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# Quests for Freedom

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## 5.4 Divine Spirit and Human Freedom

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The plasticity of the human brain and the versatility of the human mind are extremely impressive. The capacity of the human spirit to host huge realms of memory and imagination, to keep memories and imaginations latent or to activate them, to share and to communicate them, can evoke strong impressions of individual freedom. The ability to communicate emotional, rational, cognitive and volunative powers, to connect and to intensify them, and to shape natural and social environments generates feelings of shared and communal freedom. But the many experiences of limits to transforming imaginations and thoughts into action, the many experiences of disagreements and conflicts in social life, experiences of self-jeopardy and self-endangerment require the complicated discernment between illusions of freedom and reliable experiences of freedom.

### *Freedom-Discourse in the West*

The last decades have seen several areas of discourse in the academic orbit in the West, in education systems and civil societies that have tried to rise to this challenge. A dominant discourse was marked by the debate between liberalism and communitarianism.<sup>1</sup> At the center of the discussion we found the question: “Freedom or community?” and a (readily expected) search for all possible compromises and syntheses. “Not only ‘freedom from’ but also ‘freedom to’ and ‘freedom for’” had become the standard topics of the debate.<sup>2</sup> Up for consideration were, on the one hand, self-determination, freedom of action and “self-cau-

1 The following observations have been inspired by Wolfgang Huber’s perspective on the recent Euro-American academic and public discourse about the topic: “Verantwortete Freiheit als Lebensform,” in: *Verantwortlichkeit – nur eine Illusion?*, Thomas Fuchs and Grit Schwarzkopf (eds.), Winter: Heidelberg 2010, 319-340, 319f. The following parts refer partly to M. Welker, “Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom!,” in: *Living Theology. Essays presented to Dirk J. Smit on his 60th birthday*, Bible Media: Wellington 2011, 73-90.

2 Cf. the contribution of Carver Yu in this volume.

sality” and, on the other, the limitation of our spheres of freedom.<sup>3</sup> Concerted efforts were made to distinguish between the true spirits of liberation in justice-oriented struggles and deceptive, indeed often dissembling and deceitful activities performed in its name. And of course, theology continually expressed the insight that, at least with respect to issues of healing and salvation, freedom is always a gift granted by God.<sup>4</sup> Discussions about human dignity attempted to illuminate the foundations and scope of human and creaturely freedom.<sup>5</sup> In reflections on responsibility, law and love, attempts were made to shape and direct the use of freedom into life-promoting forms. All these attempts stood up bravely against naturalistic and scientific ideologies, which, given the supposedly indisputable insight that all human desires and actions are naturally determined, sought to abandon thought about freedom or toss the quest for freedom onto the scrapheap of history.<sup>6</sup>

Since the time of Aristotle and the Stoa, discourses on freedom throughout Western history were often latently characterized by an understanding of freedom and the human spirit that focused on the cognitively steered self-referentiality of persons, societies and cultures. Spirit and freedom became tangible and effective in self-determinative thought. In the famous Book XII of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle defines the spirit as the driving force that thinks itself, insofar as it participates in what is thought, and becomes part of it.<sup>7</sup> The spirit is the power that does not lose itself in relationships with the other, but rather receives and maintains itself in the thinking relationship. Our understanding of the world and our understanding of ourselves are mediated through this spirit. The quality of all thought and understanding comes from the heightening of self-understanding together with a simultaneous recognition and understanding of external reality. Aristotle connects this spiritual activity with self-actualization, freedom and one’s own wellbeing. He even calls it “divine,” for it is the perfect actualization of all knowledge about all reality together with the absolute self-knowledge that characterizes divinity. The best and eternal life comes to it, and it does so in perfect freedom.<sup>8</sup>

This brilliant philosophical theory of the spirit and its correlated view of freedom have had an incredible influence on Western cultural history. They have provided societies and cultures with an often extreme-

3 Huber, *ibid.* 321ff.

4 *Ibid.*, 328ff.

5 Cf. the contribution of Francis Schüssler Fiorenza in this book.

6 Huber, *ibid.* 337.

7 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics X-IX*, ed. by Hugh Tredennick (Loeb Classical Library 287/18), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935, XII, 1072b, esp. 19–32; Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 283ff.

