

THE UNRELENTING GOD

God's Action in Scripture



ESSAYS IN HONOR OF
BEVERLY ROBERTS GAVENTA

Edited by

David J. Downs & Matthew L. Skinner

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.

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Published 2013 by
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
2140 Oak Industrial Drive N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505 /
P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The unrelenting God: God's action in scripture. Essays in honor of
Beverly Roberts Gaventa / edited by David J. Downs & Matthew L. Skinner.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8028-6767-4 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Bible. New Testament — Criticism, interpretation, etc.
I. Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. II. Downs, David J., 1977 — editor of compilation.

BS2361.3.U57 2013
225.6 — dc23

2013020948

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can be fleshed out in doctrines of atonement, providence, and covenant. But we should say here, at least in the briefest compass, that such an identity allows us to use the language of “natures” as well as “event,” of statutes as well as acts of obedience, of ratification and assent to law as well as the steady unfolding of the Living LORD’s life with his creatures. In my view, most potent of all, this christology is grounded not by finding a place for *obedience* within the life and being of God — a puzzling and very risky innovation in the doctrine of God — but rather by finding law, principle, and justice at the very heart and nature of God himself. These are strengths, I believe, that might well recommend a christology built up out of the gracious, covenant gifts of the law itself.

For our purposes here, I believe in the end that the great strength of such a torah-observant christology, if I may put it so, is that the promise Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt found in Barth a generation ago could be advanced, deepened, and secured. The gospel of Jesus Christ might be more fully recognized as a word of salvation to the Jew first, and also to the Greek, should the law of Israel, followed, loved, and studied by Jews then and now, be made visible, whole, honored, and perfected in Jesus Christ, the Son of the commandment, the Son of David, the Son of God. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth has given us the great riches of his doctrine of reconciliation, grounded in the astonishing grace of the covenant with the people Israel. He drew our eyes to this people, beloved, preserved, and saved by almighty God; he made plain that our Savior belongs by nature, history, and observance to the one people, to “Jewish flesh.” May we, with Barth, seek to enter ever more fully into this one Jew, Jesus Christ, for “in [him] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), and in him we see confirmed the divine mystery, that “all Israel will be saved; as it is written, ‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.’ And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26-27).

Role Model — God’s Image — Life-Giving Spirit: Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?

Michael Welker

Today, when we ask young people if they have a role model, they tend to point first to athletes, singers, or actors, and then often their parents. Friends and teachers also act as role models. Role models are people we identify with consciously or unconsciously. We copy their behavior (or at least try), and we use their lives as a model for our own. Can we place Jesus Christ into this group? Can Jesus Christ be a role model for us today?¹

Jesus Christ as Role Model?

In Christian theology, “image christology” often has negative connotations.² Theology warns us that those who believe in Jesus Christ must never reduce him to the level of an ethical role model. And yet in contrast to this theological apprehensiveness we find a very different message in the Christian piety of the past and present. “Jesus still lead on,” we sing, “‘til our rest be won. And although the way be cheerless, we will follow calm and fearless; guide us by your hand, to our fatherland.”³ As with so many

1. The following is a small contribution of a systematic theologian to the great project: Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays, eds., *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays, “Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Rejoinder,” *JSNT* 32 (2010): 363-70.

2. Cf. Friedrich Schweitzer, “Vorbild I,” *RGG*, vol. 8, col. 1207-8.

3. “Jesu, geh voran auf der Lebensbahn! Und wir wollen nicht verweilen, dir getreulich nachzueilen; führ uns an der Hand bis ins Vaterland,” *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, no. 391. See also no. 384: “Lasset uns mit Jesus ziehen, seinem Vorbild folgen nach” (“Let us ever walk with Jesus, follow his example pure”).

of our spiritual songs, this early eighteenth-century hymn by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf presents an image of Jesus that flickers between human role model and eschatological Savior, one who will lead his people into a heavenly “fatherland.” In the verses that follow, Zinzendorf stresses the example given by Christ, who bears his own suffering as well as that of others. The message is clear: with patience and humility, and without complaint, we should follow the example of Jesus.

