

4. REFINING KUYPER'S VIEW OF THE SPIRIT'S WORK AMONG OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES WITH WELKER'S PNEUMATOLOGY

This chapter 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 concludes by critically assessing the study's contribution, incorporating comparative perspectives from broader neo-Calvinist and Pentecostal traditions.

4.1. Common affirmations

Welker's pneumatology substantiates and reinforces Kuyper's five foundational insights concerning the Spirit's work within other religious communities.

First, both Kuyper and Welker view religion as a communal, embodied, pluriform, and spiritually ambivalent phenomenon in which the human spirit, shaped by both divine and demonic influences, expresses itself through beliefs and rituals that form and are formed by individuals, communities, and society. This complex view challenges reductive accounts and calls for careful discernment. Kuyper frames this through theological, socio-psychological, and political lenses, emphasizing not only the presence of sin and demonic influence but also common grace. In contrast, Welker draws on the lens of multimodal anthropology, clarifying the human spirit's capacity

to integrate meaning across sensory, cognitive, material, and social dimensions, while remaining open to both divine and destructive spiritual influence.

Second, both maintain that the Holy Spirit, while revealed within the church as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, also operates in diverse, non-salvific ways among other faith communities without being detached from Christ. Kuyper limits the Spirit's saving activity to the church through the doctrine of particular grace, while attributing the Spirit's broader influence to the indivisible operations of the Trinity, the filioque, the organic motif, and common grace. Welker also affirms that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is known exclusively and salvifically within the church and, beyond it, as the liberating Spirit of God, while emphasizing that both are the same, one Spirit. He further describes a perichoretic or "selfless reciprocal interpenetration" between the Word and the Spirit: The Spirit reveals, testifies to, and actualizes the Word of God, while the Word discerns and distinguishes the divine Spirit from other spirits or demonic forces. Thus, this approach rejects any opposition, separation, subordination, or prioritization between the Spirit and the Word in either direction.¹ The perichoretic relationship implies that Spirit discernment must focus on their dynamic interplay, beginning with recognizing that human words, though often cloaked in deceptive certainty, are powerless apart from the creative Word of God. It then requires attending to the diverse scriptural testimonies (the written word of God) concerning the Spirit and the Word, and closely examining how Jesus Christ, as the one true Word, illuminates the Spirit, and how the Spirit, in turn, reveals Christ.

¹ Michael Welker, "Word and Spirit - Spirit and Word: A Protestant Response," in *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kusche, Concilium 1996/3 (London : Maryknoll, N.Y: SCM Press ; Orbis Books, 1996), 80–81; Similarly, Calvin also believes in a "mutual bond" between God's Word and God's Spirit. See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, chap. I.ix.3.

Third, both affirm that recognizing the Spirit's presence within other religious communities requires interdisciplinary engagement with lived religious experiences rather than relying on rigid theological assumptions. Kuyper, who analyzes religions from theological, psychological, social, and political angles, refuses to reduce religions to theoretical analysis. Welker likewise underscores the multimodal character of both human and divine spirit, whose powers span diverse life domains, thereby resisting the reduction of religion to dogmatic propositions.

Fourth, both Welker and Kuyper emphasize the need for humility and openness in response to the Spirit's surprising activity among other faiths. Kuyper highlights that the Spirit's work of common grace, oriented toward particular grace—whether preparing communities for conversion or producing fruits to be purified at Christ's return despite their potential destruction—calls for such a posture. Welker stresses the divine Spirit's emergent and incalculable nature, which defies final human judgments and remains open to ongoing transformation.

Fifth, both argue that the Spirit's work among other religions is mediated, in part, through the church's presence and mission. Kuyper describes the church as the "atmosphere of the Holy Spirit," capable of exerting transformative influence through the interaction of particular and common grace. Welker suggests that the church's threefold *Gestalt* serves as meaningful signs of the work of the Spirit of Christ beyond the church. Within this shared perspective, the church's witness—through both word and deed—signifies the Spirit's work beyond the boundaries of the church.

4.2. Addressing Kuyper's limitations with Welker's pneumatology

4.2.1. *Compartmentalization of the cosmic and redemptive Spirit*

As demonstrated earlier,² applying Kuyper's distinction between common grace and particular grace to pneumatology results in a compartmentalized understanding of the Spirit's cosmic and redemptive activity, ultimately leading to practical dualism. This outcome is understandable, as Kuyper formulated his doctrine of common grace without giving primary attention to the Holy Spirit.

Welker, by contrast, does not begin with a systematic dogmatic construct. Instead, he develops his pneumatology by tracing the continuity between the Spirit's work in creation and new creation as depicted in biblical traditions, especially the Old Testament. This method enables a coherent view of the Spirit's action across these domains. The clearer self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ then illumines the more ambiguous operations of the Spirit in the Old Testament. With the fulfillment of messianic prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth, the identity and mission of the Spirit become more sharply defined, culminating in the Pentecost event. This theological trajectory effectively addresses the issue of compartmentalization.