8 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics XII*, 1072b, 19–32.

ly individualistic and intellectual understanding of freedom based in theoretical subjectivism. It is impossible to hold this great achievement in too high regard, although one has to address its problems and limitations. Greek political thought further developed the theory of freedom by connecting the intellectual freedom of ideas with forms of oligarchical equality in the public sphere. The freedom to speak in public assemblies (*parrhesia*), the equal right to express oneself publicly (*isegoria*), equality before the law (*isonomia*) and equal entitlements with regard to exercising political leadership (*isokratia*) were all important elements in the empowerment of free men, both individually and communally, and in the direction of their paths through society (*eleutheria*).<sup>9</sup> Today, when we study Jürgen Habermas's description of the so-called "democratic process,"<sup>10</sup> we must ask ourselves whether philosophical thought on the concept of freedom has really made any significant advances over the last 2,000 years.

According to Habermas, members of society [*Gesellschaftsbürger*] – who are the recipients and beneficiaries of civil rights and liberties, and who stand as the addressees of the law – should qualify and understand themselves as citizens of the state [*Staatsbürger*] and as the "authors of the law."<sup>11</sup> Habermas presents us with a vision of a "democratic process" in which more and more members of society become citizens of the state, citizens who consciously understand themselves as tasked with authoring the laws via civil societal discursive and institutionally legal means to secure increasingly better and clearer principles of justice within the interwoven network of a society's cultural value orientations. Here we see the propagation of an elitism within civil society<sup>12</sup>: one that establishes an essentially appellative-moral relationship to the power structures of pluralistic societies, with their systemic political, media-based, economic, legal, academic, educational and even religious forms of organization.

In this situation, what can genuine theological thought about the Spirit and about the freedom that comes from the Spirit contribute? The following comments will concentrate on a biblically oriented relativization of what is essentially a self-reflective, intellectual understanding of the spirit. Though I will not offer a detailed discussion of Paul's thinking here, my comments are significantly shaped by his

9 Cf. the contributions of Peter Lampe, Jan Gertz and Jürgen van Oorschot in this volume.

10 Jürgen Habermas und Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion*, ed. by Florian Schuller, Herder: Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 2005.

11 *Ibid.* 18ff.

12 Cf. the contribution of Susan Abraham in this volume and her references to the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

anthropology and by his distinction between the human and divine spirits.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Subversive “Outpouring” of God’s Spirit*

A biblically oriented alternative to Aristotelian thought about the spirit has to start from a different perspective than self-referential cognitive and mental power. It should start with the great biblical image of the “outpouring of the Spirit.” The talk about the outpouring of the Spirit forces us to focus on a wealth and plenitude of relations, on the constitution of a spiritual community with many interrelations, mutual impacts and radiations. This is a very different starting point over against the reflexive, mentalistic and often individualistic anthropomorphic concepts of the spirit, which have resulted from the influence of Aristotelian metaphysics and related theories.

However, the wealth of relations captured with the notion of the outpouring of the Spirit is not easily perceived as helpful exactly because the generated diversity and plenitude are not easy to control in imagination. This approach then leads many people to assume that we cannot really know anything about the Holy Spirit at all, that the Spirit is just a numinous power. And it seems to follow that we had rather remain piously silent in the face of the divine apophatic mystery when we want to focus on the divine Spirit. Over against an intellectualistic reductionism in the Aristotelian vein on the one side and over against the – only seemingly pious – will to intransparency and vagueness on the other side, the biblical classics about the pouring of the Spirit provide us with illuminating insights. The topmost classic, the prophet Joel 2:28–29, tells us that God’s Spirit will be poured out on men and women, on the old and the young, and on male and female slaves. The other great classic, the Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, quotes Joel and adds that the Spirit of God comes down on human beings of different nations, cultures and languages.<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of this outpouring of the Spirit are indeed seen to be salvific. The human beings who are gifted and filled by the Spirit gain cognition of God, they gain the power of proclamation and spiritual communication, and they gain the related orienting ethical

13 Cf. 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*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2014, M. Welker (ed.), 45–57.