In 1896, Charles Monroe Sheldon (1857-1946), a pastor in Kansas and one of the leaders of the Social Gospel Movement, published a book *In His Steps*, with the subtitle: *What Would Jesus Do?*⁴ The book became an enormous best seller, with 30 million copies sold. Even today, a number of paperback versions are still in circulation.⁵ For a short time in March 1900, Sheldon became the publisher of the *Topeka Daily Capital* and introduced a new editorial principle: “Newspapers should be operated as Jesus Christ would operate them.” The *Capital* saw its circulation numbers increase rapidly from 12,000 to 387,000 copies. A hundred years later, in the 1990s, the Michigan lay preacher Dan Seaborn picked up the slogan “What would Jesus do?” and organized an incredibly successful grassroots movement. Businesswoman Jamie Tinklenberg struck on the idea to create an armband with the initials “WWJD?” and sold over 50 million. Perhaps Jesus Christ was a super role model after all.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant developed the famous categorical imperative: “Act in such a way that the subjective rules by which you live could, at any time, become a universal law.” In a way similar to this categorical imperative, “What would Jesus do?” became a moral appeal: act in such a way that the rules by which you live are oriented to the words and actions of Jesus. But does such a religio-moral “role-model christology” correspond to the life and work of Jesus, and is it even possible to live such a role-model christology?

At least some of the “historical Jesus specialists,” whose research saw a strong revival at the end of the twentieth century, would say yes. In this group, we find John Dominic Crossan with his two U.S. best sellers *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* and *Jesus: A Revolution*

4. He appealed, among others, to the journalist William Thomas Stead (1849-1912) and his book *If Christ Came to Chicago: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1894; reprint: BiblioLife, 2009).

5. E.g., Redford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970; reprint 2010.

tionary Biography.⁶ As Crossan points out, all extant early biblical and extrabiblical texts focused on the life and teachings of Jesus were written between 30 and 150 CE. He was particularly interested in the two oldest layers, from the years 30 to 60 and 60 to 80. Crossan also highlighted narratives about Jesus or references to him that appear repeatedly in unrelated texts. From the texts he examined, Crossan identified 522 “complexes” of Jesus material, finding that 42 have words or actions of Jesus that were recorded in three sources; and 33 references to Jesus were repeated even more than three times. Interestingly, one of these is Jesus’ command “Let the little children come to me . . . for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:14 and pars.).⁷ On the basis of this textual-archeological approach, Crossan offered an impressive image of Jesus.

Jesus was one who recognized the most elementary needs of the people — the need for healing, food, and community. In healing the sick and in open table fellowship, Jesus accepted others. But he did more than that: he launched a new social order. Old and young, women and men, unclean and clean, slaves and slaveowners grew together into a new community in the Jesus Movement. This led to a revolutionary, yet nonviolent, transformation of political and familial relationships of power.

The image of Jesus that Crossan offered us is not misleading. It certainly portrays features of the historical Jesus and his work, and it clearly emphasizes the nature of the life of Jesus as an ethical ideal. Yet, this image of Jesus obscures the deep structures of Jesus’ proclamation, in the same way that it loses sight of those events that were so central to his person, life, and work: the events of the cross and resurrection. Remembering Jesus as an ethical role model who saw the basic human needs of others and strove to help them, and the “role-model christology” linked to such a view, distorts our understanding of the life and work of Jesus and our faith in him. One need not be a “pious Christian” to appreciate this problem.

Jesus Christ as God’s Image?

There is an anecdote told about Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the great yet enigmatic French politician from the period of the French Revolution. A contemporary of Talleyrand asked his advice about found-

6. San Francisco: Harper, 1992; San Francisco: Harper, 1995.

7. Unless indicated otherwise, all of this essay’s biblical quotations come from the NIV.

ing a new religion. According to the story, Talleyrand leaned back in his chair and said: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ founded a new religion by being crucified and then rising from the dead after three days. In your matter, I would suggest that you try something similar." It is here at the cross and resurrection that we see the failure of reductionistic and simplistic "role-model christologies." When one looks at Jesus' journey to the cross, one can certainly highlight his exemplary and symbolic actions, such as the miraculous feeding of thousands and his nonviolent resistance against the Roman Empire. And for this reason, other heroes of nonviolent resistance, such as Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr., are often associated with the person and work of Jesus. Yet the incredible depth of Jesus' suffering really calls into question all talk of "Jesus as role model."