At the same time, Welker retains the essential discontinuity embedded in Kuyper's distinction between common and particular grace. Although the Spirit's peacebuilding ethos is evident within the church and among other faith communities, the revelation of Jesus Christ is exclusive to the church.

Welker's correction of Kuyper's compartmentalization does not entail dismissing Kuyper's contributions. Instead, the two represent distinct but complementary approaches. Welker offers a more comprehensive and refined

² See chapter 2.3.4.

pneumatology encompassing the Spirit's work inside and outside the church.

Nevertheless, Kuyper's doctrine of common grace remains valuable, both apologetically and pedagogically, as it challenges Christian exclusivism and provides an accessible foundation for deeper pneumatological engagement, such as Welker's.

4.2.2. *Lack of Spirit discernment*

As Chapter Two demonstrates, the lack of discernment in Kuyper's common grace stems from two main issues. First, he fails to adequately distinguish between the human spirit and the divine Spirit, resulting in an uncritical attribution of cultural advancement to the work of the Spirit. Second, his doctrine of common grace is built on abstract theological premises that fail to engage the concrete, lived contexts where spiritual discernment is most needed.

How does Welker's pneumatology address both limitations?

Welker distinguishes the divine Spirit from the human spirit in two key ways. First, he affirms the considerable power of the human spirit, which extends beyond intellectual and artistic domains to include cultural and social dimensions. However, greatness does not equate to goodness or godliness. This human power is profoundly ambivalent and susceptible to corruption by evil spirits, potentially becoming a force of immense destruction. It is the divine Spirit alone, he argues, that imbues humanity with justice, truth, and love.³ In contrast, Kuyper does not make room for a distinct notion of the human spirit. He adopts a totalizing framework in which fallen nature, though retaining remnants of divine power, inevitably descends into ruin without the restraint of common grace. He compares this condition to a wagon without brakes speeding down a mountain and crashing into a ravine: without common grace, the

³ Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, chap. II.ii.15 "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God." p 274

universe would immediately collapse into chaos and hell.⁴ Thus, human beings are maximally evil apart from common grace. Consequently, whatever is not hellish—virtually all aspects of life, including *sensus divinitatis*—is *automatically* attributed to the divine, obstructing distinction between human and divine agency.

Welker's understanding of the knowledge of God further diverges from Kuyper's view of a constant, automatic *sensus divinitatis*. Kuyper holds that the Spirit's common grace sustains an innate awareness of the divine in the heart of every individual. This perspective risks blurring the Spirit's divine revelation and conflating it with the human mind's religious projections. In contrast, Welker differentiates a vague *sensus divinitatis* from the Spirit's clear knowledge of God. Following Calvin, Welker understands *sensus divinitatis* as an extremely vague awareness of a vague transcendent power that surrounds all human beings. This sense of deity arises from creation, which by its beauty, order, and structure, points to the Creator God, who is invisible and eternal (Rom. 1:20). However, its vague knowledge of God is susceptible to be mistaken with human fancies, thus continually leading to idolatrous constructs.⁵ Only the Spirit reveals a determinate knowledge of God, which leads human beings beyond the clouds of indeterminacy of *sensus divinitatis*. Such knowledge of God is accompanied with experiences of reorientation toward liberation and interconnection with justice, mercy, and the pursuit of truth.

In terms of theological scope—particularly regarding the range of activity attributed to the human spirit and the divine Spirit—Kuyper and Welker need not be seen as fundamentally opposed, since they operate with differing theological objectives. Kuyper, operating within the boundaries of Reformed confessions, seeks

⁴ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 2019, 2:68.

⁵ Welker, *Creation and Reality*, 24–27; Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, chap. I.v.11.

to articulate the ontological foundations of reality. Accordingly, he primarily offers a totalizing account of divine presence. Although he differentiates three forms of the Holy Spirit's presence,⁶ he does not sufficiently integrate these distinctions with his broader doctrinal framework in a way that facilitates practical discernment. Welker, by contrast, advances a non-confessionally reformed, non-totalizing theological approach that aims at human discernment of God's determinate action in the world. His inquiry—centered on what can be clearly known or experientially apprehended—affirms the authority of biblical testimony while recognizing the epistemological limits of human understanding. This results in a more differentiated conception of divine presence through the Spirit. In this light, he accepts, yet reframes the classical notion of divine omnipresence—rejecting an abstract, uniform, and context-independent model, akin to a gravitational force, in favor of one that is differentiated and contextually sensitive.⁷ Analogously, Kuyper functions like a theological architect, establishing the overarching structure of divine reality, while Welker works more like an artisan, attending to how God's presence is discerned in specific contexts and experiences. For the present aim of discerning the Spirit's presence in other religious traditions, both approaches are essential: Kuyper's all-encompassing—albeit more enigmatic—vision of divine activity offers a crucial, programmatic foundation, while Welker's attention to the Spirit's concrete and context-specific manifestations provides a necessary complement by delineating its particular contours. In short, Kuyper affirms that the Spirit is everywhere; Welker explores *how* the Spirit is everywhere.