14 Cf. Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*: new. Ed. Wipf & Stock: Eugene 2014, 134–158, 228–248.

powers for their lives.<sup>15</sup> At this point it should be emphasized that the biblical traditions do not regard each and every pouring of the spirit as salvific. Rather, God can pour out a “spirit of distortion” (Is 19:14) or a negative “spirit of deep sleep” that blinds even the prophets (Is 29:10). Over against this negative impact, the salvific pouring of the spirit, of which not only Joel and Acts, but also Isaiah (32:15), Ezekiel (39:29), Zechariah (12:10) and Paul’s letter to the Romans (5:5) speak, constitutes a lively spiritual plural and polyphonic communality and community.

In the light of the biblical classics, this polyphony appears to be loaded. It can be regarded as subversive and even as revolutionary. According to the prophet Joel, not only the men, but also the women are overcome by the spirit – and this is said in patriarchal environments. The young people are overcome by the spirit – and this is said in gerontocratic contexts. And even the “menservants and maidservants,” and these were most likely slaves, are overcome and gifted by the spirit of God – and this is said in slaveholder societies. Finally, the account of Acts challenges all ethnocentric, tribalist and exclusivist perspectives on the work of the Spirit by its emphasis on the fact that people from many nations, many cultures and many languages are overcome by the Spirit of God.

The idea of such a polyphony and of the multitude of interrelations in the community of the Spirit easily raises the fear that we have nothing but chaos. To be sure, the emergent reality of the working of the Spirit and the emergent reality of the coming of the reign of God that the biblical traditions envision present multifarious cognitive difficulties to grasping this process and event.<sup>16</sup> However, the pouring of the divine Spirit gains clarity by its connection with the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*), which are especially emphasized by Paul (1Cor 12:4ff; 7:7; 13:1-3 and 14:4ff; Rom 12:4ff). According to Paul, the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit serve the edification, enlivenment and vivification of a multidimensional and polyphonic community, of the “body of Christ” (1Cor 12 and Rom 12). The church as the body of Christ has to be seen as a pluralistic and organismic unity of a distinct number of members. These members are all related to Jesus Christ as their head, but among themselves they live in only relative and functional hierarchical relations. Sometimes the eyes are particularly important, sometimes the hands, sometimes the feet ... (cf. 1Cor 12:12ff). The

15 Cf. M. Welker (ed.), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2006 and Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, Zondervan Grand Rapids 2006.

16 Cf. Michael Welker and Michael Wolter, “Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes,” in: *Reich Gottes, Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XI*: Marburg 1999, 103-116; Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2013, 223ff.

lively polyphonic “unity of the body” is constituted and maintained by the pouring of the Spirit and by the multitude of the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Since many established monohierarchical, patriarchal, ageist, classist, nationalistic and culture-chauvinistic guidelines are thus questioned and challenged by the outpouring of the Spirit, we should ask again: How is it that Paul can claim that the “Spirit of freedom” is not actually a Spirit of disorder, even of chaos (cf. 1 Cor 14:33)?

### *Spirit, Freedom, and the Law of Justice and Mercy*

The first response, dealing with the form and efficacy of the Spirit, helps us to address the concerns that the Spirit of God is just a “numinous being” and that the outpouring of the Spirit leads to simple religious and cultural “confusions” – yet it is also vital for the discourse between different religions and other worldviews. This answer is that the efficacy of the Spirit of God stands in continuity and discontinuity with the law traditions, with the Torah. In several messianic promises in the Book of Isaiah (Isa. 11, 42 and 61), which the New Testament expressly and explicitly associates with the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, we find mention of “the Chosen One of God” upon whom the *Spirit of God rests*. It is said that he will bring justice among the nations, protection for the weak and knowledge of God. Justice, compassion and the knowledge of God – here we have the fundamental goals of the biblical law. Matt 23:23 identifies “the most important matters of the law [as] justice, mercy, and faith.” One can hardly overestimate the incredible influence on Western culture of the normative connection between these concepts.

