

# IMAGE OF THE DIVINE AND SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

In What Ways Can Christology Provide Cultural Orientations?

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The chapters of this book intend to develop diagnostic proposals of the complex sphere of cultural orientations, by focussing on the religious, symbolic, liturgical, cognitive and normative powers which we see at work in the different faith traditions. They investigate the power of images, icons and metaphors which illuminate religious thinking and moral practices. The following contribution investigates the key Christian “Image of the Divine”—which, as will be shown, has to be translated into “Spiritual Presence of the Divine” in order to decode and to illuminate its cultural orientations.

The anthropological investigation of the *imago Dei* in our faith traditions might be regarded as a common ground of discourse—at least between the Christian and the Jewish traditions. In the Christian perspective, however, it is unavoidable to finally shift from the anthropological notion of the *imago Dei* to the Christological notion and to reflect anthropological patterns and affairs in a Christological light. However, if we merely concentrate on the iconic presence of Jesus Christ in its anthropological shape, we will easily get stuck with the very powerful “frozen” icons of the cradle and the cross, the beginning and the end of Jesus’ life with the message of the incarnation and the kenosis. The correlated insistence on a specific nearness of God can easily divide our faith traditions. In contrast to this incarnational and kenotic approach, as valid as it is, it is noteworthy that Paul speaks of a transformation into the “image” of the “Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). What does this mean?

The standard message of the theologies of the cross used to be that the focus on the condescending and suffering God challenges the self-aggrandization of human beings, and their attempts to dominate the world and other people, and to behave in a god-like manner. In my view, this message has hardly served a subtle cultural analysis and cultural orientation. We gain a very different approach when we reflect the differentiated spiritual presence of the divine, which for the Christian perspective has a Christo-morphic shape in its orientation towards the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Christ. A *threefold spiritual presence* can be and has to be unfolded in this light.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following draws on insights gained in my book: *God the Revealed: Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

With the shift from “Images of the Divine” to “a threefold spiritual presence” this chapter replaces conventional dogmatic thinking about “Divine attributes”. It also engages the challenge described in the introduction, to speak of the presence of the Divine under earthly conditions while respecting the theological reserve against image and icon making.

## 1. The “Kingly” Spiritual Presence of Christ and the Cultural Orientations of a Christian Humanism

In light of the pre-Easter life of Jesus, *the kingly rule of Christ* and of “those who belong to him” comes into focus, and send *a clear message of freedom and multidimensional care and love. This spiritual presence revolutionizes hierarchical and monarchical forms of rule and order, both in the churches and (indirectly) in political and civil-societal spheres. For this king is simultaneously brother and friend, indeed he is even poor and ostracized.* With its radically democratic character, this kingly rule appears, on the one hand, uncomfortably confusing. Yet on the other hand, it is exemplary of that freedom-affirming search for orientations that are characteristic for egalitarian orientations, democratic communities and freedom-affirming civil societies. This “kingly” spiritual presence is shaped above all by the praxis of mutual care and support, mercy and love beyond family and tribal realms and the freedom that such love mediates. Loving acceptance, healing, liberating teaching and education, and the push to include as many as possible in it—these all define its praxis.

In continuity and discontinuity with the Torah traditions, love and forgiveness are defined by *free, creative self-withdrawal*<sup>2</sup> for the benefit of others.<sup>3</sup> Free, creative, and (in love) joyful self-withdrawal for the benefit of one’s neighbors is incredibly effective at promoting freedom. Love—which *eros*, *agape* and *philia* can only ever insufficiently define<sup>4</sup>—aims at achieving a state for the beloved where “all things serve the best,” where the feet of the beloved are set on “wide places.” And yet essential for any understanding of the reign of God is that it is *not primarily a responsibility* for freedom-promoting behavior and action that wins over our hearts and minds, but rather the joyful and thankful *experience of voluntary self-withdrawal by others, performed for our sake*.<sup>5</sup> For this reason it is said that

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Michael Welker, “The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law”, in: *Journal of Law and Religion* 29/2 (2014), 225-235.

