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"God the Revealed: Christology" Michael Welker's response to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's question

Van der Westhuizen, Henco
University of the Free State
hvdw13@gmail.com

Abstract

Almost twenty years after the publication of the German Systematic Theologian Michael Welker's celebrated *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes,* comes his awaited *Gottes Offenbarung. Christologie.* In the light of this publication, recently translated by Douglas W. Stott into *God the Revealed: Christology,* the article attempts to analyse his theology of Jesus Christ. This theology has developed over the last decades out of his theology of the Holy Spirit. In the first part it will be shown how his theology of Jesus Christ can be seen as an answer to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's question of who Jesus Christ is *for us today.* The second part then sketch the most important insights and impulses for future theologies concerned with the confession: "God revealed himself in Jesus Christ". This is followed by a few remarks in the light of his realistic theological endeavour.

Keywords

Michael Welker, Christology, The Reign of God, The Spirit of God, The Biblical traditions.

> Die Lehre von der dreifachen Gestalt des Reiches Christi stellt ein reiches und lebendiges Bild der Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus vor Augen. In Kontinuität und Diskontinuität zu seinem vorösterlichen Leben offenbart er sich selbst als der Auferstandene und Erhöhte. Er offenbart die Kraft und Macht des Heiligen Geistes, "die Seinen" in sein königlich-diakonisches, priesterliches und prophetisches Leben hineinzunehmen. Er offenbart die schöpferische und neuschöpferische Gegenwart Gottes mit ihren rettenden, erhebenden und erlösenden Kräften (Welker 2012a:292).

1. Bonhoeffer's question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

1. In the last years of his life Bonhoeffer develops what the German systematic theologian Michael Welker finds to be his most important theological questions and thoughts (Welker 2009a:103-120). Here, writing from prison to his friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer (1998a) asks the question of what Christianity, or who Jesus Christ actually is for us today. He answers the question by saying that Jesus Christ reveals the God who is weak and powerless in the world and that precisely in this way, *and only so,* helps us.[1] The question for Welker, however, is what the answer to the question of who Jesus Christ *actually* is for us today would be for people not finding themselves in Bonhoeffer's situation. What would the answer to this question be *for us today?* (Welker 2012a:17-20).

2. To answer this question it is therefore important for him to realise that Bonhoeffer wants to speak about God in the *polyphony of life* (Bonhoeffer 1998b, 1998c, 1998d), i.e. in the polyphonic, multidimensional presence of God *in the Spirit* (Welker 2012a:23-28) In this light it is clear why Bonhoeffer is critical where God is made to be a marginal figure, i.e. moved to where human knowledge is at an end (Bonhoeffer 1998g). For him it is important to grasp that God wants to be recognised in the midst of our lives, i.e. of multidimensional, polyphonic life.

3. For Welker both of these legacies are imperative when trying to make sense of God's revelation in Jesus Christ today. Through the centuries and also today, however, there have been an one-sided interest in what he labels the iconic presence of Jesus Christ, i.e. a fascination with God's iconic proximity in the depictions of the beginning and the end of Jesus' life, on the one hand, and Jesus Christ as cultural icon, i.e. an interest in his life recurrently prompted by the manifold ways in which he is customarily present, on the other (Welker 2012a:28-29). The fact that Jesus Christ is iconically present and is generally seen as a cultural icon does *not* mean however that there is an interest in the Jesus often embedded in conflict-laden contexts,[2] and emphatically regarded as the concrete revelation of

1 Bonhoeffer sees this to be the "starting point" for speaking of Jesus Christ in a religionless *zeitgeist*. Cf. Bonhoeffer (1998g).