Even today, the connection between justice and the protection of the weak continues to shape the dynamics behind the evolution of a just and humane law. Conversely, the connection between the protection of the weak and the law has led to the institutionalization of a “culture of aid,” not only in the social work of the church but also in the form of a legal, societal and national interest in general education, in basic economic welfare for all people and in a dependable healthcare system. It was hardly coincidental that after the fall of the Nazi regime, Germany sought to regain international trust and recognition by portraying itself as a “state under the rule of law” and as a “welfare state.” There is no room in this context to examine the complex normative dynamics of the biblical law traditions, which have been powerfully effective

17 Cf. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press New York 1997, 110ff; Welker, *The Work of the Spirit*, 221ff.

down into our modern era.<sup>18</sup> Yet we must recognize that the creation of the dichotomies “law and Spirit” and “law and gospel” has been fatal in both theology and the church: for even God’s good law, as with the human spirit, can fall under the power of sin. The law can indeed take on highly dangerous forms, even degenerating into a “law of sin” (Rom 8:2). But if Paul was operating with some primitive dichotomy between law and Spirit, then he could never have spoken of a “law of the Spirit” (Rom 8:2), a “law of faith” (Rom 3:27) or a “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Rather what is characteristic for the work of the Spirit of God is the further development of the ethos of the law into an ethos of love, hope and faith. But the intentions of the law – to promote justice, mercy and the knowledge of God (or perceptions of the truth) – remain intact. In a positive sense they have been “elevated.”

This elevation also applies to the Spirit of Christ. For many people, even within the churches, the “Spirit of the Lord” is still connected with the model of a monarchical “royal rule of Christ” or a “Christocratic brotherhood” in the sense of Barmen III,<sup>19</sup> the hierarchical-patriarchal tones of which are not easily associated with a very heartening understanding of freedom today. The Spirit of Christ can also be connected with the Spirit of kenosis, of sacrificial surrender and co-suffering – yet in which we easily lose all clear perspectives on the liberation and elevation of creation.

### *The Spirit of Christ as a Spirit of Freedom*

We can find a helpful alternative when, with Calvin, we reclaim the biblical and original understandings: that Jesus Christ, upon whom the Spirit of God (the Spirit of justice, mercy and knowledge of God) rests, pours out this Spirit upon all “those who are his.”<sup>20</sup> In his work

18 Cf. Michael Welker, “Justice – Mercy – Worship: The ‘Weighty Matters’ of the Biblical Law,” in: Michael Welker and Gregor Etzelmüller (eds.), *Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology, Religion in Philosophy and Theology* 72, Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 2013, 205-224; „The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law,” in: *Journal of Law and Religion* 29/2 (2014), 225-235.

19 While the Barmen Declaration was in its own time, and is still today, a highly laudable and in many respects exemplary theological text, it does display significant pneumatological deficits; cf. Michael Welker, “Barmen III: Woran orientieren? Die Gestalt der Kirche in gesellschaftlichen Umbrüchen,” in: *Begründete Freiheit – Die Aktualität der Barmer Theologischen Erklärung*. Vortragsreihe zum 75. Jahrestag im Berliner Dom, Evangelische Impulse 1, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009, 59–75.

20 James Dunn, “Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology,” in: *The Work of the Spirit*, 3–26.



the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,<sup>21</sup> Calvin emphatically notes that: Christ the Messiah was not anointed with oil but with the Holy Spirit so that those who belong to him might have a share in his power:

Therefore the anointing of the king is not with oil or aromatic unguents. Rather he is called 'Anointed' [*Christus*] of God because 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might ... and of the fear of the Lord have rested upon him' [Isa 11:2p.] ... he did not enrich himself for his own sake [*privatim*], but that he might pour out his abundance upon the hungry and thirsty."<sup>22</sup>

Here Calvin stresses the so-called "baptism of the Spirit" through the "Anointed by the Spirit," which became a groundbreaking spiritual experience for the early church, and which the global Pentecostal movement and twentieth-century charismatic renewal have made the center of their piety.<sup>23</sup>

