



On theological promise

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Abstract

This was the public address in the Alte Aula of Heidelberg University on the occasion of the reception of the 2022 Manfred Lautenschlaeger Awards for Theological Promise. The essay reflects on the theme for which these awards are given, namely “God and Spirituality – widely conceived.” The argument employs the methodology of “sites of memory,” made famous by French historian Pierre Nora. In the form of a walking tour of such sites in Heidelberg, it reflects on different ways of understanding “God and Spirituality,” represented by several public intellectuals from the academic history of Heidelberg. In the process, it constructs an approach to the notion of “theological promise” which is then briefly spelled out as the conclusion at the end of the argument.

Keywords

Sites of memory; spirituality; theological promise; Luther; Arendt; Jaspers; Weber; Gadamer; Schlink

An invitation to sites of memory

It is a privilege to congratulate the recipients on this festive occasion and a joy to be together in Heidelberg after several Covid postponements.¹ I would like to invite the recipients on a short walking tour through the streets of Heidelberg, to show them a few places and share a few memories – through South African eyes.

1 This paper was the public lecture in the Alte Aula of Heidelberg University on 27 May 2022, during the festive occasion when the 2022 Manfred Lautenschlaeger Awards were presented to the recipients, including a doctoral student from Stellenbosch, Calvin Ullrich. The original spoken lecture was retained without any changes, only the footnotes were added.

Many will know that this is what visiting students do. They form groups sharing information on how to find one's way in strange new surroundings – how to get around, where to shop, what to see. The information is not always reliable, and locals would have been much better guides, so that those with local knowledge will hopefully turn a deaf ear and rather use the next few days to correct and improve my outsider impressions.

You are invited, in the words of the French historian Pierre Nora, to visit some “sites of memory,” places recalling events and moments with lasting influence² – and while walking to talk about “God and Spirituality – Broadly Understood,” the theme of these Awards.

2 Pierre Nora famously developed this as technical term central to his methodology in his three-volume study of French history, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992), see for a brief description his essay “Between memory and history: *Les lieux de mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24. The concept suggests that certain places, objects, or events can have special significance related to collective memory, they may bring forgotten histories to mind, they may allow silences to speak.

In South African theological and public discourses, notions of memory and history play a key role, see e.g. the collected essays by Robert Vosloo, *Reforming memory. Essays on South African church and theological history* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2017), as well as his inaugural lecture at Stellenbosch University, *Time in our time: On theology and future-oriented memory* (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2015). He was the doctoral supervisor of one of this year's recipients of a Lautenschlaeger Award. For Vosloo, studies on memory like Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, history, forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004) as well as several studies on memory and history by Aleida Assmann from Heidelberg, including for example *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006) as well as *Ist die Zeit aus dem Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (Köln: Carl Hander Verlag, 2013) have been important resources.

A spirituality of the cross

We can begin directly outside, at the plaque on the University Square beneath us, the site of memory recalling Luther's ground-breaking *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518.³ Still young enough to qualify for this Award,⁴ he was invited to address his Augustinian Order in the Monastery, adjacent at the time.⁵

In twenty-eight brief theological theses he radically critiqued dominant notions of God and spirituality from his time. He challenged what he called

3 For the text of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, see Timothy Lull (ed), *Martin Luther's basic theological writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), for example 9-11, 30-49. In Lull's study on Luther, *Resilient Reformer. The life and thought of Martin Luther*, posthumously published by Derek Nelson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), he discusses the *Heidelberg Disputation* in historical context. It was Luther's "first prong about how theology should be done" and "an opportunity to show his real promise," 59. His travel to Heidelberg "must have been one of the most enjoyable journeys of his life" and "at the impressive Heidelberg Castle, Count Wolfgang of the Palatinate entertained Luther, Staupitz, and Lang quite lavishly." When he introduced his topic during the disputation at the University, "half the group found (his theses) thrilling and the other half deeply troubling." This division was in fact a "generational split" – the older Augustinians were "shocked and displeased" while many of the younger theologians felt excited and inspired, some of whom would become major figures in the Reformation themselves, including Martin Bucer going back to Strasbourg and Philip Melancton to be appointed in Wittenberg within a few months; *Resilient Reformer*, 59-67.

For an interesting description of the journey – which actually took place under great danger and therefore incognito, along "a careful route with designated stops to reduce the threat of abduction or attack" – and the consultation itself, see Michael Massing, *Fatal discord. Erasmus, Luther, and the fight for the Western mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 304-308.

4 According to the Lutheran scholar and ecumenical theologian Bernd Oberdorfer, this moment "finally made him into a theological star," Oberdorfer, "Theologie des Kreuzes aus evangelischer Perspektive in ökumenischer Absicht," *Evangelische Theologie* 78, Heft 6 (2018), 437.

For Reformation theology, these "pieces of public theology" – in the words of the Luther scholar Gerhard O. Forde – became the most influential of all Luther's disputations, Forde, *On being a theologian of the cross. Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 19-20.

5 In the beginning the Monastery also served as university building until it was destroyed in 1693 during the War of the Palatine Succession. The Old University with the Old Aula was erected between 1712 and 1718 and the square with the Lion's Fountain took the place of the former Monastery.

“theology of glory” and argued for what became known as his “theology of the cross,” nowhere else explained as clearly.⁶

No-one deserves to be called theologians who claim that the invisible things of God can be perceived in what we actually observe, Luther said, only they deserve to be called theologians who comprehend the things of God “seen through suffering and the cross.”⁷

6 For earlier uses of the expression in diverse contexts, see for example Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther. Sein Weg zur Reformation 1483-1521* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1981), 210, 224-228. In his popular study *Luther. An introduction to his thought* (London: Collins, 1970 [original German, 1964]) the Luther scholar Gerhard Ebeling claimed that the terms *theologia* or *theologus crucis* “are an accurate expression of his understanding of theology ... The expression serves as an indication of the object of his constant concern, the fundamental orientation of his theological thought ... (T)his God, revealed and proclaimed, is himself, as the language of the *theologia crucis* calls it, the hidden God, hidden under his contrary. The understanding of revelation as revelation under a contrary was a determining factor in Luther’s theological thought as early as the first lectures on the Psalms, and was maintained right up to the end,” 226-241.