2 Welker not only refers to the contexts recorded in the biblical traditions which fundamentally call the iconic presence, where Jesus Christ comes close to human

God (Welker 2012a:13-14). On the contrary, Welker calls attention to a "Christophobic" attitude that, although evident especially in Europe and North America, extends to all of Christianity in general (Welker 2012a:29-31). Here, in line with what Bonhoeffer (1998a) labelled the "religionless age" he indicates how the problems attached to the question of who Jesus Christ is for us today have led to what he has often called a *subjectivist faith*.[3]

4. This is a form of faith that in an emphatic self-relation believes itself to be certain of a removed entity that is at the same time remarkably close (Welker 2004:239), i.e. faith is reduced to an inwardness, a feeling, an immediate relation to an "inneren Ganz Anderen in mir" (Welker 2001a:17). This powerful form of faith: leads to religious speechlessness and an incapacity for communication; it is an empty religious form that does not gain contours in the disclosing of content; it appears as a decisive certainty and does not advance from this mere certainty to a communal search for truth, i.e. the disclosure of truth content;[4] it is a self-irritating form in the sense that the entity that is remarkably close nonetheless stays removed; it furthermore is an individualising form of faith that in its escapist character remove itself from communicative forms of religious life (Welker 2004:243).

5. For Welker, this interest in the subjectivist faith is clearly fathomable in light of the fact that a christologically confused situation made it difficult to make comprehensible theological sense of the foundation and central content of faith: "God revealed himself in Jesus Christ" (Welker 2012a:46, 48). For him the task of Christology is to make clear that and how this

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beings and touch them in a consoling manner, into question by emphasizing the conflict-laden contexts of both "the cross" and "the baby in the manger". In the light of these contextualisations he refers to the multifarious contextual theologies of Christ today. Here he highlights the necessity of the *discernment* of spirits. He makes it clear that theology is and have always been embedded in a context, that there is a need for continuous self-critique, and that theology continuously needs to subject itself to extra-theological critiques of religion while engaging in an christologically oriented critique of religion itself. Cf. Welker (2012a:20-24, 32-38).

3 Welker (1999a; 2012a:39-47) differentiates Wolfgang Hüber's concept of self-secularisation into this so-called subjectivist faith.

4 Cf. Welker (1989b; 2001b; 2005a).

formulation offers insight into faith (Welker 2012a:48).[5] He therefor aims to move from the iconic and subjectivist turns toward *multicontextual and pneumatological turns*,[6] showing how different paths need to be taken in the search for truth and understanding (Welker 2012a:47-53, 238-242), i.e. asking as to the presence of God in the history of Christ, in the Spirit of the resurrection, and in the coming of his reign, thus showing how the human spirit becomes capable of knowledge of God through *God's Spirit*. Welker, thus following Bonhoeffer (1998a) in his search for convincing language about God and for a sustainable Christian faith in a "religionless age" (Welker 2012a:26), in this manner wants to theologically reflect on God in a way that lends itself to critical analysis and conceptual articulation, i.e. a way of reflection that is accountable not only within the sphere of the church, but also that of public discourse (Welker 2012a:48).[7]To do this he seeks an alternative to the dissolution of faith in theistic metaphysics and the aforementioned subjectivist faith (Welker 2012a:238).[8]

In the following discussion the new impulses emanating from the different paths that Welker suggests for future theologies interested in Jesus Christ will be sketched. These paths, i.e. the historical Jesus, the resurrection, the cross, the exalted Christ and his reign, and eschatology, will thus be conceptualised in the light of his differentiated conception of God the Spirit.[9]

2. Michael Welker's response to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

1. The first path Welker finds to be that of *the historical Jesus*. This path is indispensable for a realistic theology that wants to make sense of the revelation of God in this human being. Here he suggests different lines of query in the search for truth about the historical Jesus (Welker 2012a:14,

5 Cf. e.g. Welker (1980; 2001c).

6 For his thought on multicontextuality and pluralism that is to be distinguished from a diffuse plurality cf. e.g. Welker (2001d).

7 Cf. e.g. Welker (2000a).

8 Cf. Welker (1995a).

9 For Welker's thought on the Spirit of God cf. e.g. Welker (1989a; 1992a).

46, 238).[10] He moves beyond what is labelled the "first quest", which is characterised by optimism and positivistic conceptions of historical objectivity and certainty (Welker 2012a:62-67),[11] and the "second quest", characterised by the assumption that the historical Jesus is not approachable at all (Welker 2012a:62, 67-70),[12] and draws from the "third quest". This "quest", which enabled historical Jesus' enquiries to move beyond mere optimism of the "first quest" and the scepticism of the "second quest", where able to develop a more nuanced appreciation for multiplicity (Welker 2012a:54-62, 70-83).[13] In light of this "third quest" Welker then suggests a shift toward the "fourth quest". Here the search for truth about the historical Jesus is accompanied by a recognition of what he refers to as a fourfold *multicontextuality*.