⁶ Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 119–20.

⁷ Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 97–98.

Second, Welker aims to characterize the Spirit of God by systematically exploring the interconnections between biblical values and their potential distortions under the power of sin. He insightfully argues that the Spirit is not merely any kind of spirit, but specifically the Spirit of justice, mercy, the knowledge of God, freedom, truth, love, and peace. These interrelated values form a pneumatological framework that clarifies the Spirit's presence and work within other faith communities. Kuyper likewise associates common grace—and thus the work of the Holy Spirit—with the preservation of “rights and freedoms,”⁸ developments of public justice, the abolition of slavery, care for the poor, the elevation of women's status, and public morality.”⁹ While these values overlap with Welker's, Kuyper does not explore their systematic interrelationships. At most, he connects morality with religious life.¹⁰ However, Kuyper fails to account for how sin can corrupt each of the following values: justice, mercy, freedom, morality, and religiosity. In contrast, Welker rightly emphasizes that even Roman law—and God's own law—were profoundly distorted by sin at the cross.¹¹ Kuyper, however, denied this, insisting instead that the legal system was an actual fruit of common grace that contributed to Christ's crucifixion.¹² In doing so, Kuyper risks construing evil as divine work, thereby fundamentally undermining theological discernment. Welker, by contrast, underscores the pervasive potential for distortion in all areas of human life, including pneumatology and human

⁸ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 2020, 3:88.

⁹ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 2019, 2:756–57.

¹⁰ Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 2016, 1:506–7.

¹¹ Welker, *God the Revealed*, 187; cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 198. The cross “certainly proves that we cannot stand God and that he must be eliminated if he comes too close to us. Those who took the initiative in that felt that they had to condemn Jesus precisely in the name of God. It was not criminals who did this, but men of high moral and religious convictions.”

¹² Kuyper, *Common Grace*, 2019, 2:179.

discernment—thereby urging humble questionings even of values upheld by human consensus as good.

Welker's realistic-biblical pneumatology addresses Kuyper's abstract, systematic theology. First, Welker highlights the Spirit's transformative presence in concrete human experiences, rejecting "theologies from above" that rely on abstract, systematic concepts detached from lived realities. Instead, he develops a realistic theology that speaks from and to the diverse experiences of God in real life, where the Spirit is encountered not in idealized conditions but amid human vulnerability, bringing liberation and deliverance.¹³ To clarify the Spirit's presence under earthly conditions, Welker replaces the traditional spirit–flesh dualism with a biblical perspective in which the Spirit works in and through the flesh, affirming that new creation restores and liberates human fleshliness rather than abolishing it. Furthermore, Welker introduces the thought-form of a multimodal Spirit—drawing from the biblical theme of the Spirit's outpouring—who operates not only within individuals but also from many sides of life, culture, and society in a discernible manner, thereby expanding the understanding of the Spirit's presence and activity beyond mere interior experience. Second, Welker grounds the discernment of the Spirit's work in the diverse and interconnected biblical testimonies, culminating in the concrete narrative of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. He maintains that the Spirit of Christ can only be rightly perceived when Jesus Christ is understood in systematic relation to both his pre-Easter and post-Easter narratives, as well as to Old Testament traditions that emphasize justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God, thus countering possible ideological distortions and affirming a thoroughly biblical pneumatology. On this basis, the one and the same Spirit is epistemically recognized

¹³ Welker, *God the Spirit*, x–xi.

in different degrees: among the church, as the one who reveals Jesus Christ, and among other faith communities, as the multimodal Spirit of love, peace, truth, freedom, justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God.¹⁴

4.3. Ten theses

Drawing upon Kuyper's insights as refined with Welker's pneumatology, this section outlines the Spirit's work among other faith communities in ten theses, each accompanied by a brief explanation.

Thesis 1: Kuyper programmatically affirms that the Holy Spirit operates non-salvifically among other faith communities by enabling their formation and flourishing, while also challenging tendencies to demonize or to idealize them.

Thesis 2: Religion is a potent yet ambivalent communal reality emerging from the human spirit—a multimodal power most vividly expressed in bodily ritual acts, which weave together symbols, beliefs, identities, and narratives into an integrated and formative force that both shapes and is shaped by individuals, communities, and societies. While this dynamic power enables profound religious expression, its openness to both the divine Spirit and deceptive spirits necessitates careful theological discernment.