This was also the theme of the Dutch doctrinal theologian Jan T. Bakker’s major study on Luther, *Coram Deo* (Kampen: Kok, 1956). Discussing the *theologia crucis*, he speaks of a “diep kloof,” “een scheiding,” “conflict,” “een totaal andere beleving en aanpak,” “twee denkwerelden met mekaar in conflict,” “twee volkomen verschillende theologische methodes,” 137-159, in short, two different and conflicting spiritualities. Elsewhere, in an essay on the fundamental correspondence between the 95 theses in Wittenberg and the *Heidelberg Disputation*, published as “Enkele notities over de 95 stellingen en de *theologia crucis*” (Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, 1967), Bakker claims that in these words Luther “als bijna nergens elders (heeft) zijn diepste drijfveren onder woorden gebracht,” 110.

Interestingly, Michael Welker, in his study *God the Revealed. Christology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), has an important chapter on theologies of the cross – from Luther to Hegel, Nietzsche, Moltmann, Jüngel, Dalferth and Kitamori – as bridge between his discussions of the historical Jesus and of the resurrection and the reign of the exalted and living Christ through the Spirit. “The fact that every Christology must necessarily concentrate on the theology of the cross should not, then, mislead us into appropriating the entirety of the thematic wealth of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ solely in a theology of sacrifice and surrender,” 208.

7 According to Luther, God is known *sub contrario*, under seeming opposites, hidden and unrecognizable, as *Deum absconditum in passionibus*, as God hidden in suffering, in brokenness and cross, in loneliness and death, and therefore invisibly, surprisingly, where God may be least expected.

These epistemological claims – on how to know God and speak of God – an argument for a spirituality of the cross,⁸ had lasting implications, for

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- 8 Several attempts have already been made to develop a *pneumatologia crucis*. In his small monograph called *Heiliger Geist. Hoffnung der Schwachen* (Hannover: Lutherhaus Verlag, 1985), the Heidelberg systematic theologian Michael Plathow, for example, found the basic structure (“Grundstruktur”) of pneumatology in a *pneumatologia crucis* and in prayer. Interestingly, he began with a description of the glass window of the chapel in the Ecumenical Institute in Heidelberg, where he lived and daily worshiped for more than a decade, which depicts the outpouring of the Spirit in relation to cries and prayers from death and the depths, as response to cries and sighs of hope and longings for life, born from experiences of weakness and suffering.

The Dutch systematic theologian Bram van de Beek similarly developed a *pneumatologia crucis*. Earlier in his career he had already published a much more optimistic pneumatology in the spirit of famous Dutch predecessors and teachers including Hendrikus Berkhof and Arnold A. van Ruler, called *De adem van God: de Heilige Geest in kerk en kosmos* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1987). In a later work, however, in the volume on the Spirit and the church in his series of doctrinal works on speaking about God, called *Lichaam en Geest van Christus. De theologie van de kerk en de Heilige Geest* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2012), he approached pneumatology in a radical different way, namely based on Christology and specifically on the Crucified Christ. On the cover is a mosaic from the Church of San Clemente in Rome, the church of Dutch cardinals, showing the unity of the Dutch Church with the Church of Rome. The Church is named after Willibrord, the apostle of the Netherlands, who was called Clemens by Pope Sergius. The image is from Christ as Crucified. Together with Christ on the cross are twelve doves, symbols of the twelve apostles and therefore the church, but at the same time as doves also symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Crucified Christ is the basis of both church and Spirit, argues Van de Beek (see also 23, 189, 434 ff.). “Als we een theologie van de Heilige Geest ontwikkelen als een *pneumatologia crucis* betekent dit ... dat de Geest zelf in deze wereld de weg van de Gekruisigde gaat. Ook zijn aanwezigheid in de wereld is in die gestalte van het lijden om de zonde,” 436.

The North American Methodist theologian D. Lyle Dabney even argues that “the most fundamental of all questions in pneumatology” has not yet received an answer widely accepted in theological circles and that it is now time “to begin to move toward fulfilling the task of the new *theologia crucis*” namely “to give an authentically Christian account” which means for him “a fully Trinitarian account of God rooted in the cross of Jesus Christ.” This has now become possible, he claims, since it is now possible “to speak of the Spirit of the cross,” “to name the Spirit at the cross” – and for him “such is the promise of a *pneumatologia crucis* today,” see D. Lyle Dabney, “*Pneumatologia crucis*: Reclaiming *theologia crucis* for a theology of the Spirit today,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol 53, No. 4 (2000), 511–524. For Dabney, Luther still showed a “fatal inability” to root his account of the Spirit in the cross, and he was followed in this by all the major Reformers. According to him, the Reformation simply continued with “the medieval subordination of Pneumatology to Christology,” and that this was only challenged in the gradual “rediscovery and reformulation” of a new *theologia crucis* during the twentieth century, in the work of figures like Heribert Mühlen and Jürgen Moltmann. “A fundamental advance in the doctrine of God was achieved,” he claims, which offers hope for “a fully trinitarian theology of the cross,” “a *pneumatologia crucis* which seeks to lay claim to a *theologia crucis*.”

theology and church, ethics, and life.⁹

Already controversial at the time – which, after all, was his intention¹⁰ – its reception history would often lead to separation of the spirits, given his

9 See also the insightful study on the pneumatology of Luther’s *theologia crucis* and the spirituality of Pentecostalism, especially as seen in the life and work of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, the younger of the two famous charismatic German Blumhardt theologians, Simeon Zahl, *Pneumatology and theology of the cross in the preaching of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt. The Holy Spirit between Wittenberg and Azusa Street* (London: T & T Clark, 2010). He argues that the younger Blumhardt offers a position between the “experiential pneumatology” of present-day Pentecostalism (Azusa Street) and the “radicalized concern over the problem of spiritual self-deception (Wittenberg’s *theologia crucis*).” He shows that the younger Blumhardt had a far more “Cross-oriented” theology than his father and therefore also a far more “pessimistic anthropology.” Zahl suggests that the younger Blumhardt’s “conception of the relationship between Spirit and cross in the Christian life is perhaps more relevant today” that even during his own time, since it could help Pentecostalism to address the major challenge of spiritual self-deception and the questions concerning discerning the Spirit and the spirits, 1-30.

