

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Research background

### 1.1.1. Grounding both mission and peaceful living together in Indonesia

This study arises from its social location in Indonesia's pluralistic context. Indonesia is a state founded on the five principles of *Pancasila*, which provides a legal framework for the coexistence of six officially recognized religions and hundreds of indigenous beliefs, known as *kepercayaan* ("beliefs") and *aliran kebatinan* ("spiritual currents").<sup>1</sup> Consequently, in addition to the biblical mandate for mission to other faith communities, churches in Indonesia must learn to live together with them peacefully.<sup>2</sup>

Churches must navigate both responsibilities without succumbing to dualism and demonization. Dualism views reality as sharply divided into good and evil, which translates to us versus them. In contrast, demonization continues the trajectory by portraying “us” as victims of “them”, the disguised children of Satan.<sup>3</sup> According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, there is “a straight line from dualism to demonization to dehumanization to genocide.”<sup>4</sup> This dualistic and demonizing tendency typically happens within Christian communities because of one-sided characterization of “us”

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Hefner, “Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom in Indonesia,” *Religions* 12, no. 6 (June 7, 2021): 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060415>.

<sup>2</sup> Benyamin Fleming Intan, “The Ministry of Religion and the Rights of the Minority: The Witness of Protestant Christianity in Indonesia,” in *Calvin's and Neo-Calvinist Legal Theory in Indonesian Context*, vol. 3, Law and Religion in the Early Modern Period / Recht Und Religion in Der Frühen Neuzeit (Paderborn, Germany: Brill | Schöningh, 2023), 245, [https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657790500\\_012](https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657790500_012); Franz Magnis-Suseno, “Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Muslim Society: A Learning Process,” in *Menggereja Di Indonesia: Percikan Kekatolikan Sekarang* (Depok, Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Penerbit PT Kanisius, 2020), 9–11.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2011), 254–57.

<sup>4</sup> Sacks, 256.

as “the children of God” and “them” (i.e., other religious adherents) as “idolaters” or “demon-worshippers.” The church must establish a common ground for mission and living together with other faith communities to avoid this. In Acts 17, the apostle Paul presents a theological foundation for such engagement: Paul’s belief in the one true God provides common ground with the idolaters of Athens, as God is his and their Creator and Sustainer. At the same time, it serves as a call for mission, since this God has appointed Christ as the judge on the last day and calls everyone to repentance.

Contemporary pneumatology offers another vital theological basis for mission and interreligious coexistence, particularly relevant to the Indonesian context.<sup>5</sup> Kirsteen Kim articulates the Holy Spirit as the agent of God’s mission, urging the church to begin by discerning the activity of the Spirit<sup>6</sup> among other religious communities before engaging in mission.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, if the Spirit is active within the church and among people of different faiths, the church must abandon a divisive us-versus-them mentality that leads to demonizing others. Instead, Christians are called to discern how, and to what extent, the Spirit is at work among them, fostering shared peace upon a mutual pneumatological foundation. Such reflection is especially pertinent in Indonesia, where traditional beliefs in spirits and magic remain

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<sup>5</sup> This effort falls under the domain of the “pneumatology of religions” or “pneumatological theology of religions”—that is, a theology of religions approached through the lens of pneumatology. *Theologia religionum* aims to engage with the reality and significance of non-Christian religions. See Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 35–56.

<sup>6</sup> This study primarily adopts the capitalized term “the Spirit,” with the definite article, to denote the Holy Spirit—also known as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This choice ensures stylistic clarity and theological breadth, reflecting the Spirit’s unified activity across biblical traditions and redemptive history, in line with scriptural usage (e.g., John 3:8; Rom. 8:16; Gal. 5:16), without privileging specific titles.

<sup>7</sup> Kirsteen Kim, “Discerning the Spirit: The First Act of Mission,” *Norsk tidsskrift for misjonsvitenskap*, March 1, 2008, 18, <https://doi.org/10.48626/NTM.V62I1.4175>.

influential across many religious groups.<sup>8</sup> By reinterpreting Paul's encounter in Athens through a pneumatological lens, Indonesian churches may, like Paul in Acts 17:23, recognize that these communities appeal to various ambivalent spiritual forces for blessing and protection, yet remain unaware of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source of these benefits. The church's mission, therefore, is to discern and proclaim the work of this "unknown Spirit" as the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ.

This study aims to examine the work of the Spirit among other faith communities by refining Abraham Kuyper's perspective with Michael Welker's contemporary pneumatology. The selection of Kuyper and Welker is intentional and grounded in three key reasons for each.