<sup>3</sup> A particularly illuminating discussion of the connection between the Old Testament images of the kingdom of God, the preaching and work of Jesus, and early Christian life praxis is offered by Christian Grappe, *Le Royaume de Dieu. Avant, avec et après Jésus* (Genf: Labor et Fides, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Welker, “Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love,” in: John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans, 2001), 127-136.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michael Welker, “The ‘Reign’ of God,” in: *Theology Today* 49 (1992), 500-515;

children are particularly close to the reign of God.<sup>6</sup> Yet an ethos of liberating joy and thankfulness is also fundamental for an ethos of philanthropic welfare and a culture of help.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, many social routines often suppress thankful sensitivity to the enormous potentials of free, creative self-withdrawal in many of our social contexts.

A thankful attentiveness to the great potentials of free, creative self-withdrawal not only among family and friends, but also in education and medical care, in civil and social organizations should sensitize human being to the strongly formative, direct and indirect forces of the kingly spiritual presence of Christ. It is not just from within the shadow of need but also in the light of thankfulness that human beings must examine the enormous challenges of today: challenges in education, therapeutic medicine, the rule of law, and global interculturalism. Through many, often unremarkable acts of love, care and forgiveness, the cultural impacts of this spiritual presence take on form and Gestalt.

William Schweiker—taking up and further developing insights from the Niebuhr brothers<sup>8</sup> and James Gustafson<sup>9</sup>—has made clear that “Christian humanism”<sup>10</sup> also influences other religious and secular forms of practiced love and compassion while also receiving in turn strong impulses from them. The freedom-promoting spiritual presence of Christ is broader than simply all the churches of all times and places. “Just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me,” regardless whether you recognized my presence in them or not.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, those who limit the image and rule of Christ to “word and sacrament” alone underestimate the breadth of the liberating and culturally orienting presence in the power of the Spirit. And yet it would also be wrong

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Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 3rd rev. edn. 2007), 237ff; idem, *Ethik* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2011), 328ff, 388ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mt 10:14; Marcia J. Bunge, “Children, the Image of God, and Christology: Theological Anthropology in Solidarity with Children,” in: Schuele/Thomas, *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?*, 167–181; idem, (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2001); idem, (ed.), *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge/U.K.: Eerdmans), 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. H. Wichern’s emphasis on “thankful love” as a foundational form of communal life in *diakonia* (Johann Hinrich Wichern, *Schriften zur Sozialpädagogik [Rauhes Haus und Johannesstift]*, Sämtliche Werke, vol. IV.1, ed. Peter Meinhold (Berlin, 1958), 119 u. ö.).

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951); Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York: Scibner’s, 1955), esp. chp. 19.

<sup>9</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. William Schweiker & David E. Klemm, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); William Schweiker, “Flesh and Folly: The Christ of Christian Humanism,” in: Schuele/Thomas, *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?*, 85–102; Liu Xiaofeng, “Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context,” in: *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, ed. Huilin Yang and Daniel Yeung (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 70ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mt 25:40 and 25:34ff; John F. Hoffmeyer, “Christology and *Diakonia*,” in: Schuele/Thomas, *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?*, 150–166.

simply to appropriate an abstract, universal, moral continuum which would be superior to a “merely Christian ethos”. Any such value-free moral reign would just be an empty construct.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. The “Priestly” Spiritual Presence of Christ and the Cultural Orientation of Theological Existence and Liturgical Life

Due to the strengths of the Letter to the Hebrews, discussion of the *priestly dimension* of the Spirit of Christ has often concentrated completely upon the difficult themes of “high priest and sacrificial cult.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus Christ is the eternal high priest, chosen by God himself<sup>14</sup>, and he presents his sacrifice not in the earthly temple but in heaven, “so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).<sup>15</sup> In this way, Hebrews presents an enormous arc that stretches from heavenly high priest chosen by God and sitting enthroned at his right hand (Heb 1:3; 8:1) to the suffering shepherd who goes to his death for the sake of his sheep (Heb 2:5–18; 13:20). The text does indeed raise a central issue regarding the efficacy of the exalted Christ. And yet it doesn’t quite grasp the entire breadth of participation in his life through the power of his Spirit, dealing as it does only with a fragment of his priestly work.

