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The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man. Walter Wink. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. 356 pp.

Walter Wink's latest book is the culmination of an expanding vision that has taken three decades to formulate. Wink's roots are in German theological liberalism. Feuerbach is one of his heroes and, though the name of Schleiermacher does not appear in the book's index, Wink grounds his entire discussion upon a seminal historical moment—the "mutation in God-consciousness" (51) that occurs with the appearance of "son of man" terminology (the Hebrew *ben adam*). This is language not very far from Scheiermacher's. He follows Troelsch and Harnack in tracing this moment back beyond the historical Jesus, through Daniel to

Ezekiel—even noting its extracanonical precedents. And the trajectory does not come to rest upon the hallowed uniqueness later ascribed to Jesus: the disciples (and all human beings, by implication) may discover "the power latent with them to become 'lords of the sabbath'" (69). All of this happens only as a development within human history, and Wink would naturalize the whole process in a way that outdoes even Schleiermacher.

Wink reflects his German pedigree in yet another respect. He begins with a real intellectual puzzle, one that is not just some grand rhetorical gesture. He begins with the enigma of the book's subtitle: The fact that the designation "son of man" (*ho huios tou anthropou* in the Greek, with that odd definite article in the genitive) is virtually Jesus' "only form of self-reference" (19). The importance of this, and of the philosophical issue of self-reference generally, can hardly be overstated. Wink writes an entire volume in answer to it.

The book's main thesis is that the "son of man" preserves the philosophical anthropology of Ezekiel 1—in which the One seated on the mystical throne "seems" to be human (26). The remainder of the book is a treatment of the various texts where "son of man" (or its trace, as in 1 John 3:2) gets preserved.

Ezekiel's language is almost torturously indirect: "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" is like "a bow in the cloud on a rainy day" (1: 28). But this is not for Wink (as it is for many) an indication that God is Wholly Other, badly rendered by the frail human imagination. Though the imagination is human and, of course, limited, Wink also wants to claim that "we can relate to God as human beings because God is truly Human" (42).

In fact, Wink declares that *only* God is fully Human. Here is a theological announcement that will no doubt ignite the misgivings of many who would take it as a form of anthropomorphic idolatry, obviously disconfirmed by the facts of original sin. But Wink would say that such moral failure is really a feature of "anthropocentrism" (26). Anthropomorphism is not anthropocentrism, because anthropomorphism captures the fact that the resources for the creative power of Being lie in our relatedness to others; anthropocentrism places the focus upon individual self-centeredness (39). The gulf between humankind and God is not an ontological chasm, but an unrealized intimacy of consciousness we have yet to bridge because we have yet to become fully Human ourselves.

Wink often resorts to Jungian language to express all of this—as when he refers to the historical Jesus as "an event in the history of the

psyche" (152). It is worth asking whether Jungian language is the discourse best suited to Wink's important purposes here, since it preserves so much the idea that human consciousness shares, at some level, a common historical development.

But Jungian archetypes are less central than Wink's concern with the notion of "power," and no one has had any more to say about the phenomenon of "power" than Walter Wink, whose writings include *Naming the Powers* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), *Engaging the Powers* (1992), *Cracking the Gnostic Code: The Powers in Gnosticism* (1993), *The Powers that Be* (1998). Here, he speaks of power in terms that Michel Foucault might have used: "The Domination system is able to survive only as long as it can delude people into believing that it is in their best interests to abandon their best interests . . . It seduces its devotees . . . to crush the spirit and produce predicable and pliant people to staff its economy and armies" (100). Jesus' response, as Wink portrays it, involves the willingness to suffer the contempt of those to whom he is called to speak the truth about social justice. This Wink traces back once again to Ezekiel, which is entirely "an account of the son of man's sufferings and endurance of contempt" for speaking the truth to the nation and "against counterfeit personalities" (101). Foucault's own preoccupation with issues of "power" is well known. What is not as well known is how much Wink and the late Foucault share in this regard.[1]

Wink's view is going to strike many Christians as thoroughly heretical. (This would not really surprise Wink, who has spent a career pondering the forms that abusive institutional power can take.) So it is ironic that Wink's project could actually be read as one resolution of a long-standing contention in early Christian orthodoxy. The dispute between the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians was formulated largely at the fringe of twin heresies: Patripassianism and Psilanthropism. Patripassianism (which caused such rancor in the Arian controversy) identified the Son wholly with the power (*dynamis*) of the Father, which made the Son's suffering—his passivity—seem scandalously unsuited to the Divine Majesty. Psilanthropism (which the Antiochenes were always struggling to avoid) seemed to make Jesus so human that the divine power of salvation seemed endangered. Wink sees Jesus' message as a

1. Foucault notes how the Cynic philosopher's life could be seen as one "continuous exercise" of *askēsis*. Wink in fact rejects the connection between Jesus and Cynicism (popularized by The Jesus Seminar) because it seems to make Jesus "more a philosopher than a preacher" (82). But there seems to be no good reason to suppose that Jesus could not have been, in a way, both.

"liberation" from "bondage to the Powers That Be" (92-93) through ascension to full Humanity. He would also insist that if the Divine is identified with Human Potentiality (if only God is Human), then one could allow for Jesus to be fully Human *insofar* as he embodied the divine power. And that would be one way of settling the matter.

