“History belongs to the Intercessors" by Walter Wink

excerpts selected by Bruce Gordon

Walter Wink (1935 – 2012) was a Methodist scholar and writer who taught at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, where he focused on biblical interpretation and theology. These quotes are from his award-winning book, "The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium" and have been selected for their thought provoking value. BG

Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the way of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current forces. Prayer infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present.

History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being. Hope envisages its future and then acts as if that future is now irresistible, thus helping to create the reality for which it longs. The future is not closed. There are fields of forces whose actions are somewhat predictable. But how they will interact is not. Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes.

These shapers of the future are the intercessors, who call out of the future the longed-for new 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, intercession is more than that. It changes the world and it changes what is possible to God. A space opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom. The change in one person thus changes what God can thereby do in that world.

All of Jesus' teachings on prayer feature imperatives. (See for example, Luke 11:9 – Ask… search… knock.") In prayer we are ordering God to bring the Kingdom near. It will not do to implore. We have been commanded to command. We are required by God to haggle with God for the sake of the sick, the obsessed, the weak, and to conform our lives to our intercessions.

Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, indecorous. It is more like haggling in an Oriental bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches.

History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being. If this is so, then intercession, far from being an escape from action, is a means of focusing for action and of creating action. By means of our intercessions we veritably cast fire upon the earth and trumpet the future into being. [Rev. 8:1-5]