#### *1.1.2. Why Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)?*

First, his doctrines of cosmic pneumatology and common grace provide a programmatic foundation for recognizing the Spirit's action in other faith communities. In the past two decades, there have been attempts to develop Kuyperian and broader neo-Calvinist contributions based on these ideas. For instance, Vincent Bacote has developed a Kuyperian public theology of culture grounded in his pneumatological interpretation of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace.<sup>9</sup> Building on Bacote's work, Robert Covolo advances a neo-Calvinist pneumatology of religions by incorporating insights from Kuyper and Bavinck, as well as Amos Yong's Pentecostal

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<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "'Nightmares and Daydreams' Fuses Jakarta's Social Ills with the Supernatural," ChristianityToday.com, August 23, 2024, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/august-web-only/joko-anwar-indonesia-horror-nightmares-daydreams-netflix.html>; Kristian Tamtomo, "Strategic Syncretism: Sorcery, Magic, and Supernatural Belief in Modern Indonesia," *Jurnal Atma Sosiologika* 1, no. 1 (March 27, 2024): 109–24.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

pneumatology of religions.<sup>10</sup> Richard Mouw and Benno van den Toren have also contributed with explorations into discerning the Spirit's work in non-Christian religions.<sup>11</sup> However, these efforts have not fully addressed all aspects, and further elaboration is needed. Benno van den Toren has reviewed the pneumatology of Amos Yong and the discernment criteria of Kirsteen Kim, observing that more explicit discernment criteria grounded in salvation history still require further development. Still, he offers only preliminary sketches, with full development yet to come.

Second, Kuyper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to religion, reflecting his reputation as a multi-systemic thinker whose influence spanned various sectors of society.<sup>12</sup> As evangelical theologians McDermott and Netland emphasize, a theology of religions must move beyond theological—or in this case, pneumatological—reflection to include a nuanced understanding of the lived realities of religious communities.<sup>13</sup> Kuyper's treatment of religion aligns with this perspective, as he engages it theologically, socially, psychologically, and politically, as the next chapter will show.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions," in *Kuyper Center Review, Volume 2: Revelation and Common Grace*, ed. John Bowlin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 315–34.

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," in *The Spirit Is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, ed. Gijsbert Van den Brink, Eveline Van Staaldue-Sulman, and Maarten Wisse, vol. 38, Studies in Reformed Theology (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 200–214, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391741>; Benno Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," in *The Spirit Is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, ed. Gijsbert Van den Brink, Eveline Van Staaldue-Sulman, and Maarten Wisse, vol. 38, Studies in Reformed Theology (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 215–31, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391741>; Benno van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 3 (July 2012): 263–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182961204000304>.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," in *Faith in Law, Law in Faith*, ed. Rafael Domingo, Gary S. Hauk, and Timothy P. Jackson (Leiden ; Boston: Brill | Nijhoff, 2024), 135, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004546189\\_009](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004546189_009).

<sup>13</sup> Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206.

Third, Kuyper rejects a “mere repristination” of past theological formulations and advocates for recasting orthodox reformed theology in light of contemporary challenges. He warned that reformed theologies become lifeless when their adherents grow narrow, recycling outdated polemics without addressing present realities, isolating themselves from the world.<sup>14</sup> Richard Mouw refers to this impulse as “Kuyperian *aggiornamento*,” updating Kuyper’s theology through engagement with current contexts and other Christian traditions.<sup>15</sup> In this same spirit, the present study aims at refining Kuyper’s programmatic recognition of the Spirit’s presence in other faith communities with the pneumatological insights of Michael Welker.

### 1.1.3. *Why Michael Welker (1947-)?*

Michael Welker’s contemporary pneumatology is chosen for three reasons. First, as a reformed theologian, Welker provides a distinctive alternative to Pentecostal (e.g., Amos Yong) and evangelical (e.g., Clark Pinnock) pneumatologies. His approach examines biblical traditions systematically as the basis for pneumatological reflection, rather than constructing it chiefly through abstract dogmatic reasoning.

Second, his pneumatology is closely aligned with salvation history and facilitates discernment. In *God the Spirit*, Welker develops a biblical-realistic pneumatology—anchored in biblical traditions, attentive to the progression of salvation history culminating in Jesus Christ, and centered on the Spirit’s activity within concrete, embodied realities. This construct enables discernment of the Spirit’s

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<sup>14</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gifts for a Fallen World*, vol. 1, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), xxxv.