Luther’s contribution to so-called modern Protestantism is of course a controversial topic, since many warn that he should be read as a product of his times and therefore as a late medieval Catholic figure and not as a twentieth-century Protestant thinker. See for example already Heiko Oberman, *Luther. Man between God and devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989 [German edition, 1982]) and recently the strong argument by Christine Helmer, *How Luther became the Reformer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2019), directed against the different idealizations of Luther as a modern figure (albeit of diverse kinds) in the so-called Luther Renaissance, since the early twentieth century.

Although Luther should certainly be read and understood against his own historical background, the far-reaching effects of these reception histories – of the Reformation itself, and indeed also of the *theologia crucis* – can obviously not be ignored or denied. See for example also general historical works like Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers. A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996); Felipe Fernández-Armesto & Derek Wilson, *Reformation. Christianity and the world 1500-2000* (London: Bantam Press, 1996); and Michael Massing, *Fatal discord. Erasmus, Luther, and the fight for the Western mind* (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), all seeing the Reformation within the broader context of spiritual movements. Fernández-Armesto and Wilson, for example, claim that “Reformation ceases to be central in the sense that we see some events ‘leading up’ to it and others ‘flowing from’ it, or certain figures as ‘forerunners’ of the Reformation and later ones as its ‘heirs’.” This does not mean that the Reformation, as traditionally understood, never happened, or that its importance has been exaggerated; only that it did not happen as commonly supposed and that its importance has been wrongly assigned ... (R)eformation is – and the Reformation was – a spiritual movement: spiritual in the sense of being a convulsion of the human spirit; spiritual also in strengthening the ties that bind individuals and society to the divine spirit,” x-xi.

10 The theses were after all presented in the form of the typical disputation of the time and were therefore proposed, opposed, defended, and debated, and the content was most certainly polemical, even constructed as paradoxes, although the young Luther on this

radical claims about God and life together.¹¹ Many argue that today they remain as topical and divisive as ever.¹²

occasion adhered to strict warnings and advice from his supporters to steer away from conflict about the controversial topic at the time of indulgences.

- 11 With the fifth edition of Walther von Loewenich's classic study on *Luther's Theologia Crucis* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1967) five decades ago, he claimed that yet another "separation of the spirits" was taking place at that time around these questions – and many argue that today these divisions remain as topical as ever.
- 12 Well-known literature from diverse contexts, almost randomly chosen from many others, may perhaps illustrate the continuing relevance of his *theologia crucis*. In the different but widespread and popular contemporary discourses on the suffering of God, the crucified God, and even the death of God, Luther's *theologia crucis* often plays an important role, whether implicit or explicit, see for example Michael Welker (Hrsg.), *Diskussion über Jürgen Moltmann's Buch 'Der Gekreuzigte Gott'* (München: Kaiser, 1979); and in South Africa the inaugural lecture of my predecessor at the University of the Western Cape, J.J.F. (Jaap) Durand, *Kruisteologie en die lydende God* (Bellville: UWK, 1974).

For attempts to read Bonhoeffer and the *theologia crucis* together, see for example from the flood of available material the Dutch systematic theologian Gerrit Neven's *Bonhoeffer. Theoloog van het kruis* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), and also H. Gaylon Barker, *The cross of reality. Luther's theologia crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Barker quotes Larry Rasmussen's essay "An ethic of the cross" in his volume *Dietrich Bonhoeffer – His significance for North Americans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), with approval, that "there are religion and ethics in North American culture but no *theologia crucis*," 29.

For serious attempts to reflect on the *theologia crucis* for North American contexts, see several works by Douglas John Hall, for example his *The cross in our context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), as well as his three-volume systematic theology *Thinking the Faith, Professing the Faith, and Confessing the Faith*, all Minneapolis: Fortress.

For use of the *theologia crucis* in philosophical discourses on questions of identity and alienation, see for example Gary Simpson, "Theologia crucis and the forensically fraught world: Engaging Helmut Peukert and Jürgen Habermas, in Don Browning et al (eds.), *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 173-205; as well as Edgar Thaidigsmann, *Identitätsverlangen und Widerspruch. Kreuzestheologie bei Luther, Hegel und Barth* (Grünwald: Kaiser, 1983).

For attempts to engage the cross in Luther's thought and political and liberation theologies together, see for example Walter Altmann, *Luther and liberation. A Latin American perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Pierre Bühler, *Kreuz und Eschatologie. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der politischen Theologie, im Anschluß an Luthers theologia crucis* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, 1981); and Klaus Nürnberger, *Martin Luther's message for us today. A perspective from the South* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2005).

For a helpful introduction and overview, see Vitor Westhelle, "Luther's *theologia crucis*," in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, L'Ubomir Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 156-167.