For Welker it is particularly important to recognise that the historical Jesus itself gives rise to a multiplicity of perspectives (Welker 2002a:140). The first level of multicontextuality refers to the different multifaceted contexts that Jesus finds himself in, i.e. how he conveys himself and how he is conceived of in multiple diverging contexts. This multicontextuality is recognisable through the second level of multicontextuality, namely that of the biblical and extra-biblical traditions.[14] These pluriform traditions focus on Jesus from a multitude of perspectives. Here it is important for him that these traditions are continually questioned in the light of the first level of

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10 Cf. e.g. Welker (2002a).

11 Welker refers especially to Albert Schweitzer's work that marked the end of the "first quest". In his work on the historical Jesus Schweitzer gives an overview of "nearly two hundred years of life-of-Jesus scholarship ranging from Hermann Samuel Reimarus to William Wrede", which Welker then gives an overview of.

12 For Welker the "second quest" was to commence, inter alia, with Günther Bornkamm's work, which was representative of the skeptimistic historical Jesus research of the time. Nonetheless, as is clear in Welker's detailed description of Ernst Käsemann's work on the historical Jesus, this quest sought "to make do with securing a minimum of sustainable elements of the Jesus tradition … a single message that remained constant".

13 Welker finds the "third quest" to have been set in motion not only by archaeological work, inter alia, by James Charlesworth, Jonathan Reed, and the textual archaeological work by John Dominic Crossan, but also, inter alia, by Martin Hengel, Larry Hurtado, and James Dunn's work on high Christology, Geza Vermes's work on Jesus within the context of contemporary Judaism, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz's work on social history, particularly also Theissen's work on the politics of symbol.

14 For his conception of the biblical traditions' complexity see e.g. Welker (1992a:253-258; 1996a; 2001e; 2001h; 2002b).

multicontextuality, i.e. how and in which ways these traditions portray the multiplicity of contexts disclosed by the initial level. The complexity of this level of multicontextuality is increased when not only the multiple contexts of those writing these texts are kept in mind, but also the multiplicity of the supposed readers of these texts. The search for the historical Jesus thus requires the constant clarification of the mutual relation between the first and second levels of multicontextuality (Welker 2011a:187; 2012a:84-85). The second level of multicontextuality, however, not only retrospectively focuses on the first, but on a third level of the biblical traditions, i.e. that of the Old Testament (Welker 2011a:187). For Welker it is important to ask how this level stands in relation to the first and second levels of multicontextuality, i.e. it needs to be clarified what influence, if any, these different levels of multicontextuality had on the other (Welker 2012a:90-98). The fourth level of multicontextuality, which for him facilitates the "fourth quest" for the historical Jesus (Welker 2011a:187), refers not only to the history of reception, but also the multicontextuality of today,[15] i.e. the multicontextuality in which Jesus is received and in which the fullness of this Jesus is realistically effective. In the manner this "quest" facilitates the discernment of continuities between the historical Jesus and his living presence in the Spirit (Welker 2012a:14). In the light of this level, which is already to be taken note of in the biblical traditions, it is important to realise that the search for the historical Jesus can only be reductive and must constantly be referred back to the other three levels of multicontextuality to, in this manner, constitute a self-critical search for the historical Jesus.

2. To further discern the continuity between the historical Jesus and who he is for us today, Welker wants to comprehend *the resurrection* of Jesus Christ, i.e. the real presence of the resurrected Christ in the Spirit.[16] Through this second path he wants to make sense of the real[17] presence of the Resurrected through what he has often called a "spiritual body",[18]

15 For his though on the constitution of this "today" see e.g. Welker (2008).

16 Cf. e.g. Welker (2000b). The significance of the relation between the resurrected Jesus Christ and the Spirit is also alluded to in the *festschrifts* given to Welker on his sixtieth birthday. Cf. Schüle and Thomas (2007; 2009).

17 Cf. e.g. Welker (1999b:96-109; 2002c).

18 Cf. e.g. Welker (2010a).

through a differentiated conception of the relation between "Spirit" and "body".