In this re-orientation toward the resurrected and exalted Christ, Calvin also offers a second key insight that links us back into the Old Testament traditions and their broad spheres of remembrance and horizons of expectation:

To know *the purpose* for which Christ was sent by the Father, and *what* he conferred upon us, we must look above all at *three things* in Him: the *prophetic office*, *kingship*, and *priesthood*.<sup>24</sup>

The doctrine of the "threefold office" of Christ (*munus triplex Christi*) helps us to understand the public and eschatological work of Jesus Christ in all its differentiated richness. It incorporates links to the Old Testament traditions – continuities in the work of the pre-Easter and post-Easter Christ with the actions of anointed kings, priests and prophets, constantly alluded to by the witnesses of the New Testament. Schleiermacher, Bath and other leading theologians of Reformed traditions have taken up and developed this doctrine of the *munus triplex Christi*. Through the work of Johann Gerhard, it found a point of entry into Lutheran theology,<sup>25</sup> and it was also adopted by the Roman

21 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, translated and indexed by Ford L. Battles, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006, Vol I., chp. II, 15.

22 Ibid. II, 15.5 499f, cf. II 15.2; Calvin continues: The Father is said "not to measure to have given the Spirit to his Son" [John 3:34p.]. The reason is expressed as follows: "That from his fullness we might all receive grace upon grace" [John 1:16p.] (II, 15.5, 500).

23 Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006. The following part takes up a part of Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2013, 209-313.

24 *Institutes* II, 15, 494.

25 *Loci theologici* 1610–22 Loc. IV, chp. 15.

Catholic<sup>26</sup> and Orthodox Churches.<sup>27</sup> Edmund Schlink notes that: “In the spread of the doctrine of the *munus triplex Christi* we can witness a unique ecumenical phenomenon. For this point of doctrine did not achieve its dogmatic form before, but rather after the division of the churches. With its views on the salvific work of Jesus Christ, it established itself as common teaching across church divisions.”<sup>28</sup>

If we take the doctrine of the threefold office seriously from a pneumatological perspective, then we must develop it further into an understanding of the *threefold Gestalt of Christ's reign*. Since the doctrine of the threefold office can often seem contrived or cobbled together, we should take care to orient these three dimensions toward the pre-Easter life, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Due to the characteristics of Jesus' life and his charisma, the work of the pre-Easter Jesus is often attributed to the “prophetic office,” with the cross signifying the “high-priestly office” (touching on sacrifice and the one who brings it) and the resurrection ushering in the “kingly office.” *But if we begin with the presence of the resurrected Christ in the Spirit and then look back upon Jesus' formative life, we discover quite a different order.*

In the light of the pre-Easter life of Jesus, we suddenly see a brighter image of the *kingly rule of Christ* and of those who belong to him, an image that displays a clear message of realistic freedom. In the light of the outpouring of the Spirit, this royal rule revolutionizes hierarchical and monarchical forms of order, in both the church and the state, for this king is a brother and friend, indeed even one who is poor and outcast. With its radical democratic and post-patriarchal concepts of order, this royal rule, for some contemporaries, can take on an uncomfortable and chaotic appearance; yet on the other hand, it becomes exemplary for all those seeking to orient themselves toward the promotion of freedom in their environments.

This reign is marked by the praxis of loving and forgiving acceptance, by healing, and by liberating teaching and education. In continuity and discontinuity with the Torah traditions, love and forgiveness are defined through one's *free and creative self-withdrawal*<sup>29</sup> for the benefit of others. The freedom-promoting power that arises from this type of

26 Matthias Josef Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* Vol. 5.2 Freiburg: Herder, 1954, 226–305.

27 Panagiotos Trepela, *Dogmatike tes orthodoxu katholikes ekklesias* (Greek) Vol. II, Athen, 1959, 143–203.

28 Edmund Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik. Grundzüge*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd edn. 1985, 414.

