *Instead of Death*. 1967. 5.

⁹ MACY Paul Griswold (ed.), *The Report of the Second World Conference of Christian Youth*. Oslo, 1947. 7, 10.

¹⁰ POTTER Phillip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Geneva, 1997. 138-155, 158, 173. See also

tion. Very quickly, students who bought them came to recognize one another throughout Europe on trains, in work camps, in prisons and in resistance groups during the war. The unofficial symbol came to signify both the vitality of resistance and the unity of fellowship across all borders and barriers.¹¹

Given such bridges of conversation and reconciliation, STRINGFELLOW was thoroughly scandalized when Bishop Stephen NEIL, on behalf of the archbishop, asked the Anglicans not to receive Eucharist at the Norwegian high mass since they were not properly “in communion”. Not bound in this matter of conscience, he and others in the delegation went forward to the altar nonetheless, and made a point of underscoring this in his formal church report, citing the prayer of confession from the liturgy itself: “Christian disunity...has been brought by pride... There is only one place where this pride can really be destroyed... that is in the very act of Holy Communion, of communion with Jesus Christ.”¹²

The meeting itself was in certain respects a confrontation with the powers. When STRINGFELLOW wrote up his experience for publication, he entitled his reflection, “Does the World Hate America? What an Innocent Learned Abroad”. He had found himself party to a kind of unmasking experience, “a creative disillusionment”.¹³ At the conference, a number of Latin American delegations joined in appealing for American churches to stand strong against the “Truman doctrine”, just announced, of arming Latin governments militarily, mainly against their own citizens. A few young people of the United States, STRINGFELLOW among them, were openly sympathetic to their thinking.¹⁴ EAPEN, a Ceylonese student who was part of STRINGFELLOW’s afternoon discussion group, confided a warning: “The next war will be a racial war” in which the colonized colored people turn the tables on the economic exploitation and racial injustice embodied in America.¹⁵

Beginning a Conversation

It was, however, the plenary speakers at the conference whose theological influence proved most lasting upon him. They named the powers. They bore their good news of Christ’s Lordship out from imprisonment and the shadow of death. They spoke from Christian resistance movements under Nazi occupation. They were chastened and sober. Among them were Martin NIEMÖLLER (of the Confessing movement in Germany), Bishop BELGRAV of Norway (imprisoned for leading the church’s defiance of QUISLING and his henchmen), and Madeleine BAROT (participant in the French resistance).¹⁶ Madeleine BAROT, for example,

¹⁰ POTTER Phillip – WIESER Thomas, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Geneva, 1997. 138-155, 158, 173. See also MAURY Philippe – SHANKE Andreas, *Christian Witness in the Resistance: Experiences of Some Members of European SCMs, 1939-1945*. Geneva, 1947.

¹¹ *The Federation Cross*. Flyer in WS scrapbook, 1949.

¹² Handwritten journal, 7/25/47, 7/27/47; Crittenden Report. 4. Cornell Archives, Box 4.

¹³ STRINGFELLOW William, *CA is Way to Church Unity*. The Bates Student October 15, 1947.

¹⁴ WILL Herman Jr., *Oslo 1947: From an Adult Delegate*. Motive 1947/1. 20-23. STRINGFELLOW William (handwritten), *Journal of the Second World Conference of Christian Youth*. Entry for 7/24, Cornell Archives, Box 1.

¹⁵ STRINGFELLOW William, *Does the World Hate America? What an Innocent Learned Abroad*. The Churchman October 15, 1947. 10.

was particularly lucid in identifying the “chaos of order” in which humanity had fallen slave to its own systems, to its own production and discovery, and to its own propaganda for which she saw the Babel story as emblematic.¹⁷

Twenty-five years later STRINGFELLOW identified the conference as the beginning of a conversation with these very speakers from whom he acknowledged learning two things: firstly that in the overwhelming circumstance of Nazi possession and occupation, resistance (however symbolic, haphazard, and apparently futile) became the only way to live humanly, retaining sanity and conscience; and secondly that recourse to the Bible became in itself a primary, practical, and essential tactic of resistance.¹⁸ This confluence, a kind of sequence or circle really – Bible study, comprehension or discernment of the powers, and resistance for the sake of humanity – is hardly incidental. This conversation would prove seminal to his life and thinking.

