3. THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT AMONG OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES ACCORDING TO MICHAEL WELKER

This chapter critically examines the second sub-question: How does Michael Welker's pneumatology conceive the work of the Spirit among other faith communities? The discussion unfolds 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, the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Finally, it concludes with critical remarks on the relative absence of the Spirit of judgment in Welker's framework and his Western secular bias.

3.1. Religion as a phenomenon of the multimodal human spirit

What is multimodality? In media and business communication studies, the concept refers to the interaction of multiple media to enhance communication. In media, this involves the combination of text, speech, and images, while in business communication, it pertains to various customer engagement touchpoints.[1]

The human spirit is a multimodal power—that is, working "from many sides." To illustrate this, Welker draws on the example of early childhood learning. When an infant points at an object and vocalizes, caregivers respond by naming it, leading to the child's gradual recognition of meaning. This process coordinates and integrates

[1] Michael Welker, *In God's Image: An Anthropology of the Spirit*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 24.

visual (seeing the object), auditory (hearing the word), tactile-motor (pointing), and cognitive (associating the word with the object) modalities. The seemingly simple deictic process thus reveals the coordinating and integrative power of the human spirit. The power becomes even more intricate in the broader contexts of language acquisition and communication, as the child is embedded into a social network of attention exchange. Through these interactions, the child learns to communicate and participates in shared meaning-making within social relations.[2]

The human spirit possesses remarkable power across diverse domains. Its multimodal capacity enables individuals to integrate and coordinate a wide array of elements—such as communication, memory, imagination, ideas, information, narratives, sensations, emotions, and symbols—as they engage with the complexities of social life. This integrative function is concretely expressed across various cultural and communal domains, including religious rituals, literature, science, the arts, and music.[3] Moreover, the human spirit is not limited to individual subjectivity; human beings do not merely possess spirits but actively participate in a larger, encompassing reality—"the ocean of the spirit."[4] Drawing on Hegel's insights, this living, supra-personal human spirit plays a crucial role in coordinating and integrating religious, moral, and political spheres of life, encompassing their diverse facets and dynamic interactions.[5]

Examining religion through the lens of Welker's multimodal power of the human spirit allows us to affirm three fundamental insights. First, religion derives its

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[2] Welker, 29–35.

[3] Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 137–38.

[4] Welker, 138.

[5] Welker, *In God's Image*, 41.

power not only from the transcendent spiritual realm but also from the capacities of the human spirit itself. The multimodal power of the human spirit enables religion to synthesize diverse elements—ideas, symbols, rituals, memories, festivals, and texts—into a coherent and formative force that shapes both personal identity and societal structures.[6] This recognition necessitates a careful distinction between the human spirit and other spirits, particularly to avoid the classical liberal tendency to conflate the human spirit with the divine Spirit.[7]

Second, the human body holds a central role in religion, as the spirit operates through the body. Drawing on Pauline anthropology, Welker views the human body as the focal contact point between the human spirit and spiritual forces, whether evil spirits or the divine Spirit.[8] He also highlights that religious rituals serve as a clear embodiment of the formative power of the human spirit.[9] This perspective readily aligns with interdisciplinary research on the relationship between religion and the human body. For example, cognitive linguist Susan Turner argues that in religious rituals, the human body serves as a "vehicle for religious experience," embodying

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[6] Michael Welker, "Comfort, Freedom, Justice, and Truth: Christian Religion, the Formation of Character, and the Communication of Values," in *The Impact of Religion: On Character Formation, Ethical Education, and the Communication of Values in Late Modern Pluralistic Societies*, ed. Michael Welker, John Witte, and Stephen K. Pickard, The Impact-Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 32–34; Herman J. Selderhuis, "Introduction," in *The Power of Religion / Religion and Power*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (De Gruyter, 2023), 2, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111229102-001: Regarding the power of religion, Selderhuis highlights its profound influence across all aspects of life, emphasizing that religious education within the home can significantly shape children's engagement in the public sphere.

[7] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Discerning the Holy Spirit in the World of Religious Pluralism(s), Secularism(s), and Science(s): A Multilayered Constructive Christian Vision of Pneumatology for the Third Millennium," *The Journal of World Christianity* 14, no. 1 (February 23, 2024): 4, https://doi.org/10.5325/jworlchri.14.1.0001.

[8] Welker, *In God's Image*, 100–101; Michael Welker, "Flesh-Body-Heart-Soul-Spirit: Paul's Anthropology as an Interdisciplinary Bridge-Theory," in *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 50.

[9] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 138.

multimodal communicative events.[10] Similarly, the anthropologist Richard Sosis, in his view of religions as complex adaptive systems, places bodily ritual performance at the center of religious life. Through interaction with other religious elements, these bodily performances generate emergent religious effects, such as collective historical memory, religious group identity, and a shared worldview.[11] Notably, Turner's concept of religious rituals as embodied, multimodal communicative events and Sosis's understanding of emergent religious effects correspond to what Welker attributes to the enabling power of the multimodal human spirit, highlighting the potentially complementary nature of their insights.

Third, despite its formative power, religion is ambivalent and requires the power of the divine Spirit. [12] On the one hand, religion can certainly serve as a force for good, providing a foundation for moral integrity, fostering benevolent character, and promoting social-political peace. On the other hand, it can also suppress human freedom, perpetuate injustice, and institutionalize fear, hatred, and hopelessness in the name of god(s) among its adherents, while also being susceptible to destructive political forces.[13] This ambivalence suggests that religion requires more than just the power of the human spirit—it needs the divine Spirit that gives orientation and elevates religion beyond destructive self-preservation. However, the spiritual realm is

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[10] Sarah Turner, "Multimodality," in *Analysing Religious Discourse*, ed. Stephen Pihlaja, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 73, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108863957.005.

[11] Sosis, "The Building Blocks of Religious Systems," 431.

[12] On ambivalence of religions, see Appleby's highly-cited book that examines the commonalities between religious terrorists and peacemakers: R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000); Consider, for example, the paradox often discussed about Indonesia — a country known for its deep religiosity, yet simultaneously plagued by widespread corruption. See, Muchamad Zaid Wahyudi, "Religius, tetapi Gemar Korupsi; Apa yang Salah?," Kompas.id, March 8, 2025, https://www.kompas.id/artikel/religius-tapi-gemar-korupsi-apa-yang-salah; Toronata Tambun, "Why Corruption Thrives in a Religious Society," *The Jakarta Post*, March 26, 2025, https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2025/03/26/why-corruption-thrives-in-a-religious-society.html.

[13] Cf. Welker, *In God's Image*, 84–86.

not limited to the human and divine; it also includes evil spirits that can masquerade as benevolent forces while ultimately promoting deception and destruction.[14]

In sum, 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.

3.2. A biblical rationale for discerning the Spirit in other faith traditions

In *God the Spirit*, Michael Welker's biblical-realistic pneumatology systematically explores present experiences of the Spirit under earthly conditions by analyzing scripture's progressive testimonies to delineate the Spirit's distinctive contour. He starts with the early, ambiguous, yet real experiences of the Spirit in the book of Judges, which suggest the Spirit's emergent, liberating work and highlight the need for further discernment. The contour of the Spirit becomes more defined within Israel's prophetic traditions, where the Spirit of God is concentrated in the figure of the Messiah, bringing justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God. The Gospels identify Jesus of Nazareth as this Spirit-endowed Messiah, in whom justice, mercy, divine knowledge, and truth are concretely embodied, further clarifying the liberating work of the Spirit. Ultimately, in the event of Christ's outpouring of the Spirit upon God's

[14] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer, 1st English-language ed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), chap. 2.4.

people, the clearest revelation of the Spirit emerges as the Spirit of freedom, love, and peace.[15]

This revealed contour of the Spirit enables us to discern his presence *beyond* the communities of Jesus Christ, including in other faith traditions. Welker rightly identifies the Spirit of new creation, recognized as the Spirit of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, as the same Spirit of creation, by emphasizing the continuity of the Spirit's operation in and through the flesh. He does not conceive of creation merely as God's initial act of bringing the world into being but also as His ongoing work of sustaining and governing the whole of creation across its biological, social, cultural, political, historical, and cultic-religious dimensions.[16] Within this creation, the Spirit of God grants life to finite, perishable creatures by enabling their participation in the common medium of life—the breath of God—which integrates their individual existence into complex interdependent relations with all living beings. Conversely, the withdrawal of God's Spirit results in creaturely decay and death (Ps. 104:29-30; Job 34:14–15).[17] Psalm 139:1–7 highlights two essential aspects: first, God's multi-perspectival knowledge of human beings in their various fleshly conditions, and second, the fragile, frail, and vulnerable nature of embodied human existence. In this way, the Spirit of creation operates in and through the fleshly reality of creatures.[18] Similarly, the Spirit of new creation renews human flesh and elevates its character by placing it in the service of the Spirit. The prophecies of Ezekiel 8–11 and 36 vividly describe the Spirit's role in replacing Israel's heart of stone with a fleshly heart. The

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[15] Welker, 336–41; Cf. Welker, *God the Revealed*, 142–43.