Over against this reduction, one has to appreciate and to understand the priestly spiritual presence of Christ in all the breadth and multidimensionality apparent in the Christian spiritual life and worship service. Francis Fiorenza has drawn special attention to the way that the appearances of the risen Christ are marked by acts such as the greeting of peace, the breaking of bread, the explanation of scripture, the command to baptize, and the missionary sending of disciples—and these acts are all elementary forms of the worship life and character of the church—from the early church on to most of church-life today.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See here the instructive discussion between Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West in: Eduardo Mendieta & Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14f; 5:1ff; 6:20; 7:26ff; 8:1ff; 9:7ff, 24ff; 10:1ff, 10ff; 13:11ff.

<sup>14</sup> “... according to the order of Melchizedek,” Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17 in reference to a mysterious figure who (following Ps 110:4 and Gen 14:1–24) combined the office of king and priest. Cf. Erich Gräber, *An die Hebräer (Hebr 1–6)*, EKK XVII/1 and (Heb 7:1–10:18), EKK XVII/2 (Zürich/Braunschweig & Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger & Neukirchener, 1990 & 1993), vol. 1: 288ff; vol. 2: 9f.

<sup>15</sup> On the theology of sacrifice in Hebrews, Sigrid Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis, Auf dem Weg zu einer befreienden theologischen Rede von Opfer* (Münster/Hamburg/London: Lit, 2004), 174–204.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Francis Fiorenza, “The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology,” in *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 213–248, 238ff.

The greeting of peace, Communion, baptism, the explanation of scripture, mission—this polyphony of the worship service is bound together with the priestly office, which in turn is then shared through the “priesthood of all believers” and its cultural orientations. Following Luther, Christoph Schwöbel sees this presence as a “dialogue between Christ and community” in the worship service: “In the differing ways in which Christ is spoken of during the worship service—in the gospel narratives, the kerygmatic promises, instructive statements, liturgical formulae and discursive discussions of the epistles—the point of them all is the Gospel, the speech of God in his Word with us, which has its point (even as law) in the Gospel, the promise of the compassionate love of God, that is mediated to us as community with God, to us creatures who are otherwise estranged from God. Conversely, in our own speech to Christ, or through Christ to God the Father in our prayers of thanks, petition, lament and praise, we express our need for lasting community with God, and in doxological speech our aim is participation in God’s glory in Christ through the Spirit”.<sup>17</sup>

Thus a correctly understood and correctly celebrated worship service will open, solidify and deepen human knowledge of God and salvation. The adequate knowledge of God is always also knowledge of salvation, not just a metaphysical insight or an ultimate idea. A correctly celebrated worship service does not lead simply to an optimized conception of God or an optimized religious sensitivity. Rather it transposes us into a multidimensional relational event in which the spiritual presence of Christ reveals the breadth of God’s creative action. The participants are enabled to experience the divine Spirit as the Spirit who lovingly saves and elevates them, and who gives them a share in the life of the resurrected and exalted Christ with many spiritual, educational and ethical repercussions.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. The “Prophetic” Spiritual Presence of Christ and the Cultural Orientation of Unmasking and Transforming Systemic Distortions in Politics, Law, Religion, and Ethics

For many people, the prophetic spiritual presence of Christ is the most difficult and even offensive of the three dimensions.<sup>19</sup> For those today who seek actively to participate in this prophetic presence, which conflicts do they find themselves

<sup>17</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, “Wer sagt denn ihr, dass ich sei?’ (Mt 16,15). Eine systematisch-theologische Skizze zur Lehre von der Person Christi,” in: *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XXIII: Christologie*, 47; 50ff; regarding the quote from Luther, see *WA 49, 588*, 16–18.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the excellent ecumenical contribution by Gregor Etzelmüller, ... *zu schauen die schönen Gottesdienste des Herrn: Eine biblische Theologie der christlichen Liturgiefamilien* (Frankfurt / Leipzig: Lembeck / EVA, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> This is not yet apparent in the New Testament texts which expressly connect Jesus with the title “prophet” (e.g. Mk 6:4,15; 8:28; Lk 7:16; 13:31ff; Jn 6:14; Acts 3:22; 7:37); the kingly and priestly titles have a far more compelling character in the context of the crucifixion and Letter to the Hebrews respectively.

