



Michael Welker

Holy Spirit and Human Freedom: A John Paul II Memorial Lecture

Abstract

In this paper, the Heidelberger Professor M. Welker, Director of the Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology (FIIT), analyses the relation of God's Spirit and Human freedom according to John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Dominium et Vivificantem* from 1986. He focusses in the second and third part of this article on the biblical foundations of the "outpouring of the Spirit" and on the understanding of the Holy Spirit as Spirit of Christ and Spirit of Freedom. In this Trinitarian approach, the *eucharistia* is presented as anamnesis and epiclesis, as "liberation of spiritual imagination,



Prof. em. Dr. Dr. Dres. h.c. Michael Welker is Senior-professor at the Theological Faculty and Director of the Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology (FIIT) of Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg, Germany

feeling and thought.” “As truth- and justice-seeking community, the church of Jesus Christ allows itself to be filled with Christ’s Spirit of freedom.”

Keywords

Holy Spirit, Human Freedom, Eucharist, Anamnesis, Epiclesis, Church, Justice

1 Introduction

“On 2 June 1979, John Paul II celebrated the first Mass on Polish soil at Victory Square. This is when he called out: *Let your Spirit descend and renew the face of the earth! (Ps 104:30, M.W.) This earth!*”¹ Later he added: *“My beloved compatriots - if we accept everything that I dared to express at this given moment - what immense tasks and obligations arise from this! Do we really live up to them?”*² A year later, strikes broke out all over the country that brought about the establishment of ‘Solidarity’. Twenty years later, on 13 June 1999, the Pope stood once again on the very same square which was already under the name of Pitsudski Square. He recalled back then that *“along with the Primate of the Millenium, Card. Stefan Wyszynski and with many bishops and a great number of the People of God from the Capital City that were gathered there, we raised up our fervent call for the gift of the Holy Spirit. (...) Is everything that happened in Europe and in the world starting from what happened in our Fatherland, not the answer of God? Transformations of political,*

¹ Pawel Zuchniewicz, Papal Warsaw, The John Paul II Centre of Thought, (Warsaw 2007), p. 49.

² Ibid.

*social and economic systems were happening before our very eyes, thanks to which given people and nations have regained anew the splendor of their dignity. Truth and justice are regaining their value, becoming a burning challenge for all those who appreciate the gift of their freedom. And for all this we give thanks to God, looking with hope at the future.”*³

The following paper will, in its first part, examine the relation of God’s Spirit and Human freedom according to John Paul II’s famous Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* from 1986. In the parts two and three, it will attempt to shed some biblically oriented and theological light on the “outpouring of the Spirit” and on the question: how to discern powerful spirits with the help of the Spirit of Christ.

2 Divine Spirit and Freedom in the Encyclical Letter DOMINUM ET VIVIFICANTEM

Pope John Paul II’s most impressive Encyclical Letter of 1986, “DOMINUM ET VIVIFICANTEM: On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World,”⁴ offers a rich theology of the Holy Spirit. It sets out with references to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed which addresses the Holy Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life,” and states that the Holy Spirit “has spoken through the Prophets”⁵. Pope John Paul II then draws on a vast variety of biblical references, above all the Gospel of John and the letters of St. Paul, but also on encyclical letters of his

³ Ibid.; cf. Michal Luczewski, *Solidarnosc, Centrum Mysli Jana Pawla II*, (Warszawa 2015), p. 8ff.

⁴ Pope Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Dominum et Vivificantem: On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World*, (Boston MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2003).

⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

predecessors and on documents of the Second Vatican Council in order to unfold perspectives on the identity and the work of the Holy Spirit: “The Church (...) instructed by the words of Christ, and drawing on the experience of Pentecost and her own apostolic history, has proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit, as the giver of life, the one in whom the inscrutable Triune God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life”⁶.

In a subtle exegesis of biblical texts, Pope John Paul II illuminates the work of the Holy Spirit as counselor, as teacher, as witness serving the remembrance of Christ and as “light of the human spirit” with the intention to guide human beings “into all the truth”⁷. He then refers to the immense revelatory power of the Holy Spirit who “searches even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10) and mediates the self-giving love of God into human hearts. In the words of St. Paul: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5; cf. 9).