[16] J. C. Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue*, 2nd edition (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019), 30–32.

[17] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 160.

[18] Welker, 163.

heart of stone symbolizes a state of desensitization toward others and self-enclosure, resulting from self-preservation mechanisms that attempt to resist the fragility and vulnerability inherent in creaturely existence.[19] In contrast, the new fleshly heart remains fragile, frail, and vulnerable, yet precisely in this way, it is uniquely capable of relationships with God and with others.[20] Furthermore, the bestowal of a fleshly heart signifies a renewal of both internal and external relational structures, which no longer operate according to the principle of self-preservation but rather through relations of trust and peace.[21] Importantly, the Spirit's renewal of human beings does not occur in a realm of "pure spirit" beyond the flesh; rather, it takes place also within their fleshliness.[22] Therefore, the Spirit of new creation is identical to the Spirit of creation—the Spirit of God who actively participates in creating, sustaining, and renewing relations across all creation, operating in and through the realm of the flesh. As a result, the biblical testimony concerning the Spirit's work in new creation offers a valuable insight for discerning the Spirit's broader activity within creation, including among other religious traditions.[23]

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[19] Welker, 167–68.

[20] Welker, 166.

[21] Welker, 171.

[22] Welker, 166–67.

[23] Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 96. While Welker's arguments are grounded in the Old Testament, Berkhof offers a complementary perspective. He observes that redemptive categories associated with the Spirit in the New Testament—such as regeneration and new creation—are inherently creational. Berkhof concludes, "Only he who knows God's Spirit in re-creation can truly distinguish His signs in creation," highlighting the intrinsic continuity between the Spirit's work in creation and redemption. Bolt, "The Ecumenical Shift to Cosmic Pneumatology," 261–62. Similarly, Bolt asserts that drawing cosmic implications from the Spirit's redemptive work in the New Testament is legitimate, as the Pentecostal Spirit of Jesus is the same cosmic Spirit revealed in the Old Testament.

3.3. Discerning the Spirit among other faith communities

Discerning the Spirit among other faith communities necessitates attention to a central claim: biblical traditions present the Spirit's power as multimodal, initiating emergent processes that concretely liberate individuals and communities from sin and cultivate the *pneumatic peacebuilding ethos*. In relation to Jesus Christ, this Spirit is identified as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, thereby disclosing its liberating power as the very power of Christ himself.

3.3.1. Multimodal and emergent

On Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out from heaven. It filled the assembled disciples in the form of "divided tongues as of fire" (Acts 2:3). As they proclaimed the mighty works of God in various languages, people from diverse nations and linguistic backgrounds understood them. This moment marked the formation of a new community from a multitude of cultural, national, linguistic, and social differences. Peter interpreted this as fulfilling Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32), which foretold the Spirit's outpouring on all kinds of people—sons and daughters, young and old, male and female servants. The Spirit reconfigured individuals, formerly shaped by social and cultural boundaries, into a new network of interdependent relationships centered on Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 42–47).[24]

This Pentecost activity exemplifies the Spirit's multimodal power. The Spirit acts across diverse relational dynamics and from multiple angles—not only within individuals or in binary relationships between humans and God, but also within a many-to-many communal matrix. Yet, this operation does not override individual distinctiveness. Instead, the Spirit affirms and engages particular persons in their

[24] Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 88; Michael Welker, "Holy Spirit and Human Freedom: A John Paul II Memorial Lecture," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 8, no. 1 (2017): 17.

contexts.[25] As a result, discerners often perceive the Spirit's work as fragmentary, calling for attentive listening and sustained communal reflection.

This dynamic power of the Spirit entails four key implications for discernment. First, it requires full engagement in the messiness of community life—what Van der Kooi describes as discerning "with our boots in the mud."[26] Second, discernment remains provisional, open to critique and recalibration. Third, genuine dialogue requires attentiveness to others' contexts, languages, and cultures.[27] Fourth, interdisciplinary insight is essential, as the Spirit's movement transcends purely religious categories and interacts with complex societal dynamics.

On Pentecost,[28] the Spirit also initiates emergent processes that form and reshape the community. Emergence refers to properties that arise from the configuration of interdependent relationships—qualities that cannot be fully understood by analyzing individual components alone.[29] While a mechanical clock operates through predictable interaction of its parts, emergence involves a surplus—a new, irreducible whole. A helpful example is consciousness, which arises from neural interaction but is not reducible to it. Likewise, the Spirit suddenly reorders the interpersonal relationships of the disciples gathered in the house (Acts 2:1–2) and those of the diverse crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). From a dispersed multitude, a new

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[25] Michael Welker, ed., "The Spirit in Philosophical, Theological, and Interdisciplinary Perspectives," in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 225–26; Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Resonant Selves in Ethical and Theological Perspective: On Personhood and Identity Formation," *Dialog* 60, no. 4 (December 2021): 405, https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12718"The work of Spirit also has particularizing and personalizing effects on individuals and groups."

[26] Van der Kooi and Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, 524.

[27] Billy Kristanto, *Human Being – Being Human. A Theological Anthropology in Biblical, Historical, and Ecumenical Perspective* (Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag, 2020), 147.

[28] Welker discusses the gradual emergence of the Spirit in the early, ambiguous experiences in the Book of Judges. However, its complete manifestation takes place only at Pentecost. See Welker, *God the Spirit*, 64ff.

[29] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 229–30.

community emerged—one characterized by the free decisions of each individual and interrelational practices that foster interdependencies:[30] mutual devotion, shared practices, and common purpose: teaching, fellowship, prayer, and the sharing of goods (Acts 2:42–47a). This transformation was not orchestrated by any human leader, including Peter or the Eleven, but was initiated by the Spirit alone (Acts 2:4; cf. 1:5, 8). The emergent process continued daily as more individuals were drawn into this Spirit-formed community (Acts 2:47b).

This emergent process, initiated by the Spirit, offers several insights into the nature and practice of discerning the Spirit's activity among faith communities.

First, discernment is crucial since not all emergent processes are Spirit-generated. While Richard Sosis sees religious communities as emergent processes, Welker shows they arise through the power of human spirits and not necessarily of the divine Spirit.

Second, discerning the Spirit requires attentively observing concrete and continuous human actions, as the gifts of the Spirit are experienced *in* doing. While emergent processes unfold through ongoing human actions and relationships, they do not originate solely from human effort—the "surplus" belongs entirely to the divine Spirit. This dynamic reflects a both-and cooperation, or "synergism"[31]: human beings act, and the Spirit brings forth the good. The Spirit and human spirit are "together but

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[30] Welker, *In God's Image*, 26; Michael Welker, "Pneumatologische Defizite: Ein Kommentar zur Orientierungshilfe der Kammer für Weltweite Ökumene der EKD," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 34, no. 1 (February 12, 2021): 195, https://doi.org/10.13109/kize.2021.34.1.191; Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 98.

[31] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 111. Synergism is a pneumatological concept. Ferguson adopts Warfield's term "synergism" to illustrate the interplay between the Spirit's activity and the believer's faith, while maintaining the Spirit's initiative in this salvific relationship.

not confused."[32] Therefore, the Spirit's presence must not remain an abstract notion but must be discerned in and through concrete human experiences, actions, relations, and movements.

Next, the process of discerning the Spirit is an ongoing journey for two key reasons. First, emergence is characterized by a state of continual development. The Spirit does not provide a complete and problem-free salvation in the present but instead manifests through various concrete experiences of liberation.[33] This underscores the ongoing need for the Spirit's presence. Second, the Spirit's past presence does not guarantee present activity. Since emergent qualities also resist reduction, the Spirit cannot be equated with human actions or structures, nor can it be controlled or manipulated by religious communities—there is no certainty of *opere ex operato*. Thus, Kooi rightly suggests that human structures are mere "possibilities, pools that must remain filled"[34] by the Spirit.