Thesis 3: A key assumption in discerning the Spirit's work in other faith communities is the mutual, perichoretic relationship between the Spirit and the Word. The perichoretic relationship implies that Spirit discernment must focus on their dynamic interplay, beginning with recognizing that human words, though often cloaked in deceptive certainty, are powerless apart from the creative Word of God. It then requires attending to the diverse scriptural testimonies (the written word of God)

¹⁴ Cf. Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 146.

concerning the Spirit and the Word, and closely examining how Jesus Christ, as the one true Word, illuminates the Spirit, and how the Spirit, in turn, reveals Christ.

Thesis 4: There is both continuity and discontinuity between the Spirit of creation (the Spirit of God) and the Spirit of new creation (the Spirit of Jesus Christ). The continuity indicates that both are the same divine Spirit, which powerfully and tangibly creates, sustains, and renews the interdependent relationships of all creatures within the fragile, finite, and mortal conditions of the flesh. In the light of Jesus Christ, the Spirit's peacebuilding ethos—clarified and embodied in Christ—becomes evident (cf. *Thesis 7*). Yet discontinuity emerges in that the Spirit reveals Jesus Christ solely within the church, not within other religious traditions (cf. *Thesis 9*).

Thesis 5: The possibility of discerning the Spirit's work within other faith communities rests on the clarity revealed in the continuity between the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ (cf. *Thesis 4*). The continuity reveals a coherent and identifiable contour of the one and the same Spirit, as testified in the biblical traditions, initially experienced as an unclear yet powerful divine presence and progressively clarified through the prophetic traditions of the Messiah, the person and life of Jesus Christ, and ultimately in the outpouring of the Spirit.

Thesis 6: The Pentecost account reveals the Spirit's power as multimodal, working through emergent processes involving diverse individuals, expressions, and means, forming a complex, interdependent communal life shaped by free decisions.

Thesis 7: Religious communities fostered by the divine Spirit under conditions of fleshliness and amid the persistent threat of sin's destructive power are discerned according to the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. Persistently caught in cycles of frantic self-preservation—resulting in disintegration, helplessness, and powerlessness under the life-destroying forces of sin—these communities continually experience

powerful liberations by the Spirit, who reorients them toward the path of peace. The pneumatic peacebuilding ethos shapes the community's quest for peace, as they both experience and actively cultivate lasting harmony through practices of love. Here, love is defined as joyful, free, and creative self-withdrawal for the benefit of others. This approach supports and integrates the pursuit of truth through a dialogue of consensus and coherence, the experience and promotion of freedom, the systematic protection of the vulnerable (mercy), and the fair resolution of conflicts (justice). All of this is rooted in religious rituals and beliefs that reflect knowledge of God. These grand concepts of peace, love, truth, freedom, mercy, and justice must remain open to evaluation, with their content constantly recalibrated in accordance with biblical traditions, culminating in the story of Jesus Christ, to guard against the distorting influence of sin.

Thesis 8: Discerning the Spirit among faith communities is shaped by three central concerns: the pneumatic ethos of peacebuilding, the Spirit's multimodal power and ensuing emergent processes, and the potential influence of deceitful spirits. Discernment is both a gift of the Spirit and a human task. It begins with recognizing that the Spirit's initiative may precede human discernment, and with a deliberate relinquishing of preconceived assumptions about faith communities. Practiced through empathetic listening and sustained dialogue amid the complexities of communal life, discernment is characterized by a willingness to encounter others on their own terms and by an openness to interdisciplinary insights. It seeks signs of an emerging orientation within faith communities that aligns with the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos, as embodied in diverse human experiences, relationships, actions, and movements, and it is accompanied by gratitude for every sign of the Spirit's work. Yet the conclusions of discernment remain provisional, held with

humble openness to critique, recalibration, and surprise. Crucially, discernment also demands vigilance against the presence of deceitful spirits—those forces that may imitate peace while ultimately fostering violence, falsehood, oppression, or communal disintegration.

Thesis 9: The work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is discerned within the church through its threefold *Gestalt*—diaconal service, worship, and prophetic witness—which reflects the church community’s ongoing witness to the Crucified and Risen Christ, and its liberating orientation marked by the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. Although this ethos may be present in both Christian and non-Christian contexts, the unique revelation of Jesus Christ takes place solely within the church, where salvific knowledge and liberative experience are mediated only through conversion to Christ and ecclesial incorporation. Accordingly, there are two additional criteria for discerning the Spirit’s liberating work among other faith communities: first, their conversion to Christ and integration into the church; second, their open and responsive engagement with the church’s practices of evangelism, interfaith dialogue, and diaconal ministry. In contrast, a sustained rejection of the church’s witness signals the Spirit’s activity of judgment.