In the final theological thesis, Luther claimed that God’s love does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it, while human love comes into being through what is pleasing – and if this is how God is, then the implications for spirituality and life are indeed radical. We are attractive because we are loved, he explained, not loved because we are attractive. The love born of the cross does not turn in the direction where it may find good to enjoy, but rather confers good upon the wretched.¹³

Finally, for an interest in similar questions and proposals, although from different back-grounds and with different conceptualities, see the work of the North American philosopher of religion and political theologian, John D. Caputo, for example in *The weakness of God: A theology of the event* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), *The insistence of God: A theology of perhaps* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013); and *The folly of God: A theology of the unconditional* (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2016), as well as *Cross and cosmos: A theology of difficult glory* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019). One of the Lautenschlaeger Prizes for 2022 is in fact awarded for a study on Caputo’s “radical theology,” namely to Calvin Ullrich, *Sovereignty and event: The political in John D. Caputo’s Radical Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), completed at Stellenbosch University.

- 13 Luther speaks of *amor crucis ex cruce natus*. These words may almost be read as reminders of the alternative genealogies of human dignity and human rights provided in our time by thinkers like the North American Reformed philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff and the German Catholic sociologist Hans Joas – both of them respected and influential in South African theological circles. Both of them argue that the contemporary respect for the sacredness of the person is historically rooted in negative experiences of suffering and being wronged.

Wolterstorff developed a philosophical interest in issues of justice later in his career, and because of experiences which he made during apartheid South Africa. He has told the story of what may be described as a deep and disturbing yet moving spiritual experience on different occasions, for example in his autobiography called *In this world of wonders. Memoir of a life in learning* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019), 153-191, and in even more detail in the deeply personal account of this spiritual journey in *Journey toward justice. Personal encounters in the global South* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013). The intellectual outcomes of this spiritual journey can be found in his two monographs on justice, *Justice. Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), and *Justice in love* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), as well as his essay “The wounds of God: Calvin’s theology of social injustice,” in Wolterstorff, *Hearing the call. Liturgy, justice, church, and world* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 114-132.

Hans Joas developed what he calls “an affirmative genealogy” of the universalism of values, particularly the widespread contemporary commitment to human dignity and human rights. He provided this in his study called *The sacredness of the person. A new genealogy of human rights* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), a work on which he worked while a fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies (STIAS). In a way he continued that project with offering a major alternative to Weber’s disenchantment as key category in the self-understanding of modernity, instead presenting a dynamic account of ever new sacralizations, in *The power of the*

A spirituality of pride

With these words in mind, let us turn across the University Square to the Neue Universität, built in the 1920s. Over the main entrance we will see an image of wisdom and the motto *Dem lebendigen Geist*, “To the living spirit.”

Eight decades ago that would not have been the case. In 1936, the sculpture and motto were replaced with an eagle and the motto *Dem deutschen Geist*, “To the German spirit.” It was the time when a pervasive spirituality of national pride caused more than a quarter of Heidelberg academics to be expelled for “racial” and “political” reasons, often under student pressure.¹⁴

For a visiting scholar from South Africa during apartheid, the oppressive and racist ideology justified with theological arguments and embodied in worship and spiritual life – such a site of memory was deeply emotional. Spiritual struggles of many around here moved us, who felt privileged to visit here to see what had happened and could happen again – and what was happening with us.¹⁵

A spirituality of discernment

Just a little further, one hundred meters behind the Neue Universität, at Schlossberg 16, a plaque will inform us that Hannah Arendt lived there as student, in a house later demolished.¹⁶

sacred. An alternative to the narrative of disenchantment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

- 14 See for example the study by Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 15 The spiritual struggles were obviously not only about the spirit of universities, but also about the spirit of the nation and in fact about the spirit of Luther. In a fascinating catalogue for their 2017 exhibition on the ways in which Luther was received in Nazi Germany, the Topography of Terror Foundation in Berlin presented a visible overview of this reception history called “*Luther’s words are everywhere ...*” *Martin Luther in Nazi Germany*, edited by Andreas Nachama & Johannes Tuchel (Berlin: Stiftung Topografie des Terrors, 2017). The title comes from an observation by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1937 that “Luther’s words are everywhere, but with their truth perverted into self-deception.”
- 16 On her life and work, see the excellent biography by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For love of the world*, 2nd ed. (Yale, New Haven, 2004), as well as her *Why Arendt matters* (Yale, New Haven, 2006); also Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (Columbia

As public intellectual, she helped our generation think about the atrocities of our times like few others, arguing for a spirit of discernment and responsibility.¹⁷

She was fascinated with thinking, the activity of thinking as key to *The Human Condition*.¹⁸

She spoke of “thinking in dark times” – naming the dangers of totalitarianism, the radical new notion that “humanity is superfluous” and

University, New York, 2001); Dana Villa (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Richard Bernstein, *Why read Hannah Arendt now?*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

On her doctoral dissertation in Heidelberg, see Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), edited and interpreted by Joanna Scott and Judith Stark. For very helpful discussions of the dissertation, see for example Young-Bruehl *Hannah Arendt*, 490-500 and Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, 30-48. It was already here – in the Heidelberg dissertation – that she developed the key notion of natality (often contrasted with mortality, which was so central in the thought of Martin Heidegger), which would later be at the centre of her thought, for example “The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality ... It is ... the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very common and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their ‘glad tidings.’ ‘A child has been born unto us,’” *The human condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 247.

17 See for example the several collections of her essays, including *Between past and future: Eight exercises in political thought* (London: Penguin, 1993); *Responsibility and judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003); *Essays in understanding, 1930-1954. Formation, exile, and totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 2005); *The promise of politics* (New York: Schocken, 2005).