Moreover, discernment must remain open to surprise. What seemed lifeless may flourish, and what appears vibrant may wither. This dynamic aligns with two key observations by Sosis: first, that religious systems are always in constant flux as they adapt to changing environments, and second, that even minor present fluctuations may have significant future consequences.[35] Likewise, the future of the Spirit is beyond human calculation, as reflected in the biblical imagery of *ruach* (wind) and Jesus' words in John 3:8: "The wind blows where it wishes... but you do not know

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[32] Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, First edition, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 132–33.

[33] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 215.

[34] Van der Kooi and Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, 520.

[35] Sosis, "The Building Blocks of Religious Systems," 439–40.

where it comes from or where it goes." While the Spirit's effects can be realistically experienced, the Spirit itself remains beyond human control or calculation.[36]

Further, discernment always follows rather than precedes the Spirit's movement. Since the Spirit initiates emergence, what is unclear epistemically may still unfold ontologically. Frank Macchia emphasizes that this incomprehensibility in spiritual experiences reveals the limits and provisional nature of discernment,[37] underscoring the need for epistemic humility. Borrowing from Margriet van der Kooi-Dijkstra's concept of "pastor as midwife" in counselling, Christians discerning the Spirit among religious communities must also act as midwives—attentively listening and faithfully bringing to light what the Spirit has already prepared. Since the Spirit may have been present and active long before our arrival,[38] understanding the history of a religious community is essential for grasping its present form.[39]

Finally, discernment is more orientational than ideal. Emergent social processes often unfold gradually (*diachronic*) rather than instantaneously (*synchronic*). Likewise, although the Spirit may act dramatically, as exemplified at Pentecost, his activity typically unfolds in sometimes hidden ways through historical processes.[40] Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones illustrates this gradual transformation,

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[36] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 99, 138.

[37] Frank Macchia, "Discerning the Spirit in Life: A Review of God the Spirit by Michael Welker," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5, no. 10 (1997): 20, https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699700501001.

[38] Margriet A. Th. Van der Kooi-Dijkstra, "Spirit, Chaplaincy, and Theology: Why Should a Chaplain Read Dogmatics?," in *The Spirit Is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, ed. Gijsbert Van den Brink, Eveline Van Staalduine-Sulman, and Maarten Wisse, vol. 38, Studies in Reformed Theology (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2019), 380, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391741_026.

[39] Sosis, "The Building Blocks of Religious Systems," 440.

[40] Michael Welker, "The Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Bainbridge Webster, Kathryn E. Tanner, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2007), 244, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199245765.003.0014; Gregersen, "Resonant Selves in Ethical and Theological Perspective," 405: "Only rarely (if ever?), does the Spirit of Christ work in unmediated forms, divorced from the ordinary and not-so-ordinary run of things."

as Israel's scattered remains are restored in stages rather than instantaneously.[41] Drawing from the evangelical missiologist Paul G. Hiebert, discernment aligns more closely with a centered rather than a bounded set. While the latter emphasizes separation of insiders from outsiders based on specific criteria, the former prioritizes an individual's orientation, whether moving toward or away from a central reference point, regardless of their initial position or proximity to the center.[42]

3.3.2. The liberating Spirit and the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos

Rather than fostering uniformity or relativism, the Spirit constitutes a form of "structured pluralism,"[43] necessitating attentiveness to its distinct orientation. Welker notes that signs of the Spirit's activity may initially appear in the emergent reorganization of fragmented communities, though such reformation is not definitive.[44] True discernment then involves distinguishing the Spirit's orientation from the influence of malevolent and deceptive spirits, which propagate hatred, destruction, and the devaluation of human life.[45] In biblical witness, the orientation is defined by its liberating action against sin and evil and its promotion of relationships grounded in justice, mercy, knowledge of God, freedom, truth, love, and peace.[46] These qualities, collectively described as the *pneumatic peacebuilding ethos*, are markers for recognizing the Spirit's tangible presence within and beyond Christian communities.

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[41] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 178.

[42] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Category 'Christian' in the Mission Task," *International Review of Mission* 72, no. 287 (July 1983): 421–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1983.tb03599.x.

[43] Michael Welker, "„Ökumene Und Pluralismus"," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 3, no. 1 (2012): 63.

[44] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 318.

[45] Welker, *In God's Image*, 26–27.

[46] Cf. Welker, 23.

The Spirit continually liberates human beings from the powers of sin

Welker characterizes God the Spirit primarily as the liberating power of God, continually freeing creation from the power of sin under earthly conditions. He rightly argues that understanding sin as power, rather than merely as guilt, clarifies the need for the Holy Spirit's liberating power.[47] This power of sin manifests in several discernible forms, including: insecurities, self-preservation, self-reproduction, and self-extension that ultimately lead to self-destruction;[48] a state of helplessness, paralysis, and powerlessness to escape life-destroying paths;[49] the distortion of religion, law, politics, and morality into oppressive forces that falsely claim to uphold order;[50] and demonic forces that enslave and destroy individuals and communities beyond human intervention.[51] Amid such profound helplessness, the Spirit is experienced concretely under earthly conditions as the divine power of true liberation, transforming human relationships and fostering justice, mercy, knowledge of God, freedom, truth, love, and peace.

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[47] Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 92; Cornelius Plantinga, "Sin," *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum (2002-)* 13, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 3–4. "We will never understand sin until we face the fact that sin is not only personal, but also interpersonal and even suprapersonal. Sin is far more than the sum of what sinners do. Sin becomes a power of darkness when it gets into the bowels of institutions and traditions and makes a home in them."; It is regrettable that these contemporary evangelical and reformed pneumatologies neglect to provide a concrete elaboration of the power of sin as a backdrop for the Holy Spirit's work. For example: Gregg R. Allison and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, Theology for the People of God (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 338–45; Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 146–50. The reign of sin is discussed in abstract. Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2007). There are merely 43 instances of the term "sin," yet none include a detailed explanation of the power of sin. Van der Kooi and Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics*, chap. 12. Sin as power, though concretely elaborated in chapter 8, is not sufficiently elaborated in relation to the Holy Spirit here. Van der Kooi, *This Incredibly Benevolent Force*. Sin-related terms only appear 11 times, without any discussion on its power.

[48] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 305–7.

[49] Welker, 215; Welker, "The Holy Spirit," 237; Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 95.

[50] Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 94; Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 146; Welker, *God the Revealed*, 187.

[51] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 217.

It must be emphasized that Welker's account of the Spirit's liberating work does not necessarily imply salvation. Within reformed evangelical theologies, salvation is commonly articulated in pneumatological terms through the exclusive concepts of regeneration, adoption, and sanctification—encapsulated in the complex imagery of the Spirit's "indwelling" of believers.[52] Nevertheless, Welker employs a different language, derived from the Old Testament, to describe the Spirit's liberating work: the Spirit "comes upon"[53] (Num. 24:2, ESV), "seizes"[54] (Original German: *ergreifen*,[55] 1 Sam. 10:10[56]), "overcomes"[57] (Original German: *überkommen*,[58] cf. 1 Sam. 10:6[59]) individuals and communities. These terminologies do *not* inherently signify salvation, as demonstrated in the cases of Balaam (Num 24:2, cf. Jude 11) and possibly Saul (1 Sam. 16:14),[60] yet they still convey concrete and transformative effects of the Spirit's work. However, as we shall see, the Spirit's liberating activity can also be salvific when it reorients individuals and communities toward Jesus Christ.

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[52] Orthodox reformed systematic theologies link the Spirit's indwelling exclusively with salvation of the elect: Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 37; Allison and Köstenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 374; Michael Scott Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit: God's Perfecting Presence in Creation, Redemption, and Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 276; Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology. Volume 3*, 101.

[53] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 319.

[54] Welker, 75; Welker, *In God's Image*, 82.

[55] Michael Welker, *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, 7., durchgesehene Auflage (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 79.

[56] In the German Bible translation *Hoffnung für Alle* (*HFA*), 1 Sam. 10:10 states, "*Da wurde Saul vom Geist Gottes ergriffen*…," which translates to "Then Saul was seized by the Spirit of God."

[57] Welker, *In God's Image*, 29; Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 93.

[58] Michael Welker, *Zum Bild Gottes: Eine Anthropologie des Geistes*, 1st ed (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 33.

[59] 1 Sam. 10:6 (HFA) states, "*Der Geist des HERRN wird über dich kommen…,*" which translates to "The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you…".

[60] Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology. Volume 3*, 105n46.

We now proceed to explicate the substantive meaning of justice, mercy, knowledge of God, freedom, truth, love, and peace as these are presented in biblical traditions concerning the Spirit and Jesus Christ.