Thesis 10: The Spirit’s work of judgment is revealed in a graduated progression that mirrors the intensity of the Spirit’s liberating action: first, through the concrete outpouring of liberating love and the proclamation of Jesus, which expose humanity’s self-destructive condition and reveal the need for the Spirit’s deliverance; second, more sharply, in response to persistent, willful, collective, demonic resistance to these liberating experiences; and third, with greatest clarity, in the collapse of religious communities, signifying the Spirit’s complete withdrawal.

4.4. Critical evaluation of the ten theses

This section evaluates the contribution of this study by situating the ten theses in dialogue with comparable insights drawn from both neo-Calvinist thinkers, Richard Mouw,¹⁵ Robert Covolo,¹⁶ Benno van den Toren¹⁷—and Pentecostal voices, notably Amos Yong¹⁸ and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen¹⁹.

4.4.1. *Theses 1 and 2*

The fundamental affirmation that the Holy Spirit's non-salvific, flourishing operations in other faith communities (*Thesis 1*) prompt practices of discernment (*Thesis 2*) is aligned with all other insights. Mouw asserts the there is non-salvific divine favor ("common grace") beyond mere restraining of sin,²⁰ citing Bavinck's assertion of the working of God's Spirit in other religions,²¹ and asserting that the Spirit works even deep in the hearts of unbelievers,²² but suggests the need to discern "how the Spirit has been present" in the lives of unbelievers we encounter in witness and interfaith dialogue.²³ Covolo suggests the Spirit's gift of the *sensus divinitatis* as a

¹⁵ Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach."

¹⁶ Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions."

¹⁷ Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria"; van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions."

¹⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*.

¹⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit': Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Discernment of the Spirit(s)," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 39, no. 2 (July 3, 2019): 165–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18124461.2019.1627510>.

²⁰ Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," 204.

²¹ Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," *The Princeton Theological Review* 7, no. 3 (1909): 454, cited in Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," 207.

²² Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," 213.

²³ Mouw, 212.

transcendent basis for our shared religious humanity.²⁴ It also speaks of the presence and absence of the Spirit in the religions, necessitating discernment for a genuine engagement with them.²⁵ Van den Toren asserts that the Spirit's activity in other religions²⁶ requires discernment since religions are a human phenomenon that is a mixture of truth and error.²⁷ Yong argues that the Spirit of God, besides demonic and human, is at work in other religions, making them ambivalent and requiring discernment.²⁸ Kärkkäinen asserts that the Spirit being at work among religions is not a matter of debate, but instead on how to discern the Spirit.²⁹

As in *Thesis 2*, Covolo and Yong highlight the complexity of religious reality. While Covolo does not delve deeply into this complexity, he attributes the multiform character of religion to the activity of the Spirit, who bestows *sensus divinitatis*. This divine awareness gives rise to varied religious expressions shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts.³⁰ Yong, by contrast, foregrounds the pluriformity of religion by acknowledging its entwinement with broader cultural, social, and political domains and its outer diverse manifestations—rituals, liturgies, values, habits, and convictions—which stem from the religion's "inner spirits."³¹ While this study concurs with the recognition of religion's complexity, it locates the source of this complexity not in the Spirit's bestowal of *sensus divinitatis* but rather in the

²⁴ Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions," 329.

²⁵ Covolo, 329–30.

²⁶ van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," 275.

²⁷ van den Toren, 272.

²⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 166–67.

²⁹ Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 178.

³⁰ Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions," 331.

³¹ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 175.

multimodality of the human spirit, which encounters, engages, and integrates the many dimensions of religion and life.

Yong's conception of spirit (*pneuma*) is fundamentally bipolar, defined by the relational pair of concrete form and inner spirit.³² In this view, all reality is composed of both form and spirit, a framework Yong employs to advocate for a phenomenological attentiveness to appearances—engaging with the outward manifestations of things to discern their inner dynamics, such as habits, dispositions, tendencies, and powers.³³ Drawing on the German idealist tradition, Yong extends these inner dynamics beyond individuals to encompass communities, institutions, and nations.³⁴ He exemplifies this by proposing that to grasp the “spirit” of the Assemblies of God, one must observe its personnel across different levels, its mission and values, financial structures, educational and ministerial programs, alumni impact, and its local influence, thus recognizing the forces that move and shape its existence.³⁵ However, while Yong emphasizes phenomenological engagement, he does not specify the character of the formative force of spirit.

Thesis 2 articulates a Welkerian account of the multimodal human spirit, shaped by the same German philosophical tradition, yet offers more profound insight into the spirit's formative character, particularly its multiplicity, integrative power, and uncontrollability. Welker defines the human spirit as a living, integrative power coordinating a multitude of concrete elements across human subjectivity and life spheres.³⁶ His framework not only acknowledges the differentiated modalities through

³² Yong, 133–34.