<sup>15</sup> Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 75–79.

presence and clarifies its criteria, directly responding to van den Toren's appeal for more robust discernment grounded in salvation history.

Third, Welker's natural pneumatology demonstrates rich interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue potential. In his 2019 Gifford Lectures, *In God's Image*, he articulates his pneumatology regarding natural theology, presenting the Spirit's multimodal power as it relates to human culture through Western values such as justice, freedom, truth, and peace. While this approach does not attain the full depth of the pneumatology of *God the Spirit* that is grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ, it effectively fosters engagement with other disciplines (e.g., religious and peace studies). This interdisciplinary orientation is particularly valuable for dialogue with religious traditions, which are themselves complex and multidimensional.

## **1.2. Research question**

This study's main research question is: "In what ways does Michael Welker's pneumatology refine Abraham Kuyper's view of the Spirit's work among other faith communities?"

This inquiry is addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. How does Abraham Kuyper's pneumatology conceive the work of the Spirit among other faith communities?
2. How does Michael Welker's pneumatology conceive the work of the Spirit among other faith communities?
3. In what ways does Michael Welker's pneumatology refine Abraham Kuyper's view of the Spirit's work among other faith communities?

### 1.3. Thesis statement

A critical and comparative analysis shows that Welker's pneumatology refines Kuyper's view of the Spirit's work among faith communities by clarifying religion's embodied and embedded character, articulating a nuanced framework for discerning the Spirit's activity among other faith communities based on biblical traditions, and differentiating the indispensable role of the church community in this discernment.

### 1.4. Research methodology

This research will utilize a methodology grounded in literary research,<sup>16</sup> combined with a systematic examination of the primary and secondary literature of Abraham Kuyper and Michael Welker. Key texts by Kuyper include *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, *The Natural Knowledge of God*, *Common Grace*, *Pro Rege*, and *On Islam*. The core of Welker's contributions will be drawn from *God the Spirit* and *In God's Image*, supplemented by his additional books, articles, and book chapters. The systematic analysis will critically engage both theologians' views on the nature of religion, the activity of the Holy Spirit beyond the church, and the explicit and implicit interconnections between these areas. Building on this, the study will conduct a comparative evaluation of Kuyper's and Welker's positions, refining Kuyper's pneumatological insights through Welker's framework, highlighting where Welker affirms Kuyper's thought and where he addresses its limitations. These refined insights will be formulated into a series of ten theses. To assess the study's contribution to understanding the Spirit's work among other faith communities, these

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<sup>16</sup> Nancy J. Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 4th ed (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 41–49.

theses will be compared with the pneumatologies of religion proposed by neo-Calvinist scholars and Pentecostal theologians.

### **1.5. Outline of the study**

Chapter Two examines the first sub-question: How does Abraham Kuyper's pneumatology conceive the work of the Spirit among other faith communities? The discussion unfolds through four stages. First, it investigates his perspective on the cosmic Spirit's presence among religions. Second, it examines his interpretation of non-Christian religions. Third, it considers the role of the Spirit in these religious communities through his doctrine of common grace. Finally, the chapter concludes with a critical synthesis of these insights as a response to the guiding question.

Chapter Three explores the second sub-question: How does Michael Welker's pneumatology conceive the work of the Spirit among other faith communities? The discussion proceeds in three stages. First, it explores his view of religion through the lens of the multimodal human spirit and the necessity of discerning the Spirit. Second, it presents his biblical rationale that supports Spirit discernment in other faith communities. Next, it examines how the Spirit's active presence can be discerned among religious communities through his concepts of the multimodal and emergent Spirit, the liberating Spirit, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The chapter concludes by addressing two critical concerns in Welker's framework—namely, the relative absence of the Spirit's judgment and a Western secular bias.

Chapter Four addresses the third sub-question: "In what ways does Michael Welker's pneumatology refine Abraham Kuyper's view of the Spirit's work among other faith communities?" Following Kuyper's example of contextualizing the Reformed tradition, this analysis critically evaluates and refines his insights on the



Spirit's work among other faith communities with Welker's pneumatology, affirming foundational contributions while addressing limitations in the first two subchapters. The subsequent section synthesizes these refined insights into a series of ten theses on the Spirit's work among other faith communities. The chapter then concludes by critically assessing the study's contribution, incorporating comparative perspectives from neo-Calvinist and Pentecostal traditions.