The Spirit of justice and mercy and the knowledge of God

The Spirit of God is recognized as the Spirit of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God in the Isaiah tradition. Isaiah 11, 42, and 66 highlight God's chosen servant, on whom the Spirit of God is poured out and rests, as the one who spreads the law's primary intention—the interconnected justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God[61]—universally, extending beyond Israel to all nations. For instance, the Spirit-bearer "shall judge the helpless righteously" (Is. 11:4; cf. 42:3-4), and through him, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD" (Is. 11:9). He will also extend mercy to those lacking the knowledge of God (Is. 42:6-8). Through this Spirit-filled servant, even the Gentiles will acknowledge Israel's God as "our God" (Is. 61:6).[62] Thus, in its identification with the Messiah who embodies these qualities, the Spirit is disclosed as the Spirit of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God. Yet to fully grasp their nature and interrelation, a closer examination of biblical law in light of the Spirit's orientation is required.

Within the biblical legal tradition, justice aims not merely to prevent conflict but to equitably reconcile interpersonal disputes. This is exemplified in the *lex talionis* found in the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 21:23-25), which aims to limit retributive vengeance, often driven by personal perceptions of injustice, and to reduce the risk of

[61] Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 138. He also frequently refers to this triad using language borrowed from Matthew 23, describing it as "justice, mercy, and faith."

[62] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 111–18.

future conflicts. Furthermore, the legal code seeks[63] to establish what Welker terms "security of expectations" (i.e., a "sense of certainty, assurances, reliable promises, firm expectations, trust, and trustworthiness"[64]) by codifying past interpersonal conflicts into casuistic laws, treating them as *settled* legal precedents. Such codification not only regulates past harm but also functions as a preventive measure against future disputes, securing public expectations regarding the resolution of future conflicts.[65] Finally, such codification also manifests the process of 'just calibration' in terms of case-oriented reduction or increase of punishments (e.g., manslaughter and murder laws, Ex. 21:12-14).[66]

Mercy concerns the systematic protection of the weak, as illustrated in the Book of the Covenant by the "mercy laws" addressing slaves (Ex. 21:1–11) and marginalized persons (Ex. 22:20–23:12). For example, the slave laws specifically establish limits on the duration of slavery and safeguard slaves from exploitation by their owners on the Sabbath. From these laws, we can infer that mercy is a "free and creative self-withdrawal of the strong for the benefit of the weak."[67] The slave laws expect the privileged enslavers to voluntarily self-withdraw, i.e., relinquishing their powers over other socially-lower human beings, at least one day a week for the slaves to rest, and finally, after six years, for the slaves to be free human beings. Even the

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[63] Though, not without risk of loss. See: Dirk J. Smit, "Security of Expectations? On Welker's Theology of Law," in *Risiko Und Vertrauen - Risk and Trust: Festschrift Für Michael Welker Zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Heike Springhart and Günter Thomas, 1st ed (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 203–4.

[64] Smit, 202.

[65] Michael Welker, "Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel," trans. John Hoffmeyer, *The Journal of Religion* 66, no. 3 (July 1986): 241, https://doi.org/10.1086/487396.

[66] Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 138–39.

[67] Michael Welker, "Justice – Mercy – Worship: The 'Weighty Matters' of the Biblical Law," in *Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology*, ed. Michael Welker and Gregor Etzelmüller, Religion in Philosophy and Theology 72 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 206.

Deuteronomic law adds that the owners are to give generously to the slaves when freed (Deut. 15:13-14), leaving the specifics of the gifts to creative moral imaginations and practical considerations.[68]

Mercy is also connected with establishing more equal relationships among human beings. The slave laws in the covenantal code aim to foster greater social parity by creating conditions under which slaves might become free and by affirming their human dignity, for instance, by assigning equal value to their lives and those of their masters (Ex. 21:20).[69] Prophetic traditions advance this egalitarian impulse. Welker draws attention to Joel 2:28–29, where the Spirit is poured out upon sons and daughters, the young and old, and male and female servants—a radical vision within the Ancient Near East's patriarchal, gerontocratic, and slave-based social structures. While retaining creational distinctions of gender and age, this prophecy subverts entrenched hierarchies by granting prophetic agency to the socially marginalized.[70] The Acts narrative extends this trajectory by addressing national, ethnic, and language divisions.[71] Thus, the Spirit's orientation manifests divine mercy by disrupting oppressive structures and cultivating equal human dignity across gender, age, status, ethnicity, and culture.

The knowledge of God is closely linked to Israel's cultic law (e.g., Ex. 20:22; 21:11; 23:13ff.), which regulates the religious dimensions of communal life, such as sacred times and places. These ordinances are designed to render the divine-human relationship publicly visible and ritually accessible,[72] thereby maintaining and

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[68] Michael Welker, "The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 2 (June 2014): 231, https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2014.9.

[69] Welker, 230–31.

[70] Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 86–87.

[71] Welker, "Holy Spirit and Human Freedom: A John Paul II Memorial Lecture," 18.

[72] Welker, "Justice – Mercy – Worship: The 'Weighty Matters' of the Biblical Law," 206.

cultivating a determinate theological knowledge. This cultic system is deeply intertwined with justice and mercy. For instance, the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorates the past event of Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 23:15), reinforcing the Israelites' identity as a people liberated by God and inspiring hope for future divine acts of liberation. Similarly, laws regarding mercy toward sojourners (Ex. 22:21; 23:9) prohibit oppression precisely based on this shared historical experience: "you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."[73] Justice laws are also embedded within this cultic framework. In disputes involving broken trust, cases are to be brought "before God" for adjudication (Ex. 22:8-9), indicating that divine justice is administered through cultic procedures. Knowledge of God is determinate, but not always salvific. For example, what can be known about God through revelation in creation is a clear rational perception of one's "limitation, finitude, and powerlessness, in the midst of experiences of superior power and might."[74]

The justice imparted by the Spirit is intrinsically linked to mercy. In the Book of the Covenant, mercy laws (Ex. 21:1-11; 22:21-23:12) frame justice laws (21:12-22:20), clearly highlighting the interrelationship between justice and mercy.[75] In other words, true justice exists only when accompanied by mercy. Conversely, justice cannot be realized without systematic protection of marginalized individuals. This connection fosters a dynamic process that progressively broadens access to equitable conflict resolution, particularly for the poor, the weak, and the marginalized within a

[73] Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 142–44.

[74] Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 32.

[75] Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 141.

community.[76] At the same time, it cultivates communal sensitivities and solidarity for grave social distortions and experiences of oppression.[77]

By the intrinsic interconnection between justice and mercy, the justice of the Spirit surpasses that of the natural law tradition. As exemplified in Justinian's *Institutiones*, the latter famously integrates the principle of justice, "to give everyone his due," with the maxim "to hurt no one." However, this principle becomes impossible to apply universally, particularly to animals, plants, and other creatures. For instance, vegetarians must inevitably take life to sustain their own, revealing the failure of natural law in recognizing the fundamental reality that "all life lives at the cost of other life." Furthermore, when the natural impulse of self-preservation—closely linked to the notion of "survival of the fittest"—is combined with the imperative to give each their due, the principle of justice risks becoming severely distorted. This was horrifyingly exemplified at the Buchenwald concentration camp, where the maxim "To Each His Due" was inscribed on the entrance gate—visible only to the Jewish prisoners within—turning justice into a cruel justification for domination. In such cases, natural law becomes a tool of oppression, privileging the strong while subjugating the weak.[78] In contrast, the justice of the Spirit, inseparable from mercy, prioritizes the defense and elevation of the vulnerable. As an act of self-withdrawal, mercy may also expand justice's horizon to include non-human creatures, guarding against ecological domination. This ecological dimension of divine justice appears, albeit briefly, in Deuteronomy 20:19-20, where God prohibits the destruction

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[76] Welker, "The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law," 233.

[77] Michael Welker, "Countering Religious, Moral, and Political Hate-Preaching: A Culture of Mercy and Freedom against the Barbarism of Hate," in *Confronting Religious Violence: A Counternarrative*, ed. Richard A. Burridge, Jonathan Sacks, and Meg Warner (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018), 200.

[78] Welker, *In God's Image*, 55–56.

of trees during military sieges, signaling a divine directive to restrain human violence through ecological concern.