³³ Yong, 151.

³⁴ Yong, 135–36. Yong rightly emphasizes that the biblical understanding of spirit possesses a corporate dimension—for instance, as manifested in the spirit of the church community.

³⁵ Yong, 152.

³⁶ Welker, *In God's Image*, 41.

which the spirit becomes operative, but also highlights the emergent unity that arises from their interrelation. Moreover, in contrast to Yong's model—which locates spirit within the internal dynamics of individuals or communities—Welker's account recognizes the involvement of persons and collectives in a supra-personal or supra-communal reality.³⁷

4.4.2. *Thesis 3*

Thesis 3 advances a perichoretic relationship between the Spirit and the Word, a theme recognized across the theological perspectives considered. Yong, followed by Mouw, emphasizes that “Word and Spirit are mutually defining.”³⁸ Likewise, Kärkkäinen contends that Christ and the Spirit always act inseparably within the one divine economy.³⁹ Van den Toren similarly argues that discerning the work of the Spirit beyond the church requires understanding “how Son and Spirit work together in the world,”⁴⁰ proposing, based on salvation history, an interdependent relationship between the Son and the Spirit.⁴¹ Covolo, from a neo-Calvinist standpoint, warns against the tendency to separate the Spirit from Christ, insisting that a properly Trinitarian Neo-Calvinism must understand the Spirit's movement in continuity with the unified ad extra work of the Triune God.⁴² While this study elaborates on the

³⁷ Cf. Reinhard Feldmeier, a German biblical theologian, who describes Geist in the German tradition as a sphere of power or influence that, while arising from communal interaction, transcends its origins to acquire relative autonomy and exerts a formative influence on both communities and individuals. Reinhard Feldmeier, *The Spirit of God: Biblical Pneumatology in Its Religious-Historical Context*, trans. Travis Niles (Paderborn, Germany: Brill | Schöningh, 2022), 14n36, <https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657760145>.

³⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 168–69; Mouw, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach,” 202.

³⁹ Kärkkäinen, “The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit ‘Signs of the Spirit,’” 177–78.

⁴⁰ van den Toren, “The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions,” 271.

⁴¹ van den Toren, 271.

⁴² Covolo, “Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions,” 330.

mutual relationship between the Spirit and Christ based on biblical traditions, the dogmatic framework of Trinitarian ad extra remains insufficiently discussed in this study.

4.4.3. *Theses 4 to 6*

Theses 4–6 affirm, respectively, the key continuity and discontinuity between the Spirit of creation and the Spirit of new creation (*Thesis 4*), this continuity then serves as the theological basis for discerning the contour of the Spirit’s activity (*Thesis 5*), and the Pentecost event as the definitive revelation of the Spirit’s multimodal power and emergent processes (*Thesis 6*). *Thesis 4* addresses two deficiencies in traditional pneumatologies noted by Kärkkäinen:⁴³ the unwarranted opposition between the divine Spirit and human experience, and the disjunction between the Spirit’s creative and redemptive work, without conflating them. It achieves this by providing a thick description of the identification between the Spirit of creation and the Spirit of new creation, while emphasizing the revelation of Jesus Christ as a unique activity of the latter. *Theses 5* and *6* remain largely unexplored in the previous studies. Collectively, these theses respond to Van den Toren’s call to anchor the discernment of the Spirit in other faith communities, not in metaphysical speculation but in the history of salvation attested in scripture,⁴⁴ thereby filling gaps left by the earlier studies.

4.4.4. *Theses 7 and 8*

Thesis 7 defines the liberating work of the Spirit, characterized by the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. *Thesis 8* builds on this by articulating the nature and

⁴³ Kärkkäinen, “Discerning the Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Pluralism(s), Secularism(s), and Science(s),” 4–6.

⁴⁴ Van den Toren, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria,” 225.

criteria of spiritual discernment, grounded in this ethos, the multimodal and emergent character of the Spirit's work, and the possibility of deceitful spirits.

Thesis 7 introduces the category of liberation to articulate clearly the Spirit's activity beyond the church without automatically implying the salvation of unbelievers, responding to concerns commonly voiced by evangelical exclusivists.⁴⁵