Jesus was nailed to the cross in the name of the Roman Empire, in the name of the Jewish religion (which stood in conflict with that Roman world power), in the name of two forms of law (Jewish and Roman), and in the name of public opinion ("Crucify him!" they shouted" [Mark 15:13 and pars.]). Even his disciples left, abandoned, betrayed, and denied him.⁸ The absolute, utter, and purposeful isolation of the crucified Jesus, against whom "the entire world" conspired, radicalizes powerlessness and the helplessness of excruciating suffering even under the most brutal of injustices — a condition Jesus has shared with the many martyrs and "victims of world history."

In the same way, talk of Jesus as our role model seems equally misleading when we consider the resurrection. Unfortunately, the resurrection of Jesus has repeatedly been equated with a simple physical resuscitation — which has in turn been the basis for much doubt and ridicule. In contrast, the biblical witnesses to the resurrection are far more subtle.⁹ On one hand, they stress that when the disciples encountered the resurrected Jesus, he was *not* immediately recognized. This speaks against a physical resuscitation. They also highlight the way that Jesus suddenly withdrew, much like a vision. On the other hand, the narratives also stressed the continuity with Jesus' pre-Easter life, and the certainty that Jesus of Nazareth was present there with them in a new form. The story of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus is particularly revealing (Luke 24:13-35): on the road to Emmaus, two disciples encounter the risen Jesus but fail to recog-

8. Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), esp. pp. 46-48, 71-72.

9. Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker, *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2010).

nize him. He explains to them "in all the Scriptures" the mysteries concerning the Messiah (24:27). When they reach their destination, the disciples ask the stranger to stay with them: "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over" (24:29). At the table, as he performs the rite of breaking bread, "their eyes were opened" (24:31). But then immediately in the same verse we read, "He disappeared from their sight." Rather than feeling horrified at having encountered a ghost, the disciples come to a realization: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (24:32).

Other records of the resurrection also testify to the strange tension between the sensory presence of the resurrected Christ and his hiddenness. It is in this tension — between the vivid experience of God's revelation and strong doubt — that the resurrection reports present the post-Easter presence of Jesus Christ. Thus in the resurrection, what we are dealing with is not a re-creation of the biological, pre-Easter body of Jesus but rather with the presence and efficacy of the post-Easter body of the exalted Christ — a body that extends to his witnesses and is indeed composed by them. With their spiritual gifts, they constitute the church as the body of Christ, with different parts each aimed at serving the construction and expansion of the church as well as its proclamation.

The biblical witnesses tell us that the resurrected and exalted Christ is the "head" of this body, and that he guides and reigns over this body through his Spirit. Quite soon after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, we find the conviction that God had revealed himself in this person. He is God's image and, indeed, in the words of the Nicene Creed, "God from God, Light from Light." It is in the resurrected and exalted Christ that God reveals himself and brings people to share in the life of the Resurrected One, and thus in the divine life, in eternal life. Here, talk of Jesus Christ as a role model appears completely misleading. In some ways, the pre-Easter Jesus can stand as a role model. But to say that the resurrected and exalted Christ is a role model for us would be like claiming God himself as a role model for humanity. Jesus Christ is not an image that we can aspire to; he is God's image. Yet is this alternative formulation really the answer?

The "Presumptuous Image Theology" of the Bible?

In 2010, Helga Kuhlmann published a book titled *Fallible Role Models in the Bible, Christianity, and Church: From Angels, Prophets, and Saints to Popes*

and Bishops.¹⁰ In this book, Kuhlmann speaks of a “presumptuous image theology in the texts of the Bible.”¹¹ She points to biblical texts that, as she says, apparently stand “in striking tension to that which, with regard to the so-called Fall, has been repeatedly handed down throughout Christian dogmatics right into the twenty-first century as the archetypal definition of true sinfulness: namely the desire to be like God (Gen. 3:5).”¹² The biblical texts she points to explicitly encourage us to seek to be like God. In the Old Testament, we read: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2). And even the Sermon on the Mount tells us: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Paul instructs the Corinthians to imitate him, just as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), and the entire New Testament canon is marked by just such an imitative discipleship ethic, which is unthinkable without a well-developed concept of exemplary “role models.” The book of Acts encourages us to follow Jesus through suffering; and the sending of the disciples mirrors the example of the life of Jesus.