facing? Naturally they are repeatedly confronted with the moral, social, cultural, communal and political crises and conflicts that arise from their immediate concrete surroundings. But to these are also added the global conflicts in which people are mostly only passively involved: economic, media, scientific and political conflicts. Countless contexts arise in which prophetic knowledge and a prophetic voice are urgently needed, in which people too want bring to bear their warnings and threats, their protests and encouragements, their yes and their no. Yet if we only focus on this overpowering tidal wave of problems before us, then we risk stumbling into resignation and cynicism: We need a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and entire armies of prophets to tackle this wealth of problems! And yet with such a vague global and religious view, we would hardly grasp the prophetic task involved in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Prophetic speech in the imitation of Christ is primarily speech that serves God, that allows God to express himself and to take action. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ... the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1:1–3). Prophetic speech in the presence of Christ seeks *his direction and God’s will in the conflicts of the present day*. And for this reason, it also engages in self-critique. According to the biblical traditions, it was only the false prophets, the “lying prophets,” who expressed themselves eagerly and quickly and, preferably, in chorus with the politically supported moral majority.<sup>20</sup> The true prophet sought to recognize truth and actualize justice in concrete situations—in the light of God’s word. Thus true prophecy carefully tests whether it really is only speaking its own opinions (or current public opinion) or whether it conveys a message oriented toward the Word and Spirit of God. Here we see how, in the imitation of Christ, the prophetic act and the priestly service of proclaiming God’s word are closely intertwined, and often connected with difficult self-examination and doubt.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On the problem of lying spirits and lying prophets, see Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, translated by John Hoffmeyer, new edition (Eugene: Wipf & Stock 2014), 84–98.

<sup>21</sup> A moving testimony is related in David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 58, quoted in Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 9: In the middle of the Montgomery bus strike, Martin Luther King’s experiences of persecution, hate, threat and suffering reached their darkest point. Over forty telephone callers had threatened violence against him and his family. “Late one night, King returned home from a meeting only to receive yet another call warning him to leave town soon if he wanted to stay alive. Unable to sleep after this disturbing threat, he sat at the kitchen table and worried. In the midst of his anxiety something told him that he could no longer call on anyone for help but God. So he prayed, confessing his weakness and his loss of courage. ‘At that moment,’ he said later, ‘I could hear an inner voice saying to me “Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world.”’ It was, realized King, the voice of Jesus speaking a word of promise, a word of reassurance, a timely word of comfort and strength.”

Importantly, the prophetic presence is also not to be separated from the welfare work of the kingly spiritual presence. Prophecy in the imitation of Christ consistently acts to serve love and the protection of the weak. It does not promote the spread of hate and violence. Prophecy in the imitation of Jesus Christ consistently holds “those who belong to him” to Christ’s Way. Thus true prophecy on the one hand overlaps with the concrete service of welfare and love (the kingly presence), while on the other hand seeking to follow that great line of the worship service in the knowledge of the true and just God and his ways (the priestly presence). Amid this connection, prophecy in the imitation of Christ has the stamina to maintain its eschatological hope: not my will, but rather may God’s will be done!

Due to this overlapping and interconnection, the other two offices and their corresponding Gestalten of the reign of God also display aspects of the prophetic character. Those who participate in Christ’s royal presence may perhaps be content with a humble and quiet life full of practiced and experienced brotherly and sisterly love. But active engagement for the weak, poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged can also take on a prophetic character even when it is not expressly engaged in public critique of the circumstances that cause poverty and disadvantage. In certain situations, quiet yet determined welfare work both inside and outside the church can penetrate deeper and provoke more strongly than noisy politico-moral posturing. And yet it has to be distinguished from prophetic action. It aims at the concrete alleviation of need and the emergent development of the “work of the reign of God.”