Under the “Lordship of Christ” there was plenty of room for the triumphalism that characterized most of postwar American ecumenism and already infected many students from the US. The word from these speakers was something to draw them up short. Something shook imperial privilege. Something disabused the naiveté of innocents.

Following the conference, an issue of *The Student World* appeared shortly, devoted to, “Christians and Power Politics.”¹⁹ The magazine issue was loaded – a nexus of providence in STRINGFELLOW’s life. This would be true simply given the subject, and even more so given that the next year he would join the WSCF’s “Political Commission”, which had sponsored its publication. Surely these articles received STRINGFELLOW’s close attention. Nearly all were notable for the long term influence upon him which they initiated.

Going Deeper: The Conversation With ELLUL

And finally “The Christian as Revolutionary”, marked STRINGFELLOW’s introduction to Jacques ELLUL, the French theologian and social historian, who would eventually become a life-long correspondent and friend. The piece was first spoken at a conference connected to Oslo and became a chapter from ELLUL’s seminal postwar book, *The Presence of the Kingdom*²⁰, which discerned the incipient bondage at hand in technology, while affirming faith as the only source of radical and revolutionary freedom.

Initiated by the post-Oslo publication, STRINGFELLOW’s life-long conversation with ELLUL certainly included their voluminous published works, but also a rich

¹⁶ Their speeches are transcribed in MACY (ed.), *Report...* 137-141, 153-165, 217-226.

¹⁷ *Confronting Moral Chaos*. 153-165.

¹⁸ *An Ethic*. 117-120.

¹⁹ The Student World 1948/3. POTTER and WIESER recount formation of the “continuing political commission to look into a whole range of concerns, such as power politics and the establishment of peace; the relation of Christianity and communism; and world order. The aim of this commission was (1) to stimulate discussion, thought and action on political issues and problems; and (2) to provide means for sharing information on political issues among the member movements.” *Seeking and Serving the Truth*. Geneva, 1997. 170.

²⁰ ELLUL Jacques, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. New York, 1967. 3. The original was *The Christian as Revolutionary*. The Student World 1948/3. 221-226.

if sporadic and sometimes cryptic written correspondence. Consider these excerpts from an ELLUL letter remarking on STRINGFELLOW's book, *Dissenter in a Great Society*²¹:

“Bien Cher: I have just finished your book... with great emotion – the description you give of the current development of the USA is almost unbelievable. In Europe, no one pays attention at all to this reality... I often ask myself which is easier – on the one hand, to live, like me, in a country radically non-Christian, where the invocation of the Gospel means nothing to the “person on the street” – or, on the other hand, like you to speak in an officially Christian country, to have the facility that the message of the Gospel is normally well received, but where it is a matter of breaking through the misunderstandings, the hypocracies, and giving the Gospel its revolutionary power. I was terribly pleased with your last chapter. You and I are trying to transmit an insupportable truth – and I sense in your pages the same urgency, the same passion that I feel in myself. I do not know how to tell you how near I am to you, how much it consoles me to know that there is, over there, a person chosen by God to carry on this combat which sometimes seems desperate to me.”²²

Years later, when STRINGFELLOW had been indicted by the Federal Government for “harboring a fugitive”, (the notorious anti-war priest and poet, Daniel BERRIGAN) he wrote to ELLUL what reads like something of a reply:

“It is difficult to put succinctly in a letter all that has happened and its background, growing out of the past several years in which this society has so much constricted and in which opposition to the regime has provoked a repression more serious and extensive than most people realize... There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that charges were brought against us because we have openly expressed our opposition to the barbarism in Indochina and the threatening totalitarianism in America. One might even say that we are attacked by the government because we are Christians, although I would not want to put it that way without a more complete designation of what that means.”²³

Are the Powers Creatures?

While still affiliated with WSCF as a law student at Harvard, STRINGFELLOW began envisioning a conference on theology and law that finally came to fruition in 1958. The conference, indeed overwhelmingly successful, was built around the English translation of ELLUL's *The Theological Foundation of Law*. That volume, a radical Christian critique of natural law which comported with STRINGFELLOW's own position, is pertinent to the topic of principalities in a number of ways, though a noteworthy one is that he there identifies institutions theologically with the principalities, powers, thrones, and dominions of the creation hymn found in

²¹ STRINGFELLOW William, *Dissenter in a Great Society*. Nashville, 1966.