Theses 7 and 8 constitute a key contribution of this study, examining non-Christologically explicit Christian criteria, yet still grounded in God's revelation in Christ and biblical traditions, through the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. The suggestions made by Yong and Covolo—namely, “signs of the kingdom,”⁴⁶ “truth, goodness, beauty, and holiness”⁴⁷ as non-Christological criteria—are ambiguous due to their lack of detailed explanation. Van den Toren discusses Kirsteen Kim's four criteria: the confession of Christ as Lord (ecclesial), the fruit of the Spirit (ethical), the practice of the gifts of the Spirit (charismatic), and liberating activities and the proclamation of the gospel to the poor (liberational). While these criteria offer more clarity than the previous ones, Van den Toren observes two critical points: first, Kim herself acknowledges the inherent ambiguity of each criterion; second, these criteria can point in multiple, even contradictory, directions, which makes discernment uncertain.⁴⁸ Van den Toren then proposes a framework grounded in salvation history, suggesting that the Spirit's Christ-ward movement provides the interpretive context for these criteria. Thus, even in contexts where the name of Christ is unknown, the

⁴⁵ See Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 121–28; J. David Willoughby, “The Spirit of God and the Religions of the World: A Response to Amos Yong's Claims,” *The Gospel Coalition* 49, no. 2 (August 2024): 423–33.

⁴⁶ Covolo, “Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions,” 324.

⁴⁷ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 165.

⁴⁸ Van den Toren, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria,” 219–20; Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (London: SPCK, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 168–69.

appearance of one or more of Kim's criteria could indicate the presence of the Spirit of Christ, drawing a community toward Christ.⁴⁹ However, this framework does not resolve the ambiguity of the criteria. This study contributes further by clarifying the ambiguity of the criteria, offering an in-depth exploration of the biblical content of and interconnections among grand concepts of justice, mercy, knowledge of God, freedom, truth, love, and peace, and also with the testimonies of the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ. However, it also acknowledges that these criteria, like all things, remain vulnerable to the influence of sin, necessitating continual critique and examination. While the study does not claim to offer absolute, perennial criteria, it provides greater clarity surrounding non-Christologically explicit criteria than the previous studies.

The notion of the Spirit's multimodality aptly encapsulates the shape of the Spirit's power as revealed in the Pentecost event—concrete, multicontextual, individual, empathetic, and pluriform—yet underemphasized in the other studies.⁵⁰ The notion of emergent process combines two insights mentioned by van den Toren and Kärkkäinen: that the Spirit's work is always partial and never final;⁵¹ and that divine and human agency are combined yet not confused, thus correcting an unwarranted dualism between natural and divine agency.⁵²

The nature of discernment in *Thesis 8* combines insights from separate studies: Discernment is both a gift of the Spirit and a human task.⁵³ It is aware of the

⁴⁹ Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 226.

⁵⁰ The Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit receives only brief attention in Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 38–40; van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," 269; Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions," 326–27.

⁵¹ Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 226.

⁵² Kärkkäinen, "Discerning the Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Pluralism(s), Secularism(s), and Science(s)," 6–7.

⁵³ Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 217; Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 168; Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 141.

possibility of the Spirit's work before our discernment,⁵⁴ forgoing a priori positions,⁵⁵ practiced through empathetic listening and ongoing dialogue with an empirical and particular faith community,⁵⁶ willingness to encounter the others in their terms,⁵⁷ receptive to interdisciplinary insights,⁵⁸ orientational,⁵⁹ provisional,⁶⁰ and open to critique, recalibration, and surprise.⁶¹ The present study can gain further insights into the nature of discernment from the other studies in three ways. First, the study can benefit from a strong biblical-systematic theology of discernment like Yong's.⁶² Second, it may be enriched by exploring the consequences of empathetic dialogue, including the work of comparative theology,⁶³ a performative pneumatology of hospitality,⁶⁴ and mutual honor and critique between the Christian discerners and the faith communities.⁶⁵ Finally, the study could be deepened by attending to the

⁵⁴ van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," 276.

⁵⁵ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 173–74; Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 227.

⁵⁶ van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," 276; Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 228; Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," 212; Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 127.

⁵⁷ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 181.

⁵⁸ Yong, 185.

⁵⁹ Mouw, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach," 211.

⁶⁰ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 166; Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 179.

⁶¹ Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 179.

⁶² Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 139–62.

⁶³ Yong, 174–75; Kärkkäinen, "Discerning the Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Pluralism(s), Secularism(s), and Science(s)," 16; See Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?*, vol. 11, Studies in Systematic Theology (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004231245>.

⁶⁴ Covolo, "Advancing a Neo-Calvinist Pneumatology of Religions: The Role of Recent Yongian Contributions," 328–29; See Amos Yong, "The Spirit of Hospitality: Pentecostal Perspectives toward a Performative Theology of Interreligious Encounter," *Missiology: An International Review* 35, no. 1 (January 2007): 55–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182960703500105>.