The justice and mercy imparted by the Spirit both shape and are shaped by the knowledge of God of the community.[79] On one hand, authentic expressions of religious devotion, theological insight, and spiritual zeal must be inseparably bound to the pursuit of justice and the defense of the vulnerable. On the other hand, efforts to cultivate humanitarian concern, advocate for the marginalized, and affirm the equal dignity of all persons must be grounded in a deepened communal knowledge of God. Accordingly, the presence of the Spirit categorically rejects spiritual abuse, elitist religiosity that excludes, and the legitimization of violence or hostility in the name of god(s). Such distortions of religion are repeatedly condemned by biblical prophets who expose their complicity in injustice, as seen in Micah 3:5-12, Isaiah 1:12-17, Jeremiah 5:30-31, and Ezekiel 22:26-29.

Nevertheless, forms of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God may be deceptive. What appears to be faith-driven justice and mercy may ultimately be the work of deceptive spirits, leading to destruction. For instance, the Peoples Temple began in 1955 as a religious movement advocating communal welfare and racial equality,[80] rooted in the belief that serving God ultimately means serving others.[81] Although its members envisioned their final migration to Jonestown, Guyana, as the realization of a "heaven on earth" and an egalitarian society, their increasing isolation fostered a siege mentality driven by self-preservation. This, in turn, led to bloody authoritarian control, culminating in the mass suicides and murders of 1978.[82] What

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[79] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 123–24.

[80] Moore, *Peoples Temple and Jonestown in the Twenty-First Century*, 12.

[81] Moore, 29.

[82] Moore, 17–20.

started as an enthusiastic pursuit of social justice collapsed tragically into coercion, paranoia, and horrific destruction. Furthermore, a society that promotes social justice may inadvertently create toxic dependencies, undermining the recipients' freedom by patronizing and disempowering them.[83] Finally, the power of sin can corrupt justice, mercy, and faith by turning them into individual and communal self-righteousness. Religion may cultivate a superficial piety and a sense of spiritual "rightness" or moral superiority, particularly when outward expressions of justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God are deemed sufficient by human standards. These deceptive forms of righteousness can mislead individuals and communities, fostering a false sense of moral security, ultimately leading to stagnation and spiritual and societal ruin.[84] A striking example of this self-righteousness is the biblical depiction of the Pharisees, whose appearance of religious fervor and public acts of charity often elevate their social standing rather than express genuine compassion.

The Spirit of freedom

The Spirit also generates freedom. Welker's concept of freedom begins with "freedom from" at both personal and social levels. Agreeing with Wolfgang Huber, he contends that freedom should not be understood in absolute terms, as the idea that human beings possess radical, unrestricted capabilities apart from physical constraints is an illusion. In reality, many individuals live in conditions of physical or spiritual oppression. Even those who live in situations relatively free of distress may succumb

[83] Welker, *In God's Image*, 68; See also discussions in: Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How the Church Hurts Those They Help and How to Reverse It* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012); Paul Harvey and Jeremy Lind, *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief: A Critical Analysis*, HPG Research Report 19 (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2005).

[84] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 255; See also: Jeanette Bicknell, "Self-Righteousness as a Moral Problem," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 44, no. 4 (December 2010): 477–87, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-010-9247-8.

to enslaving addiction or ideological bondage. Thus, the notion of "freedom from" must be considered under realistic human conditions. Welker then introduces the concept of minimal freedom, which includes freedom from overwhelming obstacles and allowing one to navigate hindrances or cope with unavoidable impediments in one's daily life.[85] He further expands this idea to a broader social level, encompassing politics, law, education, civil life, media, and religion. A stark example of denied social freedom is the former totalitarian German Democratic Republic, which, despite providing full employment and affordable entertainment, cannot be deemed free due to its pervasive surveillance, suppression of religious and public freedoms, and the ruthless enforcement of border controls through the Stasi and deadly force.[86]

Such freedom is often lacking in contemporary religious contexts, mainly due to institutional self-preservation. Welker, drawing on 2014 research spanning Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the US, highlights that discussions on religious freedom primarily centered on self-preservation and self-enhancement, as struggles for liberty were deeply entangled in turf battles, political maneuvers, and the suppression of differences within and among minority groups.[87] A concrete example of such self-preservation through political means is seen in the ongoing restrictions on constructing places of worship in Indonesia by the majority religion, a phenomenon Benyamin Intan describes as the "religionization of politics."[88]

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[85] Welker, *In God's Image*, 69–71.

[86] Welker, 74–75; See also, Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi*, The Oxford Oral History Series (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–2.

[87] Welker, *In God's Image*, 84–85.

[88] Benyamin Fleming Intan, "Kuyper's Sphere Sovereignty and the Restriction on Building Worship Places 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), 104, https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657790500_006.

Precisely from such self-preservation, the Spirit of God grants individual and social freedom. The human spirit, though powerful, is inherently ambivalent and, without the Spirit of God, becomes susceptible to evil influences that can lead to religious enslavement.[89] Those driven by the flesh fall under the dominion of sin, leading to an unending struggle for self-preservation marked by anxiety, insecurity, and a survival-driven existence that often harms others. This frantic pursuit ultimately results in a hardened, joyless life devoid of authentic relationships, ending in inevitable futility.[90] This dynamic extends beyond individuals to religious communities, which may pursue self-preservation by silencing dissent, persecuting internal critics, withdrawing into sectarian isolation, or resorting to violence. Welker suggests that the Spirit of God is a liberating power that frees life in the flesh from the dominion of sin and the futile struggle for self-preservation through self-centered assertion at the expense of others.[91] The apostle Paul clearly says that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." The freedom conferred by the Spirit is not absolute, but granted within human fleshly existence. However, this freedom redirects one's orientation from fleshly self-preservation toward the Spirit. Unlike self-preservation, which prioritizes personal security, the Spirit bestows a freedom that actively seeks the liberation of others, a concept Wolfgang Huber describes as "communicative freedom,"[92] fostering vigilance and sensitivity toward their

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[89] Michael Welker, "Where the Spirit of God Is, There Is Freedom!," in *Living Theology: Essays Presented to Dirk J. Smit on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Len Hansen, Nico Koopman, and Robert Vosloo, 1st ed (Wellington [South Africa]: Bible Media, 2011), 80.

[90] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 261–62.

[91] Welker, 262.

[92] Wolfgang Huber and Brian McNeil, *Ethics: The Fundamental Questions of Our Lives* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 4.

freedom.[93] This commitment to advocating for the freedom of others bridges individually experienced freedom with the broader pursuit of social freedom.

This other-oriented promotion of freedom manifests through acts of justice and mercy, in opposition to the Aristotelian ethos that upholds social hierarchies by treating differences in gender, ethnicity, and slavery as natural and unchangeable. The Spirit of freedom opposes maintaining discriminatory or oppressive hegemony in the name of "order." Instead, the Spirit establishes equal human dignity, liberating relationships that previously thrived on power imbalances rooted in gender, slavery, age, ethnicity, and language. Consequently, this movement of the Spirit of freedom may generate creative social unrest for the justice and protection of the weak.[94] The risks of severing legal religious freedom from the foundational principle of equality are highlighted in Laura Dudley Jenkins' 2019 study on mass conversion and religious freedom in India. Her research demonstrates how laws, ostensibly enacted to ensure freedom of religion, can entrench the dominance of majority religious groups while deepening the marginalization and persecution of vulnerable minorities, such as the Dalits. This underscores the urgent need to examine whether legal protections of religious freedom genuinely benefit marginalized communities.[95]

The Spirit of truth

The Spirit sustains the communal pursuit of truth. The New Testament consistently links the Spirit with truth (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Thess. 2:13; John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13, 4:23-24; 1 John 5:7; 2 Tim. 1:14), emphasizing that the Spirit guides the community "into all the truth" (John 16:13). But how does this guidance occur?

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[93] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 262.

[94] Welker, *In God's Image*, 71.

[95] Laura Dudley-Jenkins, *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 216–26.

Welker explores the role of the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete in the Gospel of John and concludes that the Spirit transforms individuals into a community of witnesses, from whom truth emerges. Each witness possesses an authentic yet partial and perspectival understanding, but the community does not merely represent a crowd of individual certainties. Instead, the Spirit reveals a truth through the collective testimonies, leading the truth-seeking community toward a more profound and clearer knowledge of truth.[96] But what is truth?