²² Jacques ELLUL to William STRINGFELLOW 11/16/66 Box 9, STRINGFELLOW archives #4438, Cornell University; translated by RODES Robert, Notre Dame University.

²³ STRINGFELLOW to ELLUL 2/23/71, Box 15 STRINGFELLOW archives #4438, Cornell University.

Colossians 1:15.²⁴ That view is an anomaly in ELLUL's writing, since he more generally rejects the view that the powers are creatures willed by the God of Jesus Christ which have been somehow deflected from their true and valid purpose. The latter is, however, precisely STRINGFELLOW's view (and WINK's who followed him) which may have been nourished by the book.

For STRINGFELLOW, the principalities are indeed creatures, which is to say they have a life and integrity of their own.²⁵ He references them to the Genesis story and the granting of human dominion (not domination, he would stress). In this view each power has a particular vocation to praise God and serve human life. Now this matter of "vocation" can prove to be a very useful tool in analyzing a given principality. (Walter WINK develops this further for practical use.²⁶) It becomes actually quite a radical question to ask: What is the vocation of, say, a bank? How does it praise God by serving human life? Or, what is the vocation of a city? What is it called in the Word of God to be? What is the vocation of a nation, or a corporation, or virtually any particular institution?

We are authorized by baptism to make these are interrogations. They are queries of practical analysis with enormous political import. They entail the gift of discernment. This "charismatic gift" is substantially what Christians may bring to struggles for social transformation, where they are often working side by side in improvisational alliance with secular folks who have a lucid social analysis but who are effectively blind to half of social reality. Stringfellow writes:

"Proximate to the discernment of signs is the discernment of spirits. This gift enables the people of God to distinguish and recognize, identify and expose, report and rebuke the power of death incarnate in nations and institutions or other creatures, or possessing persons, while they also affirm the Word of God incarnate in all of life, exemplified preeminently in Jesus Christ. The discernment of spirits refers to the talent to recognize the Word of God in this world in principalities and persons despite the distortion of fallenness or transcending the moral reality of death permeating everything. This is the gift which exposes and rebukes idolatry. This is the gift which confounds and undoes blasphemy. Similar to the discernment of signs, the discernment of spirits is inherently political while in practice it has specifically to do with pastoral care, with healing, with the nurture of human life and with the fulfillment of all life."²⁷

The creatureliness of the powers leads Stringfellow to assert that they are not actually under human control, whatever naive misapprehension people hold in this regard. By way of the vocational question, it also signifies their standing before the judgment of God. STRINGFELLOW acknowledges that the exact origin of this creatureliness in the powers is a mystery. Human beings are obviously privy to the genesis of certain institutions (like universities or international stu-

²⁴ ELLUL Jacques, *The Theological Foundation of Law*. New York, 1960.

²⁵ See *Free* 52-53; *Ethic* 78-80; *Conscience* 27-32.

²⁶ *Naming* 115-118.

²⁷ STRINGFELLOW William, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*. Waco, 1973. 139; reprinted in WYLIE-KELLERMANN Bill (ed.), *A Keeper of the Word*. Grand Rapids, 1994. 302-303.

dent movements or nations), but something more than human initiative also comes into play.

Actually, though ELLUL denies their “creaturehood,” his view is not all that different. Concerning the nature of the powers, he situates himself somewhere between two positions, sometimes emphasizing one aspect, sometimes the other: 1) that they are less precise powers than traditional demons, but still possessing “an existence, reality, and as one might say, objectivity of their own” and 2) that they are simple human dispositions, human factors which are constituted as powers by virtue of being exalted as such.²⁸

For example, he treats the city as a purely human creation, virtually an act of rebellion first by Cain against God. And yet on the basis of an etymological argument he observes that the word for city means also the Watching Angel, the Vengeance and Terror. “We must admit that the city is not just a collection of houses with ramparts, but also a spiritual power. I am not saying it is a being. But like an angel, it is a power on a spiritual plane.”²⁹ So, perhaps not a creature with a vocation, but a mystery to which humanity has some privacy and initiative.