29 Wolfgang Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht. Grundlinien christlicher Rechtsethik*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 3rd edn. 2006, 316f.; Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Vorrang für die Armen. Auf dem Weg zu einer theologischen Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1993.

free, creative and (in the case of love) also joyous self-withdrawal for the benefit of one's neighbor is tremendous. The goal of love – which can be defined only unsatisfactorily through *eros*, *agape* and *philia*<sup>30</sup> – is that “all things work together for the good” of the one who is loved; to set his or her feet “in a broad place.” When it comes to the reign of God, it is vital to realize that we are not primarily aiming to propagate in ourselves a responsibility toward freedom-promoting action or behavior, but rather to promote a joyous and thankful recognition of the *experience of free self-withdrawal that is done for our own good*. For this reason is it said that children express a particular closeness to the reign of God.<sup>31</sup> Yet an ethos of liberating joy and thankfulness is also fundamental for an ethos of benevolent social care in the church.

A thankful sensitivity to the enormous potential behind free and creative self-withdrawal in our family contexts, among friends, and in our civil and societal organizations, together with a sensitivity to today's tremendous global welfare, educational, therapeutic, constitutional, ecclesiastical and intercultural challenges, can truly open our eyes to the incredibly formative and freedom-promoting forces of the *munus regium Christi*. The reign of God and the reign of Christ take on form through many, often seemingly insignificant acts of love and forgiveness. And it is not only the direct witnesses who receive a share in this often inconspicuous yet incredibly powerful reign. “Christian humanism”<sup>32</sup> also shines upon other religious and secular forms of practiced love and compassion, while also receiving strong impulses from them. The boundaries of the freedom-promoting reign of Christ are broader than all churches of all times and all regions. “Whatever you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did for me,” whether you recognized me in them or not.<sup>33</sup> Those who limit the reign of Christ to “word and sacrament” alone fail to recognize the breadth of Christ's liberating presence in the power of the Spirit.

Understandings of the *priestly dimension* of the rule and reign of Jesus Christ are often linked with the Book of Hebrews, where the focus falls upon the difficult themes of “sacrifice and atonement.” In con-

30 Michael Welker, “Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love,” in: John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids and SPCK: London, 2001, 127–136.

31 Mt 10:14; Michael Welker, “The ‚Reign’ of God,” in: *Theology Today* 49 (1992), 500–515.

32 Cf. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008; William Schweiker, “Flesh and Folly: The Christ of Christian Humanism,” in: Andreas Schuele and Günter Thomas (eds.), *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today: Pathways to Contemporary Christology*, Louisville: Westminster, 2009, 85–102.

33 Cf. Matt 25:40 or 25:34ff; John Hoffmeyer, “Christology and Diakonia,” in: *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today*, 150–166.

trast to this narrow view,<sup>34</sup> when understanding the priestly office we should rather focus on the biblical witnesses to the appearances of the post-Easter presence of the resurrected Jesus Christ. Francis Fiorenza has helped us to see that the appearances of the risen Christ – which tell of greetings of peace, the breaking of bread, the expounding of Scripture, the command to baptize and the sending of disciples into the world — all outline the fundamental forms of the life of the early church and its charismatic powers [*Ausstrahlungskräfte*].<sup>35</sup> A polyphony of church life and existence is bound together with the priestly office, and it is this priestly office in which the “priesthood of all believers” shares and in which it finds its concretization.

A continuous concentration on worship services and the celebration of the sacraments can already bring about extraordinary experiences of the liberating power of the Spirit. In baptism we bear witness to a change of lordship. The baptized person – whose life stands under constant threat of sickness and need, violence and mortality – now receives the promise of an enduring life of community together with God. The biblical texts describe this new life given to us in baptism with words that are hard to understand: liberation from the powers of sin and death, community with Christ, endowment with the power of the Holy Spirit, protection into eternal life. In these ways they describe a life that, on the one hand, has already materialized and been realized in the kingly rule of Christ; yet, on the other hand, it extends far beyond mere earthly existence. In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the participating believers find themselves surrounded by the exalted Jesus Christ and his life. They celebrate that meal “in remembrance of him;” they remember his life and his work; they especially remember “the night in which he was betrayed;” they proclaim his death on the cross; they celebrate his resurrection and his presence; they look toward the *parousia* (“you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”).