18 Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958). She originally wanted to call *The human condition* “The active life” (*vita activa*) and actually did, later in German. The study was about the problem of action, the oldest concern of political theory, she called it, the question what human beings do together in the world – but precisely this raised for her the deeper problem. For the term *vita activa* itself was coined by the so-called thinkers, professional philosophers, those devoted to the so-called contemplative life – which was for many the real life, the true life, of solitude and meditation and thinking, the non-political life – so what were *they* thinking they were doing while thinking?

the terror of public talk, the so-called knowledge, information, propaganda, and ideology “obscuring everything,” making discernment so hard.¹⁹

In her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she later coined the phrase “banality of evil” to describe this “thoughtlessness,” this failure to think, to consider and imagine the consequences of our actions and inactions. What Kant called “the ability to think in the place of other people” was absent, she claimed, and evil is this refusal to imagine what others experience.²⁰

She increasingly became aware that she was left alone, *Thinking without a Banister*. Tradition had been unmasked as failure, authority as problematic, past answers no longer applied, experts and intellectuals were unreliable, and many new promises of progress – including science and technology, valuable as they are – could not help with these questions either.²¹

19 In the preface of her first major study, *The origins of totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1985 but originally 1951), she already explained that “this book was written against a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair.” For her, the two opposing spiritual conditions of “progress” and “doom” were “two sides of the same medal” and both were “articles of superstition, not of faith” (vii). The challenge for her was to think in “the grimness of the present.”

She spoke of “thinking in dark times” to describe this experience, in her collection *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), using the expression originally for the title of her reception speech for the Lessing Prize, “On humanity in dark times: Thoughts on Lessing.” The expression itself came from the first line of her friend Bertolt Brecht’s moving poem “An die Nachgeborenen,” his plea to posterity not to judge their times and failures harshly but instead to remember that those were dark times, in which it was difficult to discern and understand, difficult to practice wisdom and judgment. For her, the expression referred not so much to the horrors themselves, but rather to the ways in which the horrors appeared in public discourse yet remained hidden. It was all the talk, opinions, viewpoints, information, media, so-called knowledge, propaganda, ideology, falsehood and lying that so darkened the times. Brecht’s poem painfully reminded readers how everything seemed so different from what they truly were, so that trust became difficult, and innocence became lost. This challenge, depicting her life and work, was later used by friends and colleagues to celebrate her one-hundredth birthday, *Thinking in dark times. Hannah Arendt on ethics and Politics*, Roger Berkowitz, Thomas Keenan & Jeffrey Katz, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

20 See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* (Penguin, New York, 2006); also her interviews with Joachim Fest, *Eichmann war von empörender Dummheit. Gespräche und Briefe*, Hrsg. U. Ludz & T. Wild (München: Piper, 2011), and *Hannah Arendt: The last interview and other conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2013).

21 Hannah Arendt, *Thinking without a banister. Essays in Understanding 1953-1975* (New York: Schocken, 2018).

Finally, for her Gifford Lectures, she spoke on *The Life of the Mind*. She gave a first series on *Thinking* and prepared the second manuscript on *Willing* but passed away with only an empty page in her typewriter for the third series on *Judging* – which would have been the most important.²² One can only guess, but she would probably have argued in the spirit of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* that we need to find “an enlarged way of thinking,” enabling us to think also from the standpoints of others.

This site of memory could probably give us much pause for thought. After all, many today agree that political evil remains the most fundamental spiritual challenge of our time.²³

A spirituality of confession

From here it is again a short walk – hardly two hundred meters – down to Plöck 66, next to the University Library, where her supervisor, Karl Jaspers, lived – as another plaque will tell us.

Jaspers gave the speech when the motto was restored, having been concerned with “Die Idee der Universität” for decades.²⁴ He published extensively

22 Hannah Arendt, *The life of the mind, One/Thinking, Two/Willing* (San Diego: Harvest, 1981).

23 See for example Alan Wolfe, *Political evil. What it is and how to combat it* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); also Susan Neiman’s study called *Evil in modern thought. An alternative history of philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), as well as her *Learning from the Germans. Race and the memory of evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019).

24 He published an essay on “Die Idee der Universität” in 1923, that was radically revised and published in 1946 and again in 1961. He wrote on the nature of universities when the Nazi’s came to power and he wrote on the nature of universities when the Nazi’s lost power. He developed theses on the university for the group of thirteen intellectuals that had to revision Heidelberg University after the War, he played a major role in that think tank, he was elected as the first senator of the new University, he gave a public speech on the occasion of the festive opening of the University on 14 August 1945 (on “The renewal of the University”), he gave a speech to the University professors on the new motto, “Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität” in January 1946 and he spoke on the radio on “Volk und Universität” in September 1946. Today his many essays and speeches on the idea and responsibility of the university are available in one volume, namely Karl Jaspers, *Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, Hrsg. Oliver Immel, in *Karl Jaspers Gesamtausgabe Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, von Thomas Fuchs, Jens Halfwassen & Reinhard Schulz, Band 1/21 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2016).

on the theme and was a leading member of a think tank reimagining the future of the University.

His speech offered this new vision. Universities are built on scholarship as well as respect for human dignity, he argued, and the motto was a commitment “to serve the living spirit of truth, justice and humanity.”²⁵

Again, these ideals resonated with many in the apartheid struggle – this commitment, almost confession, that human dignity may never again be violated.

However, Jaspers became a household name for us for other reasons, namely his study on *Die Schuldfrage*. When the South African Council of Churches published their *Confessing Guilt in South Africa* (1989), his book was part of our conversation.²⁶

The remarkable background was that his work on guilt formed part of a longer lecture series directly after the War on the spiritual state – “die geistige Situation” – in Germany.²⁷ They had to learn to listen and speak to

For the 625-year celebration of the University, the New University underwent major renovation, also with financial support from the Lautenschlaeger Foundation, so that the New Aula is today again restored in impressive beauty.

25 Karl Jaspers, “Vom lebendigen Geist der Universität,” in Oliver Immel (Hrsg.), *Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, 2016, 85-102.