In Agreement About the Fall

In 1967, when the English translation of *The Presence of the Kingdom* (whose postwar theological manifesto clearly charting the future course of his whole life’s work) was republished, ELLUL asked STRINGFELLOW to provide an American introduction. Stringfellow wrote:

“Few books by American authors purporting to deal with theological ethics discern the presence and power of death in this world, in this day, even in America, as an essential clue, to nations and institutions as well as individuals, of their radical alienation from one another and from themselves, that is to say, of their fallenness.”³⁰

On this matter of fallenness STRINGFELLOW and ELLUL could not have agreed more. As far as STRINGFELLOW was concerned US Christians were hopelessly (the word is used advisedly) naive concerning the depth and ubiquity of the fall. Fallen creation included for him the distortion, confusion, and inversion of vocation in the principalities. It means they have become, every one, demonic powers – dehumanizing, enslaving, and dominating human life. It means they place their own survival above service to human life. It means, among other things, they usurp the place of God.

The structure of the fall in ELLUL’s work bears prominently on the common observation that he wrote on two parallel tracks. Jacques ELLUL would do sociological or historical analyses of political authority, say, or propaganda, or technology and would match them with works of biblical theology. For example, his volume on power, *The Political Illusion*,³¹ would be matched by a book on the Elisha cycle of 2Kings, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*.³²

²⁸ ELLUL Jacques, *The Ethics of Freedom*. Grand Rapids, 1976. 151-152.

²⁹ ELLUL Jacques, *The Meaning of the City*. Grand Rapids, 1970. 9.

³⁰ STRINGFELLOW William, *Introduction*. In ELLUL Jacques, *The Presence of the Kingdom*. New York, 1967. 3.

Or consider the volume which arrived at STRINGFELLOW's door, just as he had completed a first draft of *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*.³³ ELLUL's book, *The Meaning of the City* (so radically pessimistic about human works and radically hopeful about God's grace in history), is in fact the theological counterpoint to *The Technological Society* which is equally pessimistic about the tyranny of technique aggressively penetrating every aspect of human society. In this parallel process ELLUL made a rigorous methodological commitment to keeping his sociological analysis free of religious reference. He clearly desired the scathing sociological works to stand on their own as analysis, but he also wanted Christian readers to live with the dialectical tension of the two tracks.

STRINGFELLOW takes the opposite literary tact. In writing on the principalities he moves seamlessly between social analysis and scripture or theology. It is all one for him. That method is rooted, for him, in a radically incarnational theology which refuses any otherworldliness. The genius of the biblical witness is that "the Bible deals with the very sanctification of the actual history of nations and of human being in this world as it is while that history is being lived."³⁴ It might well be said that if you took *Technological Society* and *The Meaning of the City* and compressed them together under the weight of racial crisis and war making in American empire, the dialectical sparks would fly upwards and you would get a book very much like *An Ethic for Christians*.

Tactics of Imperial Power

In *An Ethic for Christians*, perhaps his most important book, STRINGFELLOW looked the Beast in the face without flinching, turning aside, or going weak in the knees. He was able to recognize in the principalities, and especially in the pretensions of American Empire, these characteristics in addition to those already mentioned:

The powers are neither neutral nor benign, but aggressively arrayed against human life. They victimize all, including leaders who are so enthralled that they see neither their own enslavement, nor their moral incapacitation. They are engaged in rivalry and competition with one another whereby their ethos becomes a realm of chaos and their survival perpetually threatened, such that they suffer a morality of survival, which supplants every other purpose and is itself their idolatry and service of death.³⁵

Note that while STRINGFELLOW understood the state as the preeminent principality, all of his observations are pertinent to a theological analysis of globalization, including the elaboration of superstructures like the World Trade Organization and its minions. Moreover, what he called the demonic "tactics" of the principalities have only become more entrenched and developed in this present era. These include: 1) the denial of truth; 2) doublespeak and overtalk; 3)

³¹ ELLUL Jacques, *The Political Illusion*. New York, 1967.

³² ELLUL Jacques, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*. Grand Rapids, 1972.