Wink's thesis raises other issues. His project is couched in unapologetic humanistic language, which is "metaphysical" in the sense one could more comfortably espouse in the existentialist 1960s, namely, before the advent of postmodern anti-humanism. And here is where Wink has been walking his own walk, always in dialogue but not always in full agreement with his colleagues. For Wink is no postmodernist. Postmodernists typically forsake any grand vision of progress for the human race as a whole (in favor of localized webs of events and localized discourses). Wink's own view is better characterized as neo-liberal, combining a strong commitment to social justice with the idea that "something . . . gestating for centuries, since Ezekiel and Daniel, had come to birth in the psyches of the disciples," namely, a genuine "catalyst for transformation" (249). This is nothing if not Progress, and any serious rendering of that has to come off as a grand story about humanity in general—a "metanarrative," in Lyotard's sense, or even a salvation history—which is always the sign of departure from postmodernist discourse.

However, this presents a complication for Wink. Early in his career, Wink became skeptical of the very kind of bold assertions that he finds himself making in this new book. "Objectivism," as it was being "scientifically" conducted three decades ago, was a fruitless attempt to achieve "objective neutrality" and caused the Historical Quest to go "bankrupt"—as Wink himself insisted at the time (see the opening pages of Wink's *The Bible in Human Transformation*). Since then, postmodernism has made current what sounds like a version of Wink's own anxieties over objectivism, often combined with a left-leaning political stance against hegemonic exclusion of "the other" that Wink applauds. It is certainly true, moreover, that, as an ideology, objectivist discourse has frequently a political agenda of domination. But here important questions need to be asked. Does resistance to hegemonic regimes require dispensing with all "objectivist" discourse? At times, Wink seems to think so. This explains his remarkable modesty over the rich proposal his book presents. He intends to "honor the sincerity" of other views, and wants not to be seen as "promulgating new doctrines or making claims for the 'truth.'" He is presenting in this book (he says) only a "neglected but fresh alternative" (30). But is this really all that he is doing? If this were the case, what could one possibly be

reading here in this new opus by Walter Wink—some Derridean *tour de force?* Is this not a scholarly project that is the consequence of a career spent in careful reflection on the matters it raises, uttered in *objectively* framed discourse and important enough to spend 340 pages of closely considered text and notes to convey?

On this important philosophical point, Wink is simply inconsistent. On the opening page of his new book, he declares that the expression "'objective view' is itself an oxymoron; every view is subjective, from a particular angle of vision." This fact, he thinks, heralds the "end of objectivism" (7). But is objectivity *per se* the problem? One hopes not, because then there's not much left of Wink's own project. As Wink himself later asserts: "something 'objective' did happen to God, to Jesus, and to the disciples—a fact on the imaginal plane, not just an assertion of faith" (152-153).

The philosopher Richard Bernstein has defined "objectivism" in a way that actually conforms with Wink's project—as "the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent ahistorical matrix or framework."[2] For Wink there is such a matrix (one more indication of his neo-liberalism). That matrix is human potentiality, and this potentiality possesses positive *agapic* features. This is not some attenuated discursive play: It's a real metaphysical and ethical claim. It carries with it an implicit universality, and therein lies one primary source of its power.

But this is not its only remarkable feature. Statements about human potential are complicated by the fact that they are self-referential, and no one of whom I am aware has adequately clarified this. How can the human element within that matrix come to know and describe the locale it occupies and embodies? Clearly not as a disembodied practitioner of epistemologically "objective" decision procedures. But even so, should one have to be "detached" from such a matrix in order to represent it objectively? Though self-deception is a constant risk, it is just what ascension to full human potentiality presumably overcomes. And, for Wink, this means that we can speak the truth not insofar as we are "detached" from it—but only insofar as we embody it. (What this might mean for preaching does not get addressed here.)

Only God is fully Human. We are called to be more fully Human, and when we are that, we can speak more fully the truth. And *that* is the truly revolutionary claim that lies so pregnant within this book's pages.

2. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 8.

For the neo-liberal, the challenge is not to find a way of perfecting ironic conversation—Wink's only option if he denies the seriousness of his own truth-claims. The challenge is to make apparent how the language of Humanness can be incorporated into the language of inclusion in a way that reflects the true nature of our human relatedness. On that score, much of the philosophical heavy lifting remains to be done. But anyone seriously engaged in such a project could do no better than to learn from this exciting new work by Walter Wink.

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Transforming the Stone: Preaching Through Resistance to Change, Barbara K. Lundblad. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001. 157 pp.

In a time when some teachers of preaching, as well as people in the pews, mourn the changes in "the art of preaching" and claim that preaching has deteriorated to casual reflections and conversations, Barbara K. Lundblad proposes a different perspective. In her book, *Transforming the Stone: Preaching Through Resistance to Change*, Lundblad provides ample proof that the quality of preaching has not declined, but that forms of preaching are more varied. Changing times demand changing forms, and new forms require new evaluative criteria.

The craft of contemporary preaching, for Lundblad, is just as demanding now as it was for the great orators of the past. Sermons, whether delivered with or without a text, continue to require intense preparation: writing, and practicing, to be sure; they also demand observing, listening, and talking. Lundblad is very good at this combination. There is never any doubt for her about the importance of scripture texts for our time. She studies texts with thoroughness and expectation. In addition, she pays attention to what is happening around her, especially to the most common experiences of ordinary people. She uses all this information to help us get inside the relevance of ancient biblical stories for our present contexts.

Her sermon about an easy chair at the laundromat is one example of many. The scripture text on which this sermon is based is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. Barbara Lundblad begins with another anecdote. She tells of a pastor who discovered that, for some poor women, winning the lottery meant that they could buy new easy chairs to sit on in the laundromat. No luxurious trips or new clothes for them—