John Paul II regards the power of the Holy Spirit as a means for “God’s salvific self-communication to the things he creates”⁸. On the one hand, this self-communication in the Spirit reveals the world under the power of sin, and on the other hand it shows the turning of “sorrow into joy” (John 16:20) in the resurrection, in the pouring of the Spirit and in the fact that the Spirit has remained active “from the day “from the day of Pentecost onwards”⁹.

With reference to the prophecy of Isaiah, ““the Fifth Gospel”” or ““the Gospel of the Old Testament,”” John Paul II unfolds the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-7, with special references particularly to John 14-16.

⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

work of the Spirit in and through Jesus Christ. “The prophetic texts (...) are to be read in the light of the Gospel – just as, in its turn, the New Testament draws a particular clarification from the light contained in these Old Testament texts”¹⁰. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah, the Anointed One, who possesses the fullness of the Spirit of God, who brings justice and mercy to the weak and the poor, and the cognition of God (cf. Is. 11:1ff; 42:1ff; 61:1ff) not only to Israel, but also to the gentiles.

John Paul II then shows how the New Testament traditions take up these messages and how they speak of Jesus Christ’s “rejoicing in the Holy Spirit” (Lk. 10:21f; Mt. 11:25ff), “because it has been given to him to reveal God’s fatherhood” and the merciful “outpouring of this divine fatherhood on the ‘little ones’”¹¹.

The dual aspect of the work of the Spirit – the revelation of the world under the power of sin and the turning of sorrow into joy – remains formative for the rest of the encyclical letter. The second part is entitled “The Spirit Who Convinces the World Concerning Sin” (John 16:8ff)¹². John Paul II centers the notion of sin very strongly on the rejection of Christ’s mission¹³. He emphasizes the revelatory power of the cross of Christ¹⁴ and then focuses on the topic of human disobedience¹⁵ and the suffering it generates. In this complex situation, he, on the one hand, sees the Holy Spirit “enter into human and cosmic suffering with a new outpouring of love, which will redeem the world”¹⁶. On the other hand, he sees the tasks of the Apostles

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20f.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 27-48.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31f.36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37f.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

who, according to John 20:22f, are given the Holy Spirit by the resurrected Christ connected with the power to forgive sins¹⁷. He also speaks of “the laborious effort of the human heart, the laborious effort of the conscience” in which conversion takes place¹⁸. He summarizes: “The Spirit of truth who helps human beings, human consciences, to know the truth concerning sin, at the same time enables them to know the truth about the righteousness which entered human history in Jesus Christ”¹⁹. The third and last part of the Encyclical Letter speaks of “The Spirit Who Gives Life”²⁰ and draws the concentration to the “Jubilee of the Year 2000.” This part also introduces a profiled notion of freedom. Based on the words of St. Paul, “The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17), John Paul II says, “When the Triune God opens himself to man in the Holy Spirit, this opening of God reveals and also gives to the human creature the fullness of freedom”²¹. However, he also bemoans that “the marvelous ‘condescension’ of the Spirit meets with resistance and opposition in our human reality”²². With Eph. 3:14-16, he concentrates on the “strengthening of the inner man” by the working of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he concludes with fine remarks on the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit as “the living breath of prayer”²³. The Encyclical Letter translates the phrase “human heart” with the term “human conscience” – or, to put it differently, it fuses the biblical terms “*cardia*” and “*syneidesis*” (heart and conscience). By so doing it constructs a bridge to modern minds

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 49-67.

²¹ Ibid., p. 51.

²² Ibid., p. 55.

²³ Ibid., p. 65.

and mentalities in the West and their basic understanding of spirit and freedom. Since 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 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.²⁴ 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 well-being. 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.²⁵

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 extremely individualistic and intellectual

²⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics X-IX*, ed. by Hugh Tredennick (Loeb Classical Library 287/18, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), XII, 1072b, esp. pp. 19–32; Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 283ff.

²⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics XII*, 1072b, pp. 19–32.

understanding of freedom based in theoretical subjectivism. This great achievement cannot be esteemed too highly, even though its problems and limitations have to be addressed. My following comments will concentrate on a biblically oriented relativization of the Aristotelian, the essentially self-reflective, intellectual understanding of the spirit.