26 Siphon Masemola, Wesley Mabuza, Blessing Finca, Johan Botha (eds.), *Confessing guilt in South Africa* (Braamfontein: The South African Council of Churches, 1989), “Apartheid has left deep scars of complacency, guilt, and bitterness on the people of this land. Our concern is that to try and build a new nation, without addressing seriously our past, will be tantamount to building a house on drifting sand ... The question underlying all others is whether reconciliation can be born again, after all that which we have done to each other in this land,” from the “Preface” by Blessing Finca, 1. Steve Biko, the celebrated South African Black student leader who was killed in prison, already used Jaspers in his reflections on dealing with guilt in South Africa, see his *I write what I like* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 77ff. See also Johan Botha, “The issue of guilt, confession of guilt and forgiveness in contemporary South African documents,” in Gerrit Loots (ed.), *Listening to South African voices. Critical reflection on contemporary theological documents* (Port Elizabeth: Woordkor, 1990), 116-147, for a survey of a long list of church documents on public confession of guilt. For an earlier study by a political philosopher, see André du Toit, *Die sondes van die vaders* (Kaaipstad: Rubicon, 1983).

27 Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946). The title of the 1947 English translation by Doubleday was published as *The question of German guilt*, but the title of the original series of lectures was “the spiritual situation” and the original German edition still included the introductory lecture on the spiritual state.

one another, he said, in spite of enormous differences between them – this was their new and challenging spiritual state.²⁸

Precisely such a concern for the impossible possibility of a shared future after so much separation and inequality led to our Truth and Reconciliation Commission.²⁹

In his account of their work, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, the chairperson and spiritual icon Desmond Tutu remembered how it became increasingly clear to him how important God and spirituality is for the whole of life, how much theology matters.³⁰

A spirituality of flourishing

From here we may walk further down until we see the famous façade of the sociologist Max Weber’s villa on the opposite bank of the Neckar, from where he published his epoch-making essays on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.³¹

28 “Wir müssen lernen, miteinander zu reden, und wir müssen uns gegenseitig in unseren außerordentlichen Verschiedenheiten verstehen und anerkennen. Diese Verschiedenheiten sind so groß, daß wir uns in Grenzfällen wie aus verschiedenen Völkern zu stammen scheinen,” Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage*, 14.

29 Literature about the task, composition, work and results of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is widely available. It was not a judicial process, but a spiritual process, with the hope of healing the nation. For that reason, the task of the Commission was threefold, to conduct public hearings so that victims could tell their own stories in their own words, in their local communities, all over the country, but broadcasted live on public media for the whole nation to hear or even witness, to grant amnesty for those perpetrators who would acknowledge their own actions publicly and fully, but not necessarily with remorse, and to provide some form of restitution for those who suffered gross violations of human rights. The official Report was completed and submitted to the President in 1998, although the work of the amnesty committee still continued, and the work of restitution never really came to concrete fruition.

30 Desmond Tutu, *No future without forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999). There was in fact widespread criticism of the work of the Commission from the perspective that spirituality and faith – and even God-talk – played too much of a role in the process, from the hearings to the public reception to the outcomes. It was even argued that it is only possible to understand the spirit, practices, rituals and presuppositions of the Commission if one understands the spirit, practices, rituals and presuppositions of the Eucharist.

31 Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, originally published in 1906 and translated into English in the 1930s by Talcott Parsons. This work formed the beginning of his famous later work on the far-reaching economic impact of cultural,

Weber's thesis, that it was Calvinist views of God that created the modern spirit by seeing profit as end in itself and therefore pursuing profit as virtuous, has been contested, but the importance of the issues he raised remained.

Invited to address the German Historians in 1906, he sent his friend Ernst Troeltsch, from the Heidelberg theology faculty, living in the same villa. His famous speech, *Protestantism and Progress. The Significance of Protestantism for the Rise of the Modern World*, preceded his well-known study on *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*.³²

Like Weber, he argued that Protestant notions of God and spirituality helped form our modern world,³³ and like Weber, he argued that once that had happened, Protestantism lost its ability to challenge and influence and transform this new world.³⁴ Already then, he lamented "the terrible

religious, and spiritual influences, including *The religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, 1915; *The religion of India: The sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, 1916; and *Ancient Judaism*, 1917; together, his widely acclaimed *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, originally 1921, with a complete English translation only available in 1968.

- 32 Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and progress. The significance of Protestantism for the rise of the modern world* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Ernst Troeltsch, *The social teaching of the Christian churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992 [1931]). For an instructive volume of his collected essays, see Ernst Troeltsch, *Schriften zur Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die moderne Welt (1906-1913)*. *Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Band 8*, Hrsg. Trutz Rendtorff, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001).
- 33 "Max Weber ... raised the question regarding the spiritual, ethical, and philosophical pre-suppositions of this system. Without a definite mental and spiritual background, a system of this kind cannot become dominant ... (H)e showed that it was the Calvinistic asceticism which produced on a large scale, not so much capitalism as the capitalistic spirit on which it was based," Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and progress*, 72-73.
- 34 "(T)he imposing but also terrible expansion of modern capitalism, with its calculating coldness and soullessness, its unscrupulous greed and pitilessness, its turning to gain for gain's sake, to fierce and ruthless competition, its agonising lust for victory, its blatant satisfaction in the tyrannical power of the merchant class, has entirely loosed itself from its former ethical foundation; and it has become a power directly opposed to genuine Calvinism and Protestantism. When it no longer practices asceticism for the honour of God, but for the gaining of power, to the honour of man, it has no longer anything in common with Protestantism except its strongly individualistic spirit now no longer held in check by the social and religious spirit of early Calvinism. It is the fate of the intra-mundane asceticism that ... it can never again get rid of the horde of spirits which swarms out upon it in overwhelming strength from that world which it at once recognizes and ignores. In the 'intra-mundane' asceticism the world and heaven were at odds; and in the struggle the world has proved the stronger. Consequently, the ethical theories also which to-day support the capitalistic organization of life have, to a great

expansion (of) calculating coldness and soullessness,” “unscrupulous greed and pitilessness,” “fierce and ruthless competition.”