In contrast, prophetic witness often proclaims critique and self-critique.<sup>22</sup> This produces tensions and conflicts in communities, churches and societies. These tensions and conflicts become particularly strong when the priestly and prophetic roles clash: We want edifying and devotional worship services, not politico-religious machinations; we want the faith and teachings of the church, not critical social agitation! But from the beginning, most of the world’s churches have expressly sought after and approved a close connection between the priestly and prophetic roles, without calling into question the blessings of a peaceful, joyful, and edifying worship service.<sup>23</sup> It is the living, relevant proclamation of the worship service both in preaching and in education, together with the scientifically-critical training of its office-bearers that bind both Gestalten of the spiritual presence together in a regulated way. At the same time, most churches are wary that prophecy not lose its theological content or become disconnected from the word of God and its critique of social, societal, political and economic conditions.

<sup>22</sup> See here Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* [1917] (Library of Theological Ethics, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010, esp. 118ff, 131ff; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II: Human Destiny* [1943], Gifford Lectures (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1964), esp. 23–34 and 244ff; also Milenko Andjelic, *Christlicher Glaube als prophetische Religion. Walter Rauschenbusch und Reinhold Niebuhr*, Internationale Theologie 3 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998), 55ff, 136ff and 183ff.

<sup>23</sup> The dimensions of proclamation and doxology are emphasized by Thomas Gillespie, *The First Theologians: A Study in Early Christian Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

If only the church's own concerns about religious routines that amplify, or even create, dishonest and befuddling "feel good" atmospheres were as pronounced as their fear of a religiously provoked "moral war of all against all."

One can see more clearly the *prophetic spiritual presence of Christ and its cultural radiation* when realistic perspectives on the cross of Christ are taken into account. To realize this, one cannot reduce the message of the cross simply to the revelation of the suffering and co-suffering God, to God's opposition to death, or similar leading conceptions in many "theologies of the cross", as important as these messages, powerfully elaborated by Luther, Hegel, Bonhoeffer and Moltmann, remain.<sup>24</sup> The nearness of God in the poverty, weakness and powerlessness of the crucified Christ, and God's suffering under the sins of the world should not blind us to God's forceful opposition in the cross and resurrection to the principalities and powers of this world. To recognize this opposition, one must understand the web of real conflicts in which Jesus was caught in the event of his crucifixion. Jesus Christ—who brought humanity the message of the coming reign of God, who mediated to his witnesses the powers of healing, the powers of affection toward children, to the weak, the excluded, the sick, the suffering—it was this Jesus Christ who was condemned by religion, law, global political power, public morality and public opinion, all in a moment of complex unanimity!

Not singular evil figures but rather the "powers of order" (powers that present themselves as "good", and claim to "wonderfully protect" us) all worked together at the cross to oppose Jesus of Nazareth and the presence of God in Jesus Christ. The cross reveals the reality of the world "under the power of sin," it reveals the "night of godforsakenness," not only for Jesus himself but as a continual threatening danger for the world. It reveals the extent to which all public and powerful protective mechanisms—such as the law, politics, religion, morality, and public opinion—can fail us and our societies, and even become a trap.

Against this background, the great challenges and significance of the prophetic spiritual presence become especially clear. More precisely, the great significance of Christian proclamation and theological teaching, of the indispensable tasks of truth- and justice-seeking communities, in addition to the church's concrete engagement in welfare work, and beyond—all of this becomes clear in the dimension of the prophetic office.

The three dimensions of Christ's spiritual presence are entangled and *perichoretically* bound within one another.<sup>25</sup> I have proposed to speak of the "*threefold Gestalt of the reign of Christ*" or the "*threefold Gestalt of the reign of God*."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Welker, *God the Revealed*, Part 3.

<sup>25</sup> See Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* II, 90ff; on perichoresis, see Eberhard Jüngel, Art.: Perichorese, *RGG4*, vol. VI, 1109–1111.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Welker, *God the Revealed*, 209–216; Paul Tillich, *Systematische Theologie*, Vol. III, 25ff, suggested that when describing the processes of life we should replace the commonly used metaphors of "layers" and "levels" with that of "dimensions." Dimensions allow for different weightings while avoiding the need to define set hierarchies.