The life of the resurrected Christ is clearly tied back to the features and characteristics that made the earthly Jesus a role model for us, and keeps him a role model today. The body of Christ works through many acts of love and forgiveness, and especially through the welfare work of the church; in the church’s great mission journey and in the spread of Christianity we see this expressed particularly clearly in the ongoing building of hospitals and schools. But can we bring these dimensions together without losing a connection to the earthly, human life of Jesus? The resurrected Christ is much more than a human role model. Indeed, he stands as the very image of God among humanity. He is the bearer of that divine revelation through which God makes himself known. To use Helga Kuhlmann’s expression, this corresponds with a “presumptuous image theology” in the texts of the Old and New Testaments.

10. Helga Kuhlmann, ed., *Fehlbare Vorbilder in Bibel, Christentum und Kirchen: Von Engeln, Propheten und Heiligen bis zu Päpsten und Bischöfinnen*, Theologie in der Öffentlichkeit 2 (Münster: LIT, 2010).

11. “Christus — Vorbild? Grenzen und Chancen von Vorbildlichkeit aus theologischer Sicht,” in *Fehlbare Vorbilder*, pp. 146-47: “[u]nbescheidene[n] Vorbildtheologie in Texten der Bibel.”

12. Helga Kuhlmann, “Christus — Vorbild? Grenzen und Chancen von Vorbildlichkeit aus theologischer Sicht,” in *Fehlbare Vorbilder*, p. 147: “in eklatanter Spannung [stehen] zu dem, was in der christlichen Dogmatik im Anschluss an die Erzählung vom sogenannten Sündenfall bis ins 21. Jahrhundert wiederholt als herausragende Bestimmung genuiner Sündigkeit tradiert wird: sein zu wollen wie Gott (Gen 3,5).”

To gain some clarity here, we need to recognize the great conceptual arc that spans biblical understandings of the human person. On one hand, the human person is created as the image of God. The Psalms tell us: “You have made them only a little lower than God himself” (8:5, paraphrased). Yet on the other hand we must accept that we are finite, transitory beings. “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19; cf. Job 10:9; Ps. 104:29). The human being, as man and woman, is designated by God to be God’s own image (Gen. 1:27). Human beings should rule over and order the world, shaping this volatile and turbulent creation in line with God’s love and God’s wisdom.

Yet people fail at this task, and by looking to human role models we can never find our way back to God’s path. For this reason, we find in Jesus Christ not only the image of the true human person but also the true image of God. Yet above all, through the power of Christ’s Spirit and through the resurrection we are drawn into Christ’s post-Easter body and his post-Easter life. The associated power and glory of the image of God transform and exalt us. The power of the divine Spirit at work here overcomes that separation and tension between the concepts of divine image and role model. Yet in the light of the cross and resurrection, this tension becomes even more dramatic.

When we acknowledge that the resurrected and exalted Christ is Lord, κύριος, the Son of God, and indeed “God from God, Light from Light,” then we discover a far deeper dimension to the message of the cross. In the incredible cooperation of the powers of this world against that exemplary work of the pre-Easter Jesus, and in the terrific violence that was directed and brought against him, we see the vain attempts of this world, caught under the power of sin, to oppose the goodness of God. In the light of the resurrection we see revealed God’s victorious and yet compassionate opposition against these combined forces of the world. In its concentration on the cross of Jesus Christ, the Christian faith gains the comforting knowledge that no matter how great our despair and fear may be, no matter how deep our suffering, no matter how difficult and threatening the conflicts are that face us, even beyond the limits of death God will be near us and will remain faithful to us. God seeks to save us out of the darkest depths of our suffering and despair and enfold us within his eternal life. This leads us away from the idea of a role model or from an image of God to the dimension of the life-giving spirit — a spirit made present in Jesus, and which takes on concrete form in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ as "Life-Giving Spirit" and the Human Spirit

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul notes: "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Jesus Christ as life-giving spirit — this is hard to understand, and yet we must grasp this insight if we hope to understand the "presumptuous image theology" of the biblical texts, or if we want to understand why Jesus Christ is far more than a role model, even though in many ways he does act as a charismatic role model for us in our direct testimony about him, and in the lives of those who follow him and become, in various ways, his witnesses.