Truth is multifaceted. First, Welker acknowledges that accuracy—correspondence with reality—is a fundamental aspect of truth. However, truth also requires qualification, as it can become outdated. For example, while the statement "Billy Graham lives" was accurate in 1984, it no longer holds in 2024. Additionally, perspective plays a crucial role in shaping truth claims. Statements such as "the earth moves, the sun is fixed," "the sun moves, the earth is fixed," and "the sun and the earth move" are all true when qualified by their respective frames of reference. Beyond empirical perception, truth can also transcend sensory experience, as exemplified in faith in Jesus' resurrection. Furthermore, truth extends beyond individually established certainty. In everyday life, our knowledge of truth is often accompanied by doubt, and many of our beliefs rely not on personal verification but on the truth claims of others. Ultimately, every individual pursuit of truth remains provisional, requiring continual refinement and correction—truth admits no definitive or final expression.[97]

Two key operations characterize truth-seeking communities formed by the Spirit: consensus and coherence. Consensus aims to expand established certainties

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[96] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 224–25.

[97] Welker, *In God's Image*, 90–94.

within the community, fostering collective agreement. Coherence, on the other hand, seeks to deepen and refine understanding by subjecting these certainties to dialogue, verification, refinement, and correction.[98] Through this process, truth-seeking communities do not merely reiterate the same established beliefs but continuously develop deeper insights, guiding their members toward a greater understanding of truth. By embracing this dynamic approach, truth-seeking communities avoid the trap of self-righteousness— the erroneous belief that they possess absolute truth in a way that necessitates agreement and unquestioning obedience from others.[99] In text-based religions like Islam and Judaism, the dynamics of truth-seeking imply *living* traditions of communal interpretation, rejecting both the notion that interpretation is unnecessary and claims of absolute finality.[100]

In contrast to the Spirit of truth, lying and deceitful spirits exist. These deceptive spirits foster oppressive and destructive forms of consensus, which are accepted uncritically by the majority within a community as "unquestioned truth." A historical example of this national phenomenon is the German people's widespread belief during World War II that the Führer possessed a miracle weapon (*Wunderwaffe*) capable of securing ultimate victory. Such forms of consensus strongly resist opposing viewpoints and often repressively label those who challenge them as "disobedient" or "subversive."[101] In light of the possibility of deceiving spirits, Welker emphasizes the importance of "discernment of the spirits,"[102] which is

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[98] Welker, 94–96.

[99] Welker, "The Spirit in Philosophical, Theological, and Interdisciplinary Perspectives," 232.

[100] Sacks, *The Great Partnership*, 251–54.

[101] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 85–86.

[102] Welker, "The Holy Spirit," 241.

fundamentally a gift of the Spirit of truth.[103] Welker then proposes three crucial criteria for discernment.[104] First, every prevailing consensus must be critically examined rather than accepted uncritically, as truth is not identical with consensus.[105] Second, individuals must be willing to stake their own lives alongside their convictions, distinguishing genuine seekers of truth from those who merely engage in conflict for its own sake. Third, one must be able to construct a theological narrative that challenges the prevailing consensus, offering an explanation that illuminates the community's resistance to truth.

The Spirit's presence transforms a religious community into a truth-seeking community that also fosters the pursuit of justice, mercy, and freedom. The oppressive consensus of lying spirits underscores the link between truth, freedom, justice, and mercy. While deceitful spirits suppress critical thought and marginalize the seekers of truth, the Spirit's liberation is unattainable without first confronting the truth of enslavement and unjust oppression—a reality to which justice and mercy awaken us. Furthermore, although the knowledge of God surpasses mere truth, truth remains essential to it, as Paul associates the biblical law tradition with "knowledge and truth" (Rom. 2:20).

The Spirit of love and peace

The Spirit fosters the pursuit of love, a transformative power that forms a community of joyous, free, and creative self-withdrawal for the good of others through its outpouring (Rom. 5:5). The mutual exchange of concrete love across diverse contexts and individuals brings joy both in giving and receiving, nurturing a

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[103] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 87, 241.

[104] Welker, 87–90.

[105] Cf. John R. Levison, *A Boundless God: The Spirit According to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 74–75.

culture where self-withdrawal is freely and creatively practiced for the sake of others. This culture of love resists instrumentalization and systematization, utilizing the law or hierarchical, totalitarian control, emerging solely through the freedom of the Spirit.[106] Moreover, this love is powerful, as self-withdrawal is not perceived as burdensome and endures even when met with rejection.[107]

This loving self-withdrawal stands in contrast to self-preservation, which prioritizes one's continuity at the expense of others' freedom to flourish.[108] Such an understanding of love rejects illusory forms that appear to create space for others but instead restrict freedom and instrumentalize it for personal gain. Self-withdrawal is also creative since the power of love constantly seeks new, concrete ways to exert a beneficial influence on others.[109]

The concept of self-withdrawal for the benefit of *others* also clarifies the popular, vague idea of "love as selflessness." While selflessness may or may not involve alterity, self-withdrawal explicitly directs love toward *others*. Moreover, selflessness risks self-negation, such as "endless self-sacrifice" or "coerced service for others",[110] whereas self-withdrawal preserves the self as an active agent,[111] *freely* stepping back to *create* space for others.

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[106] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 251–52.

[107] Welker, 249.

[108] Welker, *In God's Image*, 122.

[109] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 250.

[110] William Schweiker, "In God's Image: An Anthropology of the Spirit. By Michael Welker. Translated by Douglas W. Stott. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. 167. $29.00 (Cloth); $21.00 (Paper); $19.95 (Digital). ISBN: 9780802878748.," *Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 2 (May 2022): 420, https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.21.

[111] Cf. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 384. "Self-denial … is not suicide, for there is an element of self-will even in that."

Love elevates justice, mercy, knowledge of God, freedom, and the search for truth. It tirelessly seeks to bring justice and mercy that genuinely benefit the beloved.[112] It also counteracts the self-righteousness that can emerge in the individual and communal pursuits of justice, mercy, and piety. In the end, self-righteousness returns to self, seeking one's elevation above others, even when it momentarily appears to renounce egotism through acts of charity, almsgiving, or social advocacy.[113] In contrast, love promotes freedom for others by enabling others to grow without coercion, creating a secure space where they can flourish independently, and rejoicing in their free growth,[114] without any ultimate return to self. Love also promotes the search for liberating truth, as it facilitates mutual dialogue in the search for certainty and the deepening of consensus.[115] Finally, in experiencing acts of creaturely love, God reveals Himself concretely,[116] allowing one to grow in the knowledge of God, whether salvific[117] or not[118].

Finally, the Spirit of love is the Spirit who fosters peace within a community. Peace, understood as a "successful form of human life together," emerges from

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[112] Henco van der Westhuizen, *Faith Active in Love: On the Theology of Michael Welker*, Internationale Theologie, Bd./vol. 21 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021), 184, https://doi.org/10.3726/b19199.

[113] For Welker's description of Hegelian spirit, see Welker, *God the Spirit*, 294.

[114] Welker, *In God's Image*, 122; Welker, *God the Spirit*, 226.

[115] Welker, "Comfort, Freedom, Justice, and Truth: Christian Religion, the Formation of Character, and the Communication of Values," 37–38.

[116] Michael Welker, "Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. J. C. Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 131–32.

[117] Glen G. Scorgie et al., "Touched by Love: Spiritual Experience in Chinese Christian Conversion Narratives," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 15, no. 1 (May 2022): 44–69, https://doi.org/10.1177/19397909221074669. This article examines the conversions of twenty Chinese individuals who, after encountering the love of fellow Chinese believers, described it as "otherworldly" and divine.

[118] Aamir Hussain, "How a Muslim Experienced Agape at Puja," HuffPost, December 4, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-a-muslim-experienced-_b_4365318. The author, a South Indian Muslim, encountered the Christian concept of God's unconditional love and experienced it within a Hindu community that embraced him despite his background and beliefs. He further draws a connection between Hindu music and divine grace and love.

relationships of love both within and between communities and, when experienced, leads to inner tranquility. Drawing from Wolfgang Huber, Welker further argues that peace is not merely the absence of violence but is actively pursued through non-violent efforts to relieve suffering and free the oppressed. Such liberative actions may paradoxically provoke pushbacks and violence from the powers that be, yet they remain essential for the realization of genuine peace.[119] Additionally, he introduces a fourth dimension of peace, which connects a community to its environment through the continuous cultivation of ecological and multicultural sensitivity.[120] Therefore, peace extends beyond the mere absence of war; it must be intentionally interwoven with the pursuit and promotion of justice, mercy, freedom, and truth,[121] all empowered by the benevolent love toward humanity.[122] Finally, Welker distinguishes the peace brought by the Spirit from deceptive forms of peace that are equated with mere "tranquility, order, and security." He critiques contexts such as apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany, where outward calm prevailed—such as silent streets at night—yet true peace was absent due to systemic repression.[123]

How feasible is Welker's characterization of peace among non-Christian religious communities? Peace scholars Judy Carter and Gordon S. Smith argue that the world's religions offer abundant resources for peacebuilding, emphasizing justice, compassion, equality, nonviolence, truth, and forgiveness. This shared common

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[119] Cf. Matt. 5:9, where Jesus identifies his disciples as peacemakers—following his own example—and Matt. 10:34, where he declares that he has not come to bring peace but a sword.