In order, however, to understand what is meant by these loaded concepts it is for him of the utmost importance to recognize that the resurrection is not what has been considered to be resuscitation.[19] In light of the biblical traditions' multitude of reverences to what might be described as "light appearances", which verifies a discontinuity between the pre-and post-Easter Jesus in spite of a continuity, and the "empty tomb", which verifies that the pre-Easter body of Jesus disappeared or was definitively withdrawn, it is for him absolutely clear that the resurrection cannot be equated simply with a physical revivification.

The biblical traditions, rather, depict the more complex real presence of the Resurrected[20] as exhibiting features of apparentness, on the one hand, and what could be designated as an appearance, on the other,[21] i.e. despite their emphasis on continuity between the pre- and post-Easter Jesus, these encounters with the post-Easter Jesus evidently substantiates the immense difficulty of re-identifying and recognizing the resurrected Jesus. Here it is clear, however, that the realities of those affected by these encounters with this resurrected Jesus Christ are altered.

For Welker to make sense of the resurrection, furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between the biblical notions of "flesh", the physical dimension of a person's life that, though perishable, nevertheless indispensably lives at the expense of other lives, and "body" that, whilst bound to the flesh, is pervaded by spirit.[22] While the fleshly dimension of

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19 Cf. e.g. Welker (2012b).

20 Welker makes it clear that for him the resurrection of Jesus Christ should not be confused with a mere myth, as is the case in the work of David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann, or merely with a vision, as in the work of Gerd Lüdemann. For him, their mistake consists in the fact they, in the same manner as many religious fundamentalists whom they are indeed writing against, confuse the resurrection with a physical revivification. Cf. Welker (1996b; 2012a:99-106). Welker (2012a:106-111), following the path of Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological endeavor to make sense of the resurrection, wants to comprehend the resurrection as a real event of which the facticity can be known.

21 Cf. e.g. Welker (1994; 2002d).

22 For the significance of the relation and the differentiation of the human spirit and the Spirit of God see e.g. Welker (2010b; 2011b; 2013b).

the body might be totally absent in the appearances of the Resurrected, the spiritual dimension of the body is present (Welker 2012a:125). This presence acquires a new concrete form insofar as the Resurrected himself, in the power of the Spirit, creates a post-Easter "body of Christ". In the Spirit the Resurrected is thus encountered in "bodily" form.[23] This differentiated understanding of the "body" in relation to the "Spirit" thenceforth enables him to define the more complex "spiritual body" as a multifaceted[24] bearer of revelation in which the complete fullness of Christ's person and life is now present (Welker 2012a:125).

3. Welker describes the third path to the theology of Jesus Christ as that of *the cross*. The full dimensions of a theology of the cross for him becomes discernible only in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e. the fullness of his person and life. He frequently warns that the theology of the cross, without a developed conception of the resurrection, might result in the perception that God is dead, i.e. that there is no God.[25]

In the light of the resurrection Welker finds the theology of the cross to be directed against speculative and abstract conceptualisations of God.[26] Here it is important for him to grasp that this theology cannot be reduced merely to the revelation of the aforementioned weakness and powerlessness of this God.[27] The theology of the cross also reveals the judging and the

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23 Cf. e.g. Welker (2007), where in conversation with Nicholas Thomas Wright the biblical view on the "bodily" nature of the resurrected Jesus Christ gains clearer contours.

24 Cf. e.g. Welker (1995b), where he describes in more detail the differentiated constitution of the body of Christ.

25 This is clear in Welker's considerable analysis of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche's impressive critique of religion where the cross and the theological implications of the cross plays a significant role. Here it is of particular importance that, in their profound critique, Hegel affirmed the enduring relevance of the event of the cross and Nietzsche, even though he rejected it, acknowledged the biblical traditions' concern with an ethos of love and mercy (Welker 2012a:142-159). For his appreciation of Hegel see Welker (1978).

26 Here Welker follows the impulses of Martin Luther who, following Paul who "decided to know nothing among you accepts Jesus Christ and him crucified", placed the theology of the cross at the centre of his thought (Welker 2011a; 2012a:135-142).