The resurrected Christ reveals the triune God and thus also himself as the divine Word, as the eternal Logos, but he also reveals the Holy Spirit and the loving Creator and New Creator. In this revelation, he is “not without those who belong to him.” In a Christian perspective, “those who belong to him” cannot be reduced simply to the churches. It becomes particularly clear in the prophetic and kingly Gestalten of the reign that this reign of Christ is far broader and far more encompassing than the domain of the churches. The diaconical and prophetic cultural orientations radiate widely into civil societal, academic and legal dimensions of societal life.

It is dangerous to overemphasize any particular one of these spiritual dimensions. Too heavy a stress in theologies or churches on the kingly presence or the corresponding Gestalt of the reign of God might lead to a powerful profile of church service and welfare—but it can also pave the way for the humanistic self-secularization of piety and the churches and a cultural loss of spiritual powers. A strong emphasis on the prophetic dimensions can promote the development of spirited political and shrewd academically analytical forms of theology and piety and civil societal engagements—but it can also lead to moral exhaustion and spiritual burnout. A strong privilege of the priestly spiritual dimension can contribute to the development of powerful liturgical ecclesial profiles—but it can also lead to ecclesiocentric self-isolation and liturgical rigidity and even stale paralysis.

The respect for the three dimensions of spiritual presence and for their perichoretic connection, and the differentiated cultural radiation can help to combat these widespread, skewed overemphases. First, a *theological humanism* is supported in the orientation towards the caring and sustaining and rescuing God whom Christians see revealed in the brotherly lordship and “*kingship of Christ*”, starting with the care for the very basic human needs, such as nourishment, healing and fellowship, intensely correlated with the familial and educational systems, with health care and the establishment of basic social routines and human rights.

The second dimension brings the revealing and judging aspects of the presence of the divine, which Christians attribute to the “*prophetic office of Christ*” and which should be correlated with the complex understanding of the dimension of the cross. In this respect, not only the co-suffering and kenotic presence of God, but also the disclosure of the principalities and powers by the cross even in religion, politics, morals and public opinion are crucial. Here the real and symbol-political conflicts, the critique and self-critique of religion, the critique of political and moral and legal developments which are not compatible with the search for justice, mercy and truth, and the love of freedom and peace, become important.

Finally, we have to refer to the sanctifying and ennobling presence of the divine, which, again in a Christian perspective, is correlated with the “*priestly office of Christ*” and with the powers revealed in the resurrection. The witnesses of the resurrection reveal very basic spiritual forms of the constitution of the life of the church, such as the breaking of the bread, the illumination and opening of the Scriptures, the greeting of peace, the sending of the disciples etc.—basic

forms which Christians connect with the constitution of the body of Christ and its service in the world.<sup>27</sup>

All three dimensions of the spiritual presence of the divine which Christians see revealed in the life and lordship of Jesus Christ show various interdependences and a multitude of specific radiations into the different spheres of our cultures, our individual and social systems of memories and imaginations. They show different modes of support and of critical challenge of the secular cultural shaping powers which have to be investigated in a realistic comparative discourse with topical foci which promise mutual challenge and illumination among our traditions of faith. What might look like a christocentric triumphalism at a first glance could turn into a helpful offer of a threefold pattern of Living Image and a Spiritual Presence, in which, on the one hand, spiritual, liturgical, educational forms and markers of the identity of a specific faith tradition become cultivated.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the spiritual realm develops modes of thought and moral and religious orientation which are to be developed not only within a specific faith community but in a much broader context of societies and cultures and which can also challenge convictions and attitudes of specific faith traditions.

The ethos of the search for justice, compassion and truth is at home in all three faith traditions, represented in this book. It has spread into the moral, legal, political and educational institutions, organisations and civil societal contexts. What Christians identify with the reign of Christ and the Spirit of love and forgiveness will be named differently in other traditions of faith. But we will not only see different names but also different modes of thought and practices in the horizon of similar intentions. This will provide many resources of cultural orientations in the form of discourse, dialogue, fruitful difference and mutual challenge.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> I see Michael Fishbane in a similar way relating “Jewish Theology” and “General Theology”: *Sacred Attunement. A Jewish Theology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), parts 2 and 3.