The entire fullness of the life of Jesus Christ is present in this celebration – indeed we encounter there the entire presence of the Trinitarian God. The *eucharistia*, the expression of thanksgiving to the Creator God and the creative Holy Spirit for the created gifts of bread and wine, is followed by the *anamnesis*, when we remember Jesus Christ and his salvific work in the events of the cross and resurrection. These in turn are followed by the *epiclesis*, the thankful and joyous invocation of the

34 Cf. Sigrid Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis, Auf dem Weg zu einer befreienden Rede von Opfer*, ATM 2, Münster: Lit, 2001.

35 Francis Fiorenza, “The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology,” in: S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O’Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Oxford, 1997, 213–248, 238ff; cf. also Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 4th ed. 2010, esp. 318ff.

Holy Spirit, who elevates believers, forming them into members of the body of Christ and giving them a share in the new creation.<sup>36</sup>

It is in this celebration of the presence of the sustaining, saving and exalting Trinitarian God that *a liberation of liturgical and spiritual life, a liberation of spiritual imagination, feeling and thought* occurs. The celebration of the sacraments and a biblically oriented proclamation and teaching repeatedly call into question all banal, artificial and oppressive concepts of God, as well as banal and oppressive religious and moral practices. This moment of table fellowship, symbolized by peace and justice, refers to the royal rule of Christ and to the church's actions of love. In our remembrance of the night of Jesus' betrayal and the events of the cross, we are pointed to the prophetic office and to the richness of its radiant blessings.

The nature of the *prophetic office*, or the prophetic dimension of the reign of Christ, becomes particularly clear in the light of the cross. In order to recognize this, we must avoid reducing the message of the cross simply to the revelation of a "suffering God." God's benevolent nearness in the poverty, weakness and powerlessness of the Crucified One is vitally important.<sup>37</sup> However, a concentration upon this "crucified God" should never obscure God's mighty confrontation against the powers and forces of this world – a confrontation that takes shape in the cross and resurrection. Jesus Christ, who brought us the message of the coming reign of God, who gave us the power to heal, the power to care for children, for the weak, the outcast, the sick and the suffering; this Jesus Christ was condemned, unanimously, by the "principalities and powers" of this world.

Religion, law, politics, public morality and opinion all like to present themselves as "forces for good," which are here to "marvelously protect" us; yet in the event of the cross they all conspire together to work against God's presence in Jesus Christ. The cross reveals the world "under the power of sin," a dark "night of God-forsakenness," not just for Jesus himself but rather as a constant threat for all humankind. It shows us that all of our public and powerful protective mechanisms – such as the law, politics, religion, morality and public opinion – can fail us and our communities.<sup>38</sup> The great liberating importance of the

36 Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

37 Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation 1518," in: *Luther's Works* Vol. 31, ed. by Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957, 35-70; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and papers from prison*, ed. by John Bowden and Eberhard Bethge, London: SCM, 2001, 131-137; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993.

38 Cf. Dirk Smit, "... Under Pontius Pilate' (Fn. 16); Smit also offers a most insightful

Christian proclamation, the great importance of theological teaching, the indispensable, liberating mission of truth and justice-seeking communities – and here we mean not only the church but also the sciences and the legal system – all become clear in the dimension of the prophetic office. As truth and justice-seeking communities,<sup>39</sup> the church of Jesus Christ allows itself to be filled with Christ's Spirit of freedom. Actions ranging from the needful analysis and critique of current distorted social and global conditions to passive resistance against corrupt and perverted politics, media influence, economics, and even corrupt morality and religion – actions of critique and resistance grounded in the responsible search for truth, justice and care and respect for the weak – all become newly visible in the context of the prophetic office. In the confrontations with the powers of sin, we need spiritual and moral depth as well as analytical clarity. An opposition politics superficially flavored with religiosity and focused simply on making moral appeals on trending hot-button issues hardly does justice to the tasks of the prophetic office. The boundaries of this office also extend far beyond the walls of the church and may even turn today against a self-glorifying, self-justifying or ideologically blinded church and forms of ecclesiasticism.

and consolidated overview and evaluation of my various publications and comments on the theology of the cross.

39 Cf. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001, esp. chp. 9.