[120] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 252–53.

[121] Welker, *In God's Image*, 117; Welker, *God the Spirit*, 258.

[122] Welker, *In God's Image*, 126.

[123] Welker, 119–20; Elizabeth F. Drexler, *Infrastructures of Impunity: New Order Violence in Indonesia*, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024), 77–78. Likewise, the Indonesian state-sponsored extrajudicial killings known as Petrus in the mid-1980s were conducted under the pretext of ensuring public "security," "order," and "peace," and were even supported by religious teachings.

ground suggests the feasibility of inter-religious peacebuilding.[124] However, in practice, realizing such an ideal remains partial and nuanced. Braithwaite et al.'s fieldworks in various parts of Indonesia, focusing on post-conflict peacebuilding between 1997 and 2004, reveal a dual dynamic of reconciliation and non-truth. Reconciliation was evidenced by genuine acts of kindness and cooperation, such as an *ulama* in Maluku offering a ride to an elderly Christian man, demonstrating changed hearts and minds, as well as by forgiveness, apology, and collaborative efforts to rebuild (*gotong royong*). Yet, the peace was also marked by non-truth, where conflicts were quickly forgotten, perpetrators avoided acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and blame was often shifted to external provocateurs despite local involvement in violence. This suggests that peace in these contexts was not rooted in a pursuit of truth. Nevertheless, historical precedents indicate that peace without immediate truth-seeking can serve as a historical stepping stone toward deeper reconciliation. The Nuremberg trials (1945–1949), while not fully confronting the complexities of German complicity in Nazi atrocities, laid a foundation for later testimonies from Holocaust victims, leading to broader acknowledgment and ultimately a fuller reckoning with the terrible truth.[125] Braithwaite et al then conclude empathetically that while the high-integrity pursuit of truth remains essential, it is crucial to respect local voices when they assert that, within their cultural and traditional contexts, reconciliation without the whole truth is the most viable path they can take at the moment.[126] This perspective highlights the need for patient, empathetic, and

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[124] Judy Carter and Gordon S. Smith, "Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action," in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, ed. Gordon S. Smith and Harold G. Coward, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 279–301.

[125] John Braithwaite et al., "Healing a Fractured Transition to Democracy," in *Anomie and Violence: Non-Truth and Reconciliation in Indonesian Peacebuilding*, ed. John Braithwaite et al., Open Access E-Books (Acton, A.C.T: ANU E Press, 2010), 42–45.

[126] Braithwaite et al., 45.

orientational discernment in peacebuilding, acknowledging that the work of the Spirit of peace is attuned to context and often unfolds progressively according to divine time.

In conclusion, the virtues, values, and orientations cultivated by the Spirit—culminating in sustained experiences of peace—can be termed as the *pneumatic peacebuilding ethos*. *Peacebuilding* is used here in a non-technical sense to denote collective human efforts across various spheres of life to establish and sustain communal peace after conflict.[127] The adjective *pneumatic* underscores that peace and peacebuilding activities emerge from the multimodal activity of the divine *pneuma* (Spirit). Importantly, the term pneumatic peacebuilding affirms the participation of both the Spirit and human agents, while maintaining a clear distinction between them. *Ethos* designates the prevailing spirit of a people, community, or culture as reflected in its attitudes and aspirations.[128] Consequently, when the Spirit prevails among a religious community, that community—despite tendencies toward self-preservation and the pervasive presence of sin—will be drawn toward the cultivation of lasting peace, characterized by a joyful, free, and creative self-withdrawal for the benefit of others, which fosters and unites the pursuit of truth, the experience and promotion of freedom, the protection of the vulnerable, and the pursuit of conflict resolution.

3.3.3. The Spirit of Jesus Christ

The Spirit is recognized as the Spirit of Jesus Christ in relation to the revelation of Christ within the church. However, the term "church" requires clarification. In a pluralistic society, many entities identify as "churches" (e.g.,

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[127] For more technical definitions of peacebuilding, see Michael Barnett et al., "Peacebuilding: What Is in a Name?," *Global Governance* 13, no. 1 (2007): 35–58.

[128] Oxford English Dictionary, "Ethos, n., Sense 2.a" (Oxford University Press, July 2023), Oxford English Dictionary, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3879722485.

"atheist churches"[129]), and churches themselves take diverse institutional forms. Hence, the name "church" alone does not guarantee the presence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.[130] Welker defines the church of Christ as a concrete, earthly, emergent community, imperfect and vulnerable to ideological and spiritual distortions.[131] Yet precisely amid these limitations, the Spirit's power becomes visible as it draws diverse individuals into local communities in communion with Jesus Christ.[132] For this reason, Welker rejects idealized, abstract notions of the church, or what Nicholas Healy calls "blueprint ecclesiologies."[133]

The essential mark of the church is its creative, Spirit-empowered, and ongoing witness to the Crucified and Risen Christ.[134] This christological focus necessitates ongoing discernment, prompting the essential question: "To whom is this community oriented?" By linking Calvin's idea of Christ's threefold office to key phases of his life—his royal office to his pre-Easter ministry, his priestly office to the resurrection, and his prophetic office to the crucifixion—and by further associating these roles with their pneumatic meaning and charismatic expression, the church's christological orientation becomes tangibly discernible in its threefold *Gestalt*.[135] This Spirit-empowered *Gestalt* of the church has a christological shape: diaconal service,

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[129] "What Happens at an Atheist Church?," *BBC News*, February 4, 2013, sec. Magazine, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21319945.

[130] Westminster Confession of Faith 25.5 emphasizes that churches exhibit varying degrees of imperfection. It states, "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error (1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 2–3; Matt. 13:24–30, 47); and some have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan (Rev. 18:2; Rom. 11:18–22)." This highlights that even faithful churches have flaws, while others may fall so far that they are not true churches of Christ.

[131] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 308–9.

[132] Welker, 309.

[133] Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 7 (Cambridge (U.K.): Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[134] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 310–12.

[135] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 215–16.

representing Christ's royal office; worship, expressing his priestly office; and the pursuit of justice and truth, reflecting his prophetic office.[136] Diaconal service embodies the power of the Spirit of Christ the King by fostering mutual acts of self-withdrawal, mercy, love, forgiveness, and care within and beyond the church.[137] Through worship, primarily baptism and the holy communion, the Spirit makes present Christ the Priest, deepening communal engagement with his presence.[138] The Spirit, which empowers Christ in his prophetic office, also enables the church through scripture to seek truth and justice, discerning, confronting, and resisting falsehood, oppression, false narratives, and corrupt morality in the world and within herself.[139] The interconnectedness of these three forms—their *perichoretic* relationship—is vital. It signals that diaconal acts of love and mercy must be integrated with the church's prophetic vocation to pursue justice, freedom, and truth. These elements shape and deepen worship, which sustains and renews them through the ongoing encounter with Christ's presence and voice. The degree of integration and mutual indwelling among the church's threefold *Gestalt* corresponds to the depth of its christological orientation and the varying intensities of the Spirit of Christ's power within the community.[140]

Recognizing the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ discloses two additional criteria for discerning the Spirit besides the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. First,

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[136] Welker, 306.

[137] Welker, 247–48.

[138] Welker, 277–78.

[139] Welker, "Holy Spirit and Human Freedom: A John Paul II Memorial Lecture," 28–30.