27 The fact that the cross also reveals the suffering God is for Welker articulated in Kazoh Kitamori's theology of the cross (Welker 2012a:171-172). Welker, however, differentiates this suffering further by saying that in the cross the deity of God is called into question, thus calling attention to the suffering deep within deity itself.

rescuing God (Welker 2012a:172-178).[28] Here he follows Bonhoeffer (1998e) who insisted that God is recognised in the world in a non-religious way, by which he means recognition of the fact that human beings live in the world as if there were no God, i.e. that God is recognised in a way that does not cover up the godlessness of the world, but rather uncovers it (Bonhoeffer 1998f). The cross exposes how an entire representative world cooperatively conspires against God.[29]

> Das Kreuzesgeschehen stellt uns einen erschreckenden Verblendunszusammenhang vor Augen. Eine unentschlossene und eingeschüchterte, letztlich wohl auch gleichgültige politische Führung, verblendete und wohl auch von persönlichen Machterhaltungsinteressen gelenkte religiöse Eliten, eine aufgewiegelte öffentliche Meinung ("Heute: Hosianna! Morgen: Kreuziget ihn!"), manipulierte Gerichtsbarkeit, missbrauchte rechtliche und religiöse Normen – ein Ganzes Geflecht von Verstrickungen … wirken hier zusammen (Welker 2012a:181).

The cross, in this light, reveals the godforsaken situation of human beings, the world closing itself off from God, the separateness of God and human beings, in fact, that God closes himself off to human beings, i.e. that his revelation might not reach them. It thus reveals the situation of human beings being tied in the power of *sin*.[30]

In the light of the resurrection, however, the cross also reveals the God who selflessly gives himself to *these* human beings. Welker, conscious of the fact that the concepts of selflessness and self-giving have been misused differentiates between sacrifice that implies victimization and sacrifice that has to do with this self-giving. In the light of the crucifixion it becomes clear for him that Jesus Christ, by becoming and being *human,* gives himself to human beings as sacrifice despite the fact that he is then victimized

28 Cf. Welker (1991).

29 The impulse to this important observation Welker inter alia finds in Jürgen Moltmann's biblically orientated Christology of discipleship (Welker 2012a:161-164). For a more detailed description of Welker's conceptualisation of the explicit situation leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, see Welker (1999b:105).

30 Cf. Brandt, Suchocki, Welker (1997) and Welker (2011c; 2012a:192-197).

by those he gives himself to.[31] The cross, in the light of the resurrection, furthermore reveals that the Spirit is in fact given to those who in the power of sin conspires against God (Welker 1992a:290).

In this manner, by being giving to human beings, the Spirit of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ rescues human beings and makes them bearers of this revelation. This becomes particularly clear in what Welker considers to be the fourth path to a theology of Jesus Christ.

4. Welker's thought on Jesus Christ culminates in this fourth path, that of *the exalted Christ and his reign.* Here he follows an insight of John Calvin for whom it became clear that the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ is present through the Spirit and that it is through this Spirit that Jesus Christ is not without his witnesses.[32] Welker repeatedly emphasizes that it is through these witnesses that Jesus Christ really is embodied today.

He follows a second insight of Calvin who realized that what Jesus Christ conferred upon human beings could be recognized in the *munus triplex Christ,* i.e. the threefold office of Jesus Christ.[33] The exalted Christ in fact pours out his Spirit[34] so that his witnesses can participate in his royal, priestly and the prophetic office. For Welker it is precisely through these three offices, or rather the threefold *form of the reign of God,* that the resurrected and exalted Christ is *efficaciously* present today (Welker 2012a:208-219). Welker relates the pre-Easter life to the royal form (Welker 2012a:219-227), the resurrection to the high-priestly form (Welker 2012a:257-282), and the crucifixion to the prophetic form of the reign of God (Welker 2012a:283-292), in each case emphasizing the resonance of the Spirit. He repeatedly warns against the highlighting of one of these forms over another.

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31 Here Welker follows the thought of Sigrid Brandt, Hartmut Gese and Bernd Janowski who worked on the themes of "sacrifice", "atonement" and "substitution" respectively. For him the distinct strength of these contributions lies in the fact that the differentiated conceptual worlds of both the Old and the New Testament traditions are taken seriously. Cf. Welker (1999b:118-124; 1992a:311; 2012a:184-194).