These issues are of course still debated.³⁵ In *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, the Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman recently described a conflict between “competing gospels,”³⁶ alternative visions of flourishing,

extent, become dominated by a religiously indifferent utilitarianism. For Protestantism itself, in all its forms, the ethical attitude towards the situation created by capitalism has become a difficult problem, to the solution of which the ethico-economic teachings of the Reformation can contribute little. Even within the domain of Anglo-Saxon Calvinism, the problem begins to be felt, in face of a completely secularized capitalism,” Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and progress*, 74–75.

- 35 For an instructive essay that situates Weber and Troeltsch in the even broader cultural and religious context of Heidelberg’s intellectual milieu during the early twentieth century, see Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Puritanistische Sektenfreiheit versus lutherische Volkskirche. Zum Einfluß Georg Jellineks auf religionsdiagnostische Deutungsmuster Max Webers und Ernst Troeltschs,” *Zeitschrift für neuere Theologiegeschichte/Journal for the history of modern theology*, Band 9 (2002), 42–69. It offers an informative study of the town and university as a site of memory. Graf describes Heidelberg at the time as “a laboratory of the modern age” where scholars and artists intensively discussed “the crisis of the modern age” and “attempted to determine the cultural significance of religion for modernity.” For Graf, these exemplary historical cases could still be helpful in order to discern the possible “cultural significance” of religion for today.
- 36 There are of course many ways to tell this story – of links between theology and the economy – and therefore also many contradictory stories. For Benjamin Friedman, *Religion and the rise of capitalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), religious spiritualities had and still have far-reaching impact on economic thought and behaviour, even if most people may be unaware of this influence and even though the impact may actually work in very different and indeed opposing directions. Contrary to the conventional view of economics as an entirely secular product of the Enlightenment, he argues that religion has exerted a powerful influence from the outset – even already in the case of the religiously indifferent Adam Smith and his actively hostile contemporaries like David Hume. For a fascinating look at hidden sides of Adam Smith, also see Mike Hill & Warren Montag, *The other Adam Smith* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), as well as Albertus Kerkhof, *De mens is een angstig dier. Adam Smith’s theorie van de morele gevoelens* (Meppel: Boom, 1992), and for an intriguing account of the relations between Smith and Hume, also see Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The infidel and the professor. David Hume, Adam Smith, and the friendship that shaped modern thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). In spite of their own intentions, Friedman claims, the religious atmosphere and spirit in which they worked shaped their ideas.

For a completely different kind of argument and from a different background, yet also claiming that theological notions and spiritual atmospheres had more impact on the development of the economy than is often appreciated, see for example the work in political theology by Giorgio Agamben, *The kingdom and the glory. For a theological genealogy of economy and government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

while ecumenical bodies call for “spiritualities of resistance,” opposing economic injustice and ecological destruction.³⁷

An opposite story – namely that the economic spirit determines the religious spirit – can also be told, and again in diverse and popular ways. The story can be told in scholarly and empirical ways, demonstrating how an economic spirit leads to certain contemporary forms of religiosity and spirituality, see for example studies like John Micklethwait & Adrian Wooldridge, *God is back. How the global revival of faith is changing the world* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the gods. How economics explains religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Götter global. Wie die Welt zum Supermarkt der Religionen wird* (München: C.H. Beck, 2014).

The story can however also be told in more critical ways, sometimes even suggesting that an economic spirit has itself become a religious spirit, see for example Harvey Cox, *The market as God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); also D. Stephen Long, *Divine economy. Theology and the market* (London: Routledge, 2000); and William T. Cavanaugh, *Being consumed. Economics and Christian desire* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).

Irrespective of how the stories are constructed, the questions and topics are still those raised by Max Weber – and according to many, his account remains in some ways still informative and valuable. For interesting recent engagements with Weber’s thesis, see for example Wolfgang Huber, “Worldly worship: The Reformation and economic ethics,” in John Witte & Amy Wheeler (eds.), *The Protestant Reformation of the church and the world*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 161-178; and Jonathan Walton, “The Protestant ethic and the spirit of consumerism,” in John Witte & Amy Wheeler (eds.), *The Protestant Reformation of the church and the world* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 179-190.

Huber was the host during my first visits to Heidelberg as fellow of the Humboldt Foundation and has played an important role for many in the church struggle in South Africa – addressing the South African Council of Churches during times of crisis, visiting universities and churches, giving public lectures, mentoring doctoral students and hosting research fellows, collaborating with research projects, forming networks and lasting personal friendships.

- 37 This is true of the Ecumenical Movement itself but also of several of the global denominational bodies and communions. For one such history, see for example information about the Reformed story in Allan Boesak, Johann Weusmann & Charles Amjad-Ali (eds.), *Dreaming a different world. Globalisation and justice for humanity and the earth. The challenge of the Accra Confession for the churches* (Stellenbosch: Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche, Germany & Uniting Reformed Church, South Africa, 2010).

In this process, the world Reformed community used the expression “empire” in Accra to name the contemporary challenges and in the process of receiving the Accra document South African and German Reformed churches together defined empire by speaking of a spirit of the time, “We speak of empire, because we discern a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world today, that constitutes a reality and a *spirit* of lordless domination, created by human kind yet enslaving simultaneously; an all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while imperiously excluding, even sacrificing humanity and exploiting creation; a

A spirituality of gratitude

It may feel ironic, given that for them the main actor, some would say culprit, in this story was Protestant and in fact Calvinist spirituality, to look up to the Castle and remember that a global spirit that spread from there was, at least in intention, almost the opposite, namely a spirituality of gift and grace and gratitude.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* of 1563, ordered by the Elector, embodied this spirituality – and was translated and received worldwide.³⁸

Our comfort is that we belong to Jesus Christ and that God’s Holy Spirit makes us heartily willing to live in gratitude for this free grace given to us, by readily and cheerfully using our treasures and gifts for the advantage of others. Indeed, a God of grace and spirituality of gratitude may help change the world.³⁹

pervasive *spirit* of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed; the colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.” The “spirit of lordless domination” is again a reference to the well-known § 78 of Karl Barth’s ethics of reconciliation, see Barth, *The Christian life. Church Dogmatics Vol. IV, Part 4, Lecture Fragments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 205-272. For the discussion on empire, see for example also Martina Wasserloos-Strunk, “Empire – provocation with a perspective,” in *Europe covenanting for justice*, ed. Martina Wasserloos-Strunk (Foedus-Verlag for The Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe, 2010), 69-80.