In order to grasp this concept, we need to unpack these difficult references about the spirit. In German, as in English, the word "spirit" is often related to an individual's personality ("Goethe was a great spirit of his age"). The word can also refer to ghostly apparitions ("After he began seeing spirits, they placed him in an institution"). Yet primarily, "spirit" tends to symbolize an authority, medium, or power that binds together and orients the thinking, action, and behavior of a group, institution, society, culture, or epoch ("the spirit of this community," "our school spirit," "the spirit of the age"). In German, the word *Geist* does double duty, referring also to the human mind.

To gain some clear insights into the human and divine spirit, it will be helpful to start with human beings, particularly our undisputed cognitive (*geistig*) abilities. Even something as supposedly simple as placing external objects into our memory and imagination is attributed to the human mind (*Geist*). This act of "picturing" the external world within us is actually an incredibly nuanced activity. An object, or indeed a whole complex of objects, an entire environment with differing stimuli and signals can be stored in the human memory and imagination. Facts, natural events, and webs of experience can be "spiritualized." They exist then not only in physical reality, but also in a type of mental, spiritual form within our memory and imagination. These mental events can then be altered or combined in a broad variety of ways. And yet, these so-called "mental pictures" can be extremely deficient: they can lack focus, be fleeting, be accompanied by pain, or be tainted by disappointment. These images remain then, as we say, more or less "removed from reality." These spiritualized, mental constructions can lose contact with reality and can become oppressive and traumatizing. They begin to hinder normal life as well as our ability to experience life. They begin to undermine our mental and spiritual health.

Yet such boundaries and borderline cases of experience should not lead us to underestimate the great richness, cultural solidity, creative power, and varied blessings of the spirit and of our cognitive abilities. Not only are we able to store individual items and entire networks of objects and experience in memory and imagination, but we can release these contents into latent memory, storing and protecting them, and then recall them. These contents can be varied and recombined in an almost infinite number of ways. In our own imaginations and memories, we rule over an incredible "cognitive realm." These "spiritualized" realities can be used for our individual and communal entertainment and edification, they can aid our powers of persuasion and imagination, and they support our solid insights and offer orientation. In a person's memory and imagination, there is room for an entire ocean, indeed a whole world of mental impressions and sensations. Not only sights but also impressions from sounds and spoken words can be stored in all their richness, combined and contrasted, ordered and placed into association with a world of mentally pictured images and even series of images. Scents, sounds, melodies, and even mentally transposed tactile impressions all animate and enrich this "spiritual" world. Connected with them are often lasting impressions and powerful emotions.

Both the rich interplay of these objects and elements of the spirit, as well as a good selection and limitation of these elements, are vitally important. Both determine the quality, power, and extent of our mental operations. At different levels, religious rituals, literature, the fine arts, music, and especially today's electronic media all demonstrate the power of the spirit to process human experience, as well as the power of imagination. Abstract symbol systems and the use of symbols in mathematics, as well as formal logic and analytical thought, have helped us to discover in the natural and cognitive worlds a range of principles, rules, and correlations of order that allow us not only sensibly to systematize the richness of these mental impressions, but to unleash astonishing powers that enable us to control the world.

Our cognitive potentials allow us to reconstruct highly complex past situations and even entire worlds, and to imagine and anticipate (with some certainty) many future events, as well as their subsequent interconnections. They also allow us to communicate over vast distances, and to transfer and share not just information, or our thoughts and stories, but even complex impressions and infectious emotions.