³³ Op. cit.

³⁴ *An Ethic* 47. / ³⁵ *An Ethic* 77-94.

secrecy and boasts of expertise; 4) surveillance and harassment; 5) exaggeration and deception; 6) cursing and conjuring (which includes the current tactics of official defamation and demonization); 7) usurpation, assimilation, and absorption; and 8) diversion and demoralization.³⁶ Note the heavy verbal character (he might have given more attention to the role of images in US culture). Together he summed these up as “Babel”.

“Babel means the inversion of language, verbal inflation, libel, rumor, euphemism and coded phrases, rhetorical wantonness, redundancy, hyperbole, such profusion in speech and sound that comprehension is impaired, nonsense, sophistry, jargon, noise, incoherence, a chaos of voices and tongues, falsehood, blasphemy. And, in all of this, Babel means violence... By the 1970s in America, successive regimes had been so captivated by Babel that Babel had become the means of ruling the nation, the principal form of coercion employed by the governing authorities against human beings.”³⁷

The Ethics of Resurrection

Some will find STRINGFELLOW’s unflinching vision unduly pessimistic and heavy. His realism may even tempt some to despair. And yet, nevertheless, beyond all imagining, he proclaims a freedom literally from the power of death. William STRINGFELLOW lived and wrote in the freedom of the resurrection, the freedom to die. He wrote as it were in the estate of justification – free to stand at any given moment before the judgment of God. And he commended thereby an ethic, without principle or program, which was sacramental, improvisational, incarnational and eschatological, radically hopeful, an ethic of resurrection.

It was, if one recalls the witness of Oslo, an ethic rooted in the “Lordship of Christ” alone. He was simply convinced “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus or Lord.” In that freedom he died and lived.

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³⁶ *An Ethic* 97-106. / ³⁷ *An Ethic* 106-7.

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William WYLIE-KELLERMANN: Nombrando los Poderes:

William Stringfellow como estudiante y teólogo

William Stringfellow, quien fue un activo participante de la FUMEC en el período de post-guerra (SGM), es mejor conocido en la iglesia de los Estados Unidos como el teólogo que rescató el lenguaje bíblico de “principados y potestades” para la ética social. Su experiencia y conversión como estudiante de la FUMEC inicialmente formó y desarrolló su temprano pensamiento y fundamento Bíblico referente a los poderes. Específicamente determinante fue la Conferencia de Oslo de 1947, que incluyó entre sus oradores a Martin Niemöller (del Movimiento Confesante de Alemania), al Obispo Belgrav de Noruega (puesto en prisión por dirigir la oposición de la iglesia de Quisling y su servidor), Madeleine Barot (participante de la resistencia francesa), y sobre todo Jacques Ellul (otro participante de la resistencia, mejor conocido como teólogo y analista social de la tecnología). La devastadora crítica por parte de Stringfellow y Ellul respecto al poder imperial depredador se incrementó a partir de una correspondencia de cuarenta años, la cual es últimamente un testimonio a la ética de la resurrección.

William WYLIE-KELLERMANN: Nommer les pouvoirs:

William Stringfellow, étudiant et théologien

William Stringfellow, membre actif de la FUACE dans l'après-guerre, est surtout connu au sein de l'Église états-unienne comme le théologien qui récupéra la terminologie biblique «principautés et pouvoirs» pour l'éthique sociale. Son expérience et sa participation au sein de la FUACE ont formé et façonné, au départ, ses premières réflexions concernant ces pouvoirs. Dans ce sens, la Conférence d'Oslo de 1947 a revêtu une importance toute particulière; parmi les orateurs se comptaient Martin Niemöller (du mouvement confessionnel allemand), l'évêque Belgrav de Norvège (emprisonné pour avoir dirigé la résistance de l'Église face à Quisling et ses acolytes), Madeleine Barot (résistante française) et, surtout, Jacques Ellul (autre résistant, plus connu comme théologien et analyste social de la technologie). La critique féroce que Stringfellow et Ellul ont dirigée contre le pouvoir prédateur et impérialiste s'est étoffée pendant quarante ans de correspondance et constitue, en fin de compte, un témoignage ultime de l'éthique de la résurrection.