⁶⁵ Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 179; Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 173–74.

formative role of wisdom, spiritual disciplines,⁶⁶ and communal and ecumenical dialogue in applying and refining the criteria for Christian discernment.⁶⁷

Yong underscores a significant concern that this study underemphasizes: the need to refine our Christian criteria through dialogue with other religions. He points out that various faiths understand goodness, nobility, and truth differently. Therefore, it is crucial to translate our Christian criteria into intelligible and plausible terms within other religious traditions. This process can be achieved through interfaith dialogue and comparative theology.⁶⁸ Moreover, he warns against imposing Christian categories that may be alien to other traditions, reminding us that Christians themselves would resist having their spiritual experiences interpreted through, for instance, a Buddhist lens.⁶⁹ At its core, his caution is directed against any assumption of the intrinsic superiority of Christian categories in the absence of authentic interreligious engagement.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos proposed in this study must first undergo careful translation before it can be responsibly applied in interreligious contexts.

Thesis 8 also offers another contribution of this study, by introducing the overlooked possibility of lying spirits, a theme absent from the other studies, including Yong's, which addresses only overt and horrific demonic manifestations.⁷¹ This notion sensitizes us to the possibility of false appearances and underscores the need to temper the certitude of our discernment. Framed in New Testament terms—

⁶⁶ Van den Toren, "Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria," 227.

⁶⁷ Kärkkäinen, "The Challenge of Discerning Between the Genuine and Counterfeit 'Signs of the Spirit,'" 179.

⁶⁸ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 171–74.

⁶⁹ Yong, 177.

⁷⁰ Yong, 173–74.

⁷¹ Yong, 155.

the devil appearing as “an angel of light”—it may also serve as a constructive bridge between pneumatologies of religion and the rich traditions of discernment of spirits developed in medieval, early modern, and contemporary spiritualities.⁷²

4.4.5. Thesis 9

The identification of the church as the locus where the Spirit witnesses Christ, the Spirit’s role in conversion, and the church’s need to engage in interfaith dialogue and witnessing of Jesus Christ are traditional affirmations shared by the other studies.⁷³ The study also shares van den Toren’s suggestion that the divine favor experienced by other faith communities can be understood epistemically only through Christian witnesses.⁷⁴ Thus, the non-Christologically explicit criteria of the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos find their clarification and embodiment in Jesus Christ.

Distinctively, this study contributes a dimension not explored in the other works: it articulates how the church’s engagement can be understood as a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ at work within other religious communities. This is achieved through the application of Michael Welker’s threefold *Gestalt* of the church. As other faith communities encounter the church’s practices of evangelism, diaconal service, and prophetic witness receptively, they simultaneously encounter the Spirit’s testimony to Christ and the manifestation of divine love, justice, mercy, and

⁷² See Clare Copeland and Jan Machielsen, eds., *Angels of Light? Sanctity and the Discernment of Spirits in the Early Modern Period*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 164 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012); Wendy Love Anderson, *The Discernment of Spirits: Assessing Visions and Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages*, Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation 63 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Joseph A. Tetlow, *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2016), 89–110.

⁷³ Mouw, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: A Neocalvinist Approach,” 212; van den Toren, “The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions,” 274–76; Van den Toren, “Discerning the Spirit in World Religions: The Search for Criteria,” 226; Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, 4:263ff.; Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 52, 178.

⁷⁴ van den Toren, “The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions,” 275.

truth. However, the faith communities' persistent rejection implies the presence of the Spirit of judgment.

4.4.6. *Thesis 10*

Thesis 10 offers a modest contribution, absent from the other studies: the Spirit's judgment unfolds in a graduated progression that mirrors the Spirit's liberating work. Discernment, therefore, must attend to both, though asymmetrically—liberation precedes judgment. Hence, we must not rush to condemn.

4.4.7. *Conclusion*

The contributions of this study both affirm and advance ongoing conversations on the pneumatology of religions within the Kuyprian tradition. The study integrates previously fragmented perspectives, drawing on Kuyprian's programmatic insights and refining them with Welker's pneumatology. It resonates with broader neo-Calvinist and pentecostal affirmations regarding the Spirit's work among other faith communities (*Theses 1 & 9*), the complexity of religious phenomena, the essential role of discernment (*Thesis 2*), and the inseparable unity of Word and Spirit (*Thesis 3*). Its distinctive contributions include clarifying ambiguous discernment criteria and the nature of spirit, introducing underexplored themes such as the possibility of deceptive spirits and the Spirit's graduated judgment (*Thesis 8 and 10*), and developing a nuanced framework of discernment grounded in the continuity of the Spirit's creative and redemptive work, the Spirit's multimodal power and emergent processes revealed at the Pentecost, and the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos (*Theses 4–8*). Furthermore, the study deepens understanding of the church's role through Welker's threefold *Gestalt* of the church (*Thesis 9*).

Nevertheless, the study remains provisional and requires further refinement. It would benefit from deeper empirical engagement with religious communities in

Indonesia, expanded dialogue with comparative theology and pentecostal pneumatologies, and a more thorough exploration of how Christian criteria for discernment can be meaningfully translated into other faith traditions.