32 Cf. Welker (2012c).

33 The *munus triplex Christ* not only make connections between the pre-Easter life of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection *and* Old Testament traditions possible. It also reveals an ecumenical consensus in recent Christology. Cf. e.g. Welker (2011d:83, 84)

34 Cf. e.g. Welker (1993; 1995c). For his conceptualisation of "heaven", from where the Spirit is poured out, see e.g. Welker (2006a).

For Welker it is essential to grasp that this reign is an *emergent* reality, i.e. a reality characterized by the interplay of a multiplicity of concrete instances that, through the fundamental change brought forth by this mutual interaction, leads to a new reality.[35] He thus describes the reign of God as a discernible reality that is coming. This reign is present, immanent, and perceivable insofar as it changes the interplay of concrete instances in an emergent manner. The reign is future insofar as it is not exhausted by such changes, but rather continues its efficaciousness by letting human beings contribute to this reality even though it remains beyond their control (Welker 2012a:230). In this manner the reign exerts real influence even though it remains inconspicuous.

For him this reign becomes evident in the radicalization of the intentions of the law, i.e. of justice, mercy and worship of God,[36] i.e. in what he labels an ethos of free self-withdrawal for the benefit of others.[37] This is especially clear in his conceptualisation of the *royal form* of the reign, where the royal rule of Jesus Christ gains clear contours in *love* and freedom[38] mediated in love.[39] This love, which for him is not to be defined solely in one-to-one relations,[40] is characterised by the free self-withdrawal for the benefit of others and by the free and creative self-withdrawal of others for the benefit of the self. At this point it is clear why he relates this royal form of the reign with a humanism characterised by the *pre-Easter life of Jesus Christ.*[41] Here,

35 Cf. e.g. Welker (1992b).

36 For his differentiated conception of the intentions of the law cf. e.g. Welker (1989c; 2013c).

37 Cf. e.g. Welker and Wolter (1999c).

38 For his conception of freedom cf. e.g. Welker (1989d; 1997a; 2011d).

39 The remarkable fact that this royal Jesus Christ rules by this liberating love and thus revolutionises hierarchical and monohierarchical forms of rule must not be overlooked. Cf. esp. Welker (1992a:134-158).

40 Cf. e.g. Welker (2001f), where he tries to regain a deepened conception of love through the biblical traditions.

41 Cf. Welker (2009b), where he critically emphasizes that this royal Jesus Christ and his reign is not to be conceived of without the polyphonic interplay of the members of his body and where he makes it particularly clear that Jesus Christ's reign must not be restricted to the word and the sacrament.

in the light of the outpouring of the Spirit, it is important to recognise that this royal form must not be restricted merely to *a* time and space.[42]

> Wenn heute Menschen Bildung und Gesundheitsvorsorge für alle erstreben, freiheitliche Gemeinden und Zivilgesellschaften gestalten wollen und nicht aufhören, die unbedingte Achtung der Menschenrechte und der Menschenwürde einzuklagen, dann sind – bewusst oder nicht – Kräfte der königlichen Wirkens Christi unter ihren Motivations- und Orienterungskräften (Welker 2012a:227).

In this light Welker can bring the royal form of the reign in relation to that of the *public* Jesus Christ (Welker 2012a:244-250).[43] This public character, however, must not be dissociated from his eschatological character, which for him is the fifth path to a theology of Jesus Christ.

5. For Welker it is important to ask as to the reality of God's revelation also in the field of eschatology. In the light of his realistic insights into the reign of God the *eschatological* presence of Jesus Christ gains pertinent contours.[44] This is especially clear in his emphatic conceptualisation of the high-priestly- and the prophetic form of the reign of God.

He relates the *high-priestly form* of the reign to the breadth and multidimensionality of the "Gottesdienst", i.e. of worship. For him it is important to recognize that worship serves to disclose, secure and deepen knowledge of the triune God. Here, in the light of *the resurrection,* it becomes clear that human beings encounter Jesus Christ as truly human, "der einer der ihnen war *und ist*" (Welker 2012a:261), and truly God,[45] through whom they are elevated into the communion of the "erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott".[46] Through *faith* in the triune God they are

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42 Welker (2012a:202), nevertheless, repeatedly warns that even though the royal form of the reign cannot be restricted to the church, it must not foster the self-secularisation of the church.