[140] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 215–16, 314.

through individual or mass[141] conversions to Jesus Christ and incorporation into His catholic church. Scripture portrays the Spirit as the Paraclete who directs attention to Jesus (John 15:26; 16:13-14) and mediates his presence in diverse contexts.[142] Reorientation toward Christ by individuals and communities previously outside the faith manifests the Spirit's work. Additionally, drawing from the Heidelberg Catechism's answer to Question 21, Welker emphasizes that the Holy Spirit grants saving faith in Christ while simultaneously gathering believers into "*the whole church of Christ*."[143] When non-Christian individuals or communities establish or join churches genuinely oriented to Jesus Christ—however imperfectly—and demonstrate the Spirit's presence through diaconal, priestly, and prophetic expressions, this signals the activity of the Spirit of Christ. Second, the Spirit may also be discerned in non-Christian communities that engage receptively with the church's threefold *Gestalt*. Through encounters with the church's diaconal and prophetic works—embodying justice, mercy, truth, and love—such communities may experience the Spirit's multimodal power.[144] The Polish Solidarity movement, catalyzed by Pope John Paul II's 1979 invocation of the Spirit, may be seen as an instance of the Spirit's work in, through, and beyond the institutional church.[145] Similarly, the Spirit may be discerned

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[141] Dudley-Jenkins, *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India*, 33–61. Mass conversion should not be automatically viewed with suspicion. In fact, the emphasis on individual conversion reflects a Western tendency toward excessive individualism. Drawing from the research of Methodist missionary J. Waskom Pickett on mass conversions in 1930s India, Jenkins demonstrates that many individuals within such movements exhibited genuine sincerity, despite the complexity of their motives.

[142] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 222–23.

[143] Welker, 248.

[144] Welker, "What Christianity and Law Can Learn from Each Other," 146; Welker, *God the Spirit*, 308.

[145] Welker, *In God's Image*, 21–24; Even secular historians also attribute the beginning of the Solidarity movement to the 1979 papal visit and highlight the papal invocation of the Spirit: Tobin Miller Shearer, *Religion and Social Protest Movements* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 103–5; John J. Kulczycki, "The Beginnings of the Solidarity Movement in Poznań, 1980–1981," *The Polish Review* 27, no. 3/4 (1982): 158.

across religious boundaries through the church's priestly-prophetic proclamation of Christ in evangelism and interfaith dialogue.

How is the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ within the church differentiated from the Spirit's peacebuilding activity among other faith communities? In continuity, the church's *Gestalt*—especially its royal and prophetic dimensions—corresponds to the pneumatic peacebuilding ethos. Christologically stated, the Spirit's peacebuilding ethos finds its clarification and embodiment in Jesus Christ. The key discontinuity, however, lies in the Spirit's exclusive revelation of Jesus Christ within the church, through whom alone a saving knowledge of God is given—something not present among other faith communities. Thus, the concrete experiences of liberation in other faith communities are fully realized and clarified only when they convert to Jesus Christ and join the church. In short, while both Christian and non-Christian communities may realistically experience the Spirit's peace, the salvific knowledge that identifies this peace as originating from Jesus Christ, leading to faith, praise, and gratitude for God in Jesus Christ, is granted only when non-Christian communities convert.[146] Meanwhile, those who engage with the church's witness but are not yet converted remain in a liminal space, where Jesus Christ draws them toward faith.

3.4. Concluding critical remarks

3.4.1. The Spirit of judgment

Unfortunately, Welker does not sufficiently discuss the Spirit's role in judgment, yet he provides clues into how the Spirit enacts judgment. He acknowledges a final judgment distinct from salvation, rejecting Christian

[146] Cf. van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," 275. "God's grace may be universally available, but in order to make sense of it, people need to hear the witness of the Christian community."

universalism (*apokatastasis panton*).[147] Judgment is the other side of salvation. In Christ's prophetic ministry, salvation and judgment are inseparable,[148] indicating that the Spirit of salvation is also the Spirit of judgment. Three works can then identify the Spirit of judgment:

First, the Spirit's outpouring of liberating love and the proclamation of the crucified Jesus unveil divine judgment by exposing humanity's deep entanglement in fleshly self-preservation, marked by violence, hatred, injustice, impiety, and heartlessness—manifestations of the power of sin—thus underscoring the need for the Spirit's deliverance.[149] This judgment is most clearly revealed at the atoning cross of Jesus, where God and the Spirit declared that humanity had been handed over to its death in their opposition against Jesus Christ.[150] This involvement of the Spirit can only be fully grasped when the cross is understood in continuity with Jesus' pre-Easter life and ministry, marked by his anointing and empowerment by the Spirit, and with his resurrection, which reveals the Spirit's power to raise the dead.[151]

Second, Welker emphasizes that divine forgiveness is withheld from those who deny the Spirit's tangible and diverse acts of deliverance from demonic helplessness. This is vividly illustrated in the Pharisees' refusal to acknowledge Jesus' exorcism of a demon-possessed man as an act of the Spirit of God. Instead, despite

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[147] Peter Koslowski, "Discussion of God, Creation, and the Image of The Human Person in Christianity and Islam," in *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions*, ed. Peter Koslowski, vol. 1, A Discourse of the World Religions (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2001), 114, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0999-7_8.

[148] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 304.

[149] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 227.

[150] Welker, *God the Revealed*, 186–88.

[151] Welker, 190.

witnessing the event directly, they attribute his power to Beelzebul, the prince of demons (cf. Matt. 12:22–28).[152]

Third, God can withdraw God's Spirit, which leads to decay, death, and the disintegration of creation, as attested in Job 34:14–15 and Psalm 104:29–30.[153] This possibility underscores the Spirit's freedom, as it cannot be confined within human institutions or controlled by religious communities, leaving the possibility of divine withdrawal open.[154]

In sum, 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, and demonic resistance to these liberating experiences—resistance that may extend even to attributing them to evil spirits; and third, with greatest clarity, in the collapse[155] of religious communities, signifying the Spirit's complete withdrawal.

3.4.2. Welker's Western secular bias

Welker's pneumatology exhibits a Western secular bias.[156] While he affirms the reality of demons and unclean spirits—criticizing those who dismiss them—he reinterprets such biblical language for a Western secular audience by framing these

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[152] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 211–19.

[153] Welker, 159–60.

[154] Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*, 85; Welker, *God the Spirit*, 162.

[155] Sosis, "The Building Blocks of Religious Systems," 434. According to Sosis, the majority of religious systems in human history have dissolved.

[156] Welker, *God the Spirit*, 24. Welker humbly acknowledges his limitations as an "aging, white, Protestant man shaped by the German and North American systems of education." This admission is particularly fitting from his own pneumatological perspective, which recognizes that each individual is merely a bearer of fragmentary truth and is therefore always in need of further pursuit of truth in dialogue with others.

forces as complex and disintegrative phenomena.[157] Furthermore, rather than engaging with culturally specific manifestations of spirits, such as ghosts or spirit possession, which are central to many non-Western religious contexts, Welker speaks more abstractly of "the spirit of the Western world" as that which opposes the Spirit of God.[158] This abstraction leaves significant questions unaddressed in settings like Indonesia. Examples include *Suanggi*, a cannibal witch from Eastern Indonesia;[159] *tatung*, spirit-mediums in the *Capgomeh* parade in Singkawang;[160] and Balinese institutionalized spirit-possession known as *Sanghyang Dedara/i*.[161] These phenomena raise important theological and pneumatological questions that remain unresolved in Welker's framework: What are these spirits? Are they simply manifestations of demonic forces—i.e., Satan? Or do they represent more complex realities? How do we understand the supposed physical invulnerability experienced during the traditional Javanese *jathilan* ritual?[162]

Welker's cosmology aligns with what Pentecostal theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen describes as a "unitive" paradigm rather than a plural one. The unitive cosmological paradigm focuses on the singular Spirit of God while largely overlooking the existence of spirits and forces. By contrast, Kärkkäinen's plural

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[157] Welker, 196–97.

[158] Welker, 280.

[159] Nils Bubandt, "Ghosts with Trauma: Global Imaginaries and the Politics of Post-Conflict Memory," in *Conflict, Violence, and Displacement in Indonesia*, ed. Eva-Lotta E. Hedman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 275–301, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501719233.

[160] Margaret Chan, "The Spirit-Mediums of Singkawang: Performing 'Peoplehood,'" in *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging*, ed. Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series 52 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013), 138–58.

[161] Roma O'Neill, "Institutionalized Spirit-Possession and Healing Rites in a Balinese Village," in *Australian Essays in World Religions*, ed. Victor Hayes (Bedford Park: Australian Assoc. for the Study of Religions, 1977), 49–65.

[162] Eva Rapoport, "Spirit Possession, Javanese Magic and Islam: Current State of Affairs," in *Between the Worlds: Magic, Miracles, and Mysticism. Vol. 2*, ed. Mila Maeva et al. (Sofia, Bulgaria: IEFSEM – BAS, 2020), 94–112.

paradigm posits that the Spirit of God operates in a world inhabited by numerous spirits and forces, including those acknowledged in other faith traditions.[163] Consequently, further theological engagement along Kärkkäinen's pluralistic paradigm is needed to contextualize Welker's reformed pneumatology within the varied religious contexts of Indonesia.

[163] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 4, A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 9–11.