We can coordinate extraordinarily multifaceted memories and expect-

tations, producing the orienting and organizational power of a communal, cognitive world. On this basis, the human spirit not only achieves cognitive feats, but also brings about a real wealth of cognitive-material cultural achievements that intensify and accelerate their own processes of communication and formation. The machinery of science and education, of research and technological innovation, of political and cultural organization are all fruits of the human spirit. And yet despite all these reasons to be enthralled by the powers of the human spirit, we must be extremely careful not simply to glorify this spirit.

When we examine the phenomena of the spirit, we must take into account psychotic phenomena and also our many possibilities to use our cognitive powers (either consciously or unconsciously) for the severe detriment of others, of culture, and of nature. We throw a wealth of ideas and impulses into global circulation, broadcast them around the world, and these are not always helpful or healthy. Entire torrents of trivializing and banalizing ideas, forms of thought, and emotions also become cognitively transported and culturally ingrained. Fanaticizing, brutalizing, and destructive dispositions and views are placed into circulation via the power of this same spirit and gain incredibly binding and charismatic social and political power. Over long periods of time, and often unnoticed, brutal mentalities spread, destroying and impoverishing everything around them.¹³

As Paul Tillich warned us, countless manifestations of the spirit are highly ambiguous and ambivalent. In a highly dangerous way, numerous achievements of the spirit blind people, as well as entire societies, cultures, and epochs, creating naïve images of the world and committing us to aggressive ideologies. An “evil spirit” then begins to rule the people and uses many of our great mental abilities to destroy and corrupt the conditions of human and creaturely life. Therefore, it would be a dangerously negligent practice simply to connect this spiritual world from the outset with “goodness,” “the promotion of life,” “freedom,” or even “the divine.” This sobering and shocking insight reminds us of the need always to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) and orient ourselves to the creative, life-giving Spirit of God

13. Today, the poisoning of entire societies and epochs by deeply rooted racist, sexist, imperialist, and colonialist attitudes and their correlated use of force is undeniably and shockingly clear. Even into the 1960s one could read in academic textbooks and encyclopedias that water and air were “infinite resources” and thus did not need to be accounted for economically. Thus “in all innocence” ecological brutality was cognitively propagated across the globe.

revealed in Jesus Christ. “[T]he last Adam [is] a life-giving spirit” — but what does this mean?

The Power of Jesus and His Spirit to Create Role Models

Without surrendering the many and diverse exemplary characteristics of his pre-Easter life, the resurrected and exalted Christ still meets us, not only in a personal encounter, but also in the efficacy of the Spirit, which the biblical traditions described with the image of the “outpouring of the Spirit.” Already in the Old Testament we find passages describing how God will “pour out [his] Spirit on all people,” men and women, old and young, and male and female slaves (Joel 2:28-29). The report of the Pentecost event in Acts 2 then picked up this language. The outpouring of the Spirit was revolutionary. In those patriarchal societies, where only men and the elderly had any say, and where the young were simply expected to obey, in those societies built upon slavery (as were all societies in antiquity), even the mere proclamation of this outpouring of the Spirit was revolutionary. A promise has now been given to society’s marginalized and ostracized individuals and groups that they too will be able to testify to God’s wonders and will be given access to God’s truth and justice. Even the weak and excluded will be enabled to see the central forces of life and to share these with others, to set into motion cognitive, spiritual, and even material processes that will shape the world in accordance with God’s desires.

It is Jesus Christ, the life-giving spirit, who offers us this divine, orienting power. In his great volume on Christian doctrine, the Reformer John Calvin (whose 500th birthday was celebrated around the world in 2009) offers us an exceptionally important double insight: Jesus Christ — upon whom the Spirit of God rests, the Spirit of justice, compassion, and the knowledge of God — pours this Spirit out upon those who belong to him.¹⁴ In Calvin’s main work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he is emphatic in his insistence that Christ, the Messiah, was anointed not with oil but with the Holy Spirit, so he could give those who belong to him a share in his power: “Therefore the anointing of the king is not with oil or aromatic unguents. Rather, he is called ‘Anointed’ of God because ‘the spirit

14. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, “Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology,” in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 3-26.