Though I will not offer a detailed discussion of St. Paul's thinking here with his illumine-ting differentiation between heart, psyche, conscience, reason and spirit, my comments are significantly shaped by his anthropology and by his distinction between the human spirit and the divine Spirit and related notions of freedom.²⁶ Only indirectly do I refer back to a multi-years international and interdisciplinary dialogue between theologians, philosophers, and scientists on the complex nature of the human person. My main concern will be an attempt to illuminate the biblical notion of the "outpouring of the Spirit" and the notions of freedom correlated with this event.

3 The Biblical Notion of the "Outpouring of the 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 divine Spirit forces us to focus on a wealth and plenitude of relations, on the constitution of a

²⁶ Cf. Michael Welker, "Flesh–Body–Heart–Soul–Spirit: Paul's Anthropology as an Interdisciplinary Bridge Theory," in: M. Welker (ed.), *The Depth of the Human Person: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2014), pp. 45-57.

spiritual community with many interrelations, mutual impacts, and radiations. This is a very different starting point over against the reflexive, mentalist 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 in the notion of the outpouring of the Spirit is not easily perceived as helpful exactly because the resulting diversity and plenitude are not easy to control. 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 should 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 the prophet Joel at length and adds that the Spirit of God comes down on human beings of different nations, cultures, and languages.²⁷

The consequences of this outpouring of the Spirit can indeed not be perceived other than salvific. The human beings who are gifted and filled by the Spirit gain cognition of God, they gain

²⁷ Cf. Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, (new ed. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 134-158, 228-248 (*Gottes Geist. Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 6th ed. 2015).

the power of proclamation and spiritual communication, and they gain the related orienting ethical powers for their lives.²⁸ 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 – emphasized in Joel and Acts, in Isaiah (32:15), Ezekiel (39:29), Zechariah (12:10) and Paul’s letter to the Romans (5:5) – 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. Even the “menservants and maidservants,” and they were most likely slaves, are overcome and gifted by the Spirit of God – and this is said in slaveholder societies, a matter of course in antiquity. 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 the multitude of interrelations in the community of the Spirit easily raises the fear that it

²⁸ Cf. M. Welker (ed.), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2006); Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

results in 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 many difficulties to an understanding of this process and event.²⁹ 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” (1 Cor. 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. 1 Cor. 12:12ff). The 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.³⁰ How is it that Paul can claim that the “Spirit of freedom” is not a Spirit of disorder, even of chaos (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33)?

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

²⁹ Cf. Michael Welker, Michael Wolter, “Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes,” in: *Reich Gottes, Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XI*: Marburg 1999, 103-116; Michael Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 223ff.

³⁰ Cf. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), p. 110ff; Michael Welker, *The Work of the Spirit*, p. 221ff.

leads to religious and cultural “confusion” – and yet it has to be maintained that it is vital for the discourse between different religions and worldviews. The 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 (Is. 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. Mt. 23:23 identifies “the most important matters of the law [as] justice, mercy, and faith.” One can hardly overestimate the incredible influence of the normative connection between these concepts on Western culture.

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 demonic Nazi regime and the horrors of two World Wars, 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 down into our modern era.³¹ Yet we must recognize that the establishment of the dichotomies “law and Spirit” and “law and gospel” has been fatal in both theology and the church. Moreover, it is important to see that even God’s good law, like the human spirit, can fall under the power of sin. The law can indeed take on highly dangerous forms, and even degenerate into a “law of sin” (Rom. 8:2). However, if Paul had operated 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 of 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. Still, 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 gains the greatest clarity when we concentrate on the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ.

4 The Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of Freedom

According to the well-known English New Testament scholar James Dunn, one of the central insights of the early church was that Jesus Christ, upon whom the Spirit of God (the Spirit of justice, mercy, and knowledge of God) rests, pours out this

³¹ Cf. Michael Welker, “Justice – Mercy – Worship: The ‘Weighty Matters’ of the Biblical Law,” in: Michael Welker, Gregor Etzelmüller (eds.), *Concepts of Law in the Sciences, Legal Studies, and Theology, (Religion in Philosophy and Theology 72)*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 205-224; Michael Welker, “The Power of Mercy in Biblical Law,” in: *Journal of Law and Religion* 29/2 (2014), pp. 225-235.