43 Cf. e.g. Welker (2013d).

44 Cf. e.g. Welker (2002d:31-42).

45 In contrast to the dualistic structures inherent in the so-called doctrine of the two natures of e.g. Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonense, he finds the priestly and also the prophetic forms of the reign to develop a more differentiated notion of the confession that God revealed himself in the human being, Jesus Christ. Cf. Welker (2012a: 242-257).

46 For his biblical view of the *triune* God cf. Welker (2005b).

enabled to participate in God's life, even *now*. This becomes specifically clear in Welker's conception of the sacraments, i.e. baptism[47] and holy communion.[48]

In Welker's theology of Jesus Christ the *prophetic form* of the reign is of particular importance; "diese Christologie kulminiert in der Darstellung der prophetischen Gestalt des Reiches Gottes" (Welker 2012a:242). The prophetic form intensely pursues indications of God's will "for us today". In the light of *the cross* of Jesus Christ, he finds this form to be concerned with a quest for truth and concretization of justice.[49] This form critically and self-critically orients itself toward Jesus Christ and toward scripture.

> Mit der häufigen Betonung: "nach der Schrift", "auf dass die Schrift erfüllt würde", "nach dem Gesetz und den Propheten" unterstreichen Jesu Verkündigung und die neutestamentlichen Schriften diese unverzichtbare Bindung an ihre umfassende Quelle der Inspiration und der geistlich erhellenden Prophetie (Welker 2012a:287-288).[50]

Here he particularly emphasises the responsibility to constantly engage in self-critical dialogue with secular scholarly discipline, i.e. "Christologisch und biblisch orientierte Verkündigung in Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit suchenden Gemeinschaften" (Welker 2012a:288-292).[51]

In this light it is clear that the prophetic form is closely connected to the royal- and priestly form of the reign of God. It is in this realistic interplay of the royal- priestly- and prophetic form of reign that Welker finds *hope* in the midst of societies characterised by suffering; "die Prophetie in der Nachfolge Jesu Christi atmet in dieser Verbindung der Ämter den langen

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47 For his conception of baptism cf. e.g. Welker (2005c; 2006b; 2012:261-269).

48 For his ecumenical and biblical endeavour to conceptualise what happens in holy communion cf. e.g. Welker (1996c; 1999b; 2012a:270-282).

49 This concern with truth and justice goes along with a specific concern for the development of freedom-based societies and *human dignity* and is thus related to the royal form of the reign. Cf. e.g. Welker (2001g; 2015).

50 Cf. also Welker (1997b; 1998a; 2001e), where it is clear why Welker emphatically finds the biblical traditions to be an exceptional witness to Jesus Christ.

51 For his thoughts on interdisciplinary thinking and dialogue cf. e.g. Welker (2012d).

Atem der eschatologische Hoffnung: Nicht mein Wille, sondern Gottes Wille geschehe" (Welker 2012a:285, 292-297).[52]

3. Remarks on Welker's theology of Jesus Christ.

Welker has truly written a remarkable theology of Jesus Christ.[53] It indeed is, as Dirkie Smit noted in the translation of *Gottes Offenbarung, God the Revealed,* "the mature thought of a leading scholar, weaving together insights from historical studies, biblical material, doctrinal developments, confessional convictions, philosophical arguments, cultural observations, and contemporary experiences in a creative way". He not only stimulates further conversation with the most diverse fields of research, but illumines the controverted themes of the historical Jesus, the resurrection, the cross, the exalted Christ and his reign, and eschatology, contributing to future theological and Christological inquiry.

In his work on Jesus Christ Welker has especially been able to bring divergent Christological perspectives together without the moulding of these different insights into his own way of thinking. He has been able to allow for these diverging perspectives without lapsing into relativism or "anything goes" forms of thought. His theology of Jesus Christ, rather, can be characterised as having an inherent seismograph that is alert to and warn against the functionalisation of Christ.[54]

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52 It is in the light of the resurrection and the coming reign, i.e. the threefold form, that Welker conceptualises eternity-eschatology, i.e. the *parousia* of Jesus Christ, where it is clear that this *parousia* has already been taking place, and takes place even now. Cf. Welker (2012e).

53 Cf. e.g. the reviews of Krebs (2013), Schweitzer (2014), and Vorster (2014).

54 Welker himself refers to a seismograph when rethinking a theology of law. Cf. Welker (1998b:33).

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