of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might . . . and of the fear of the Lord have rested upon *him*' [Isa. 11:2]. . . . [H]e did not enrich himself for his own sake [or 'privately,' *privatim*], but that he might pour out his abundance upon the hungry and thirsty."¹⁵ Here Calvin stresses the so-called "baptism of the Spirit" through the one who was "anointed by the Spirit." This was a revolutionary spiritual experience for the early church, and in the twentieth century it came to stand as the center of the global Pentecostal movement and the charismatic revival.¹⁶ The second key insight that Calvin gives us is: if we want "to know *the purpose for which* Christ was sent by the Father and *what* he has brought us, we must look above all at three things in him: *the prophetic office, kingship, and priesthood.*"¹⁷ The teaching of the "threefold office of Christ" (*munus triplex Christi*) has made its way today into all Christian confessions.

According to the biblical texts and the theologies based on them, Jesus Christ is the true king. This king is brother and friend, and yet simultaneously a poor and despised person. He revolutionizes the concepts and conditions of rule, placing them in the service of the church's welfare work (the service of our neighbor), in the service of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. He thus stands for us in various ways as a role model, across the entire spectrum of various human relationships. The passionate pursuit of a free and democratic life, as well as universal education and healthcare for all members of society, stands in this tradition.

Jesus Christ also stands in the prophetic tradition. Through his proclamations and through his suffering and death he reveals to us the evil spirits and powers that consciously and unconsciously oppose God's salvific presence. He is a role model for truth-seeking and justice-seeking communities, not only in the church but also in the sciences, law, and civil society. He is a role model for prophetic, nonviolent resistance against injustice and oppression.

Finally, he is also a priestly role model. By establishing the sacraments of baptism and holy communion (celebrating our change of lordship away

15. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.15.5 (ET: ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960], pp. 499-500, emphasis added).

16. Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

17. Calvin, *Institutes* II.15; ET: p. 494, emphasis added. Cf. Michael Welker, "Rethinking Christocentric Theology," in *Transformations in Luther's Theology: Historical and Contemporary Reflections*, ed. Christine Helmer and Bo Kristian Holm, *Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte* 32 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011), pp. 179-92.

from the powers of this world to the power of God), in a continually renewed remembrance of his life, suffering, and death, and in anticipation of his perfect revelation in glory, the Resurrected One also gives orientation to our spiritual service — not only for ordained pastors but for the entire community of Jesus Christ and, potentially, the entire world.

It is in the power of the Spirit that all people have a share in this human as well as divine work. Here before our spiritual eyes we see an incredible polyphony of this role-model-creating work. Thankfully, we can perceive an incredible polyphony of this role-model-creating work in those real lives that orient themselves both consciously and unconsciously toward this person and role model.

Jesus Christ is much more than an individual, human role model. Indeed, when we reduce his image to that of an individual, human role model, it becomes distorted and destroyed. According to the biblical traditions, it was demons and unclean spirits who, after Jesus' first spectacular healings, announced: "You are the son of the highest, you are the Son of God!" As the Gospels tell us, Jesus reacted by swearing them to silence. (Already in Mark 1:34 we read that "he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.") His identity should not be made known before the resurrection, so that others will not reduce his work, seeing him simply in the role of great healer or great teacher, or taking him simply as a role model for the acceptance of others or for political resistance. In the cross and resurrection, Jesus seems to be utterly removed out of the hands of those seeking a role model or a corresponding life orientation. When we recognize in the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ the presence of this life-giving spirit, in all continuity and discontinuity with his pre-Easter life, then we see that this life-giving spirit materializes and concretizes itself within his many witnesses. It is then that we regain Jesus as a role model, coming back to us almost explosively through the polyphony of the Spirit's work and in the charismatic power of his witnesses.

More precisely: as a "life-giving spirit," Jesus Christ calls countless people to follow and imitate him. He enables his disciples to live, in a multitude of ways, their own exemplary lives with their many different gifts and abilities — even by bearing witness through patience and suffering. From the perspective of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ, as the resurrected and exalted life-giving spirit, raises up countless people (even beyond the borders of the church) to be role models and to imitate him. That, too, is why today, and for all time, he remains far more than a human role model.