Spirit upon all “those who are his.”³² Similarly, in his work the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,³³ 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.”³⁴ Here Calvin stresses what is known as “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 – now numbering half a billion members – have made the center of their piety.³⁵

In this re-orientation toward the resurrected and exalted Christ, Calvin also offers a second key insight that links us to the Old Testament traditions and their broad spheres of remembrance and horizons of expectation: “To know *the purpose* for which

³² James Dunn, “Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology,” in: *The Work of the Spirit*, pp. 3–26.

³³ *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, p. 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 15.5, p. 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).

³⁵ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). The following part takes up a part of Welker, *God the Revealed: Christology*, pp. 209–313.

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*.³⁶ 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, Barth and other leading theologians of the Reformed traditions have taken up and developed this doctrine of the *munus triplex Christi*. Through the work of Johann Gerhard, it found entry into Lutheran theology,³⁷ and it was also adopted by the Roman Catholic³⁸ and Orthodox Churches.³⁹ Edmund Schlink notes that “[i]n 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.”⁴⁰

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*.

³⁶ *Institutes* II, 15, p. 494.

³⁷ *Loci theologici* 1610–22 Loc. IV, chp. 15.

³⁸ Matthias Josef Scheeben, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik*, Vol. 5.2, (Freiburg: Herder, 1954), pp. 226–305.

³⁹ Panagiotes Trempele, *Dogmatike tes orthodoxu katholikes ekklesias* (Greek) Vol. II, (Athen, 1959), pp. 143–203.

⁴⁰ Edmund Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik. Grundzüge*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd ed. 1985), p. 414.

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, the cross and the 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." *If, however, 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 an outcast. 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*⁴¹ for the benefit of others. The

⁴¹ Wolfgang Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht. Grundlinien christlicher Rechtsethik*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 3rd ed. 2006), p. 316f; Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Vorrang für die Armen. Auf dem Weg zu einer theologischen Theorie der Gerechtigkeit*, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1993).

freedom-promoting power that arises from this type of 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*⁴² – 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 it says that children have a particular closeness to the reign of God.⁴³ 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 educational, therapeutic, constitutional, ecclesiastical, economic, legal 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. Moreover, it is not only the direct witnesses who receive a share in this often inconspicuous yet

⁴² Michael Welker, “Romantic Love, Covenantal Love, Kenotic Love,” in: John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, (Grand Rapids and London: Eerdmans and SPCK, 2001), pp. 127–136.

⁴³ Mt 10:14; Michael Welker, “The ‘Reign’ of God,” in: *Theology Today* 49 (1992), pp. 500-515.

incredibly powerful reign. “Christian humanism”⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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 contrast to this narrow view,⁴⁶ 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. The Roman Catholic theologian Francis Fiorenza from Harvard 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

⁴⁴ Cf. David E. Klemm, 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), pp. 85–102.

⁴⁵ Cf. Mt. 25:40 or 25:34ff; John Hoffmeyer, “Christology and Diakonia,” in: *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today*, pp. 150–166.

⁴⁶ Cf. Sigrid Brandt, *Opfer als Gedächtnis, Auf dem Weg zu einer befreienden Rede von Opfer*, (ATM 2), (Münster: Lit, 2001).

church and its charismatic powers (*Ausstrahlungskräfte*).⁴⁷ 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. For instance, in baptism, we bear witness to a change of lordship. The baptized person – whose life stands under the 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, a 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. Furthermore, 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

⁴⁷ 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: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 213–248, 238ff; cf. also Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 4th ed. 2010), esp. p. 318ff.

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 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 Holy Spirit, who elevates believers, forming them into members of the body of Christ and giving them a share in the new creation.⁴⁸

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 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 the church’s actions of love. In our remembrance of the night of Jesus’ betrayal and the events of the cross, we are directed to the prophetic office and 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

⁴⁸ Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), (*Was geht vor beim Abendmahl?*, Gütersloh 5th ed. 2015).

powerlessness of the Crucified One is vitally important.⁴⁹ 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. The great liberating importance of the 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.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation 1518,” in: *Luther's Works* Vol. 31, ed. by Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), pp. 35-70; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and papers from prison*, ed. by John Bowden, Eberhard Bethge, (London: SCM, 2001), pp. 131-137; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

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. As truth- and justice-seeking community, the church of Jesus Christ allows itself to be filled with Christ's Spirit of freedom.