38 See for example Wilhelm Neuser, “Heidelberger Katechismus von 1563,” *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften Bd. 2/2 1562-1569*, Bucsay, Campi, Csepregi, Neuser & Van Booma (Hrsg.), (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009), 167-212; Martin Heimbucher, Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht & Aleida Siller (Hrsg.), *Zugänge zum Heidelberger Katechismus. Geschichte – Themen – Unterricht* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2012).

39 For the reception and lasting influence of the *Heidelberg Catechism* in the theology of Karl Barth, particularly in his influential doctrine and ethics of reconciliation, see the study by Hanna Reichel which also received the Lautenschlaeger Award, *Theologie als Bekenntnis. Karl Barths kontextuelle Lektüre des Heidelberger Katechismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015). In South Africa the impact of the *Heidelberg Catechism* was also far-reaching, as was the case with many countries on several continents, see for example Helene van Tonder, *Recollection and confession: The Heidelberg Catechism as a site of memory in the Dutch Reformed Church 1862-1963*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2017); as well as the volume of essays called *Remembering the Heidelberg Catechism in Southern Africa today. Essays*

It is no wonder that this spirituality is today once again a main culprit in scholarly debates about gift and gratitude – whether a gift can actually be given and whether gratitude could indeed inform ethics, or whether gifts and gratitude only create spiritualities of dependency and feelings of guilt.⁴⁰

A spirituality of conversation

Given so many controversies, it seems a relief that we may turn to the many sites of memory where we still hear Hans-Georg Gadamer, the groundbreaking philosopher of hermeneutics.⁴¹

on the occasion of the 450th Anniversary of a Reformed Confession, Helené van Tonder & Robert Vosloo (eds.), (Bloemfontein: SunMedia, *Acta Theologica. Supplement* 20, 2014).

- 40 See for example the study for which J. Todd Billings received the John Templeton Prize for Theological Promise in 2009, called *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift. The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), in which he already addressed some of this criticism of Calvin and the Reformed spiritual tradition's emphasis on gratitude as foundation for the Christian life. For some of these critical voices – like John Milbank, Kathryn Tanner, Stephen Webb – Calvin's theology breathes the spirit of a negative anthropology, a coercive God, and an inadequate view of human reciprocity, giving unilateral gifts to those in need while keeping the receivers in the lowly place of having nothing to give themselves. Billings disagrees and develops the Reformed spirituality as one of rich human activity and participation.

For an intriguing historical overview full of sites of memory, including Martin Heidegger's famous "Denken ist Danken," see Peter J. Leithart, *Gratitude. An intellectual history* (Waco: Baylor University, 2014).

- 41 He is best known for his magnum opus *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), the translation of *Wahrheit und Methode*, published in 1960 by Paul Siebeck, when Gadamer was already sixty years old. See the impressive biography on Gadamer by the Canadian philosopher and his personal friend, Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer. A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) (in German 1999, at Mohr Siebeck, English translation by Joel Weinsheimer). Gadamer lived until 102 and the decades after *Truth and Method* were in many ways his really productive years, and the years with a growing international reception, reputation, and impact. Grondin describes those years as Gadamer's "second youth" (or rather, his fourth and only real youth), "Only after he became emeritus did he experience a real youth. It was then that he became an experienced world traveler; he became fluent in new languages (English and Italian) which he had known before only as a reader; and the late blossoming of his reputation around the world made him happy as a child," 313-329. For Gadamer's thought, see from the vast literature for example Jean Grondin, *The philosophy of Gadamer* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's hermeneutics: A reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and the recent Robert Dostal (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021). By Gadamer himself, see also the ten volumes of collections of essays, *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985-1995).

We could walk by a favourite restaurant in the Floringasse or just stroll down the Uferstrasse where he once lived.⁴²

Gadamer often used the phrase “the conversation that we are” by the poet Hölderlin to explain being human as “das unendliche Gespräch in Richtung auf die Wahrheit, das wir sind.”⁴³ As part of this never-ending conversation in search for truth, we have to listen and listen again, even to hear what is not being said.⁴⁴

A spirituality of encounter

For me it has always been as if the whole Heidelberg breathed this spirit of conversation.

42 In June 1950 Gadamer moved to the Uferstrasse in Heidelberg, from where they moved to the Ziegelhausen neighbourhood of Heidelberg in 1966, where he is also buried.

43 See for example Gadamer, “Die Universalität des hermeneutischen Problems,” in *Gesammelte Werke. Band 2*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1986, 219-231; as well as Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnschwald & Jens Kertscher (eds.), *Gadamer's century: essays in honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), essays celebrating his centenary by showing his wide influence and the thread of conversation through all of his contributions.

44 Anecdotes abound on Gadamer's passion for conversation and for his open and listening style of respectful conversation, including anecdotes about his conversations with young people, students, and children. Grondin for example remembers from around Gadamer's 102nd birthday an occasion where “I saw him discussing poetry for no less than six hours with gifted high school students who had invited him and who were more exhausted at the end than Gadamer himself!” *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 336.

There are also many essays by Gadamer on the notion of conversation and also many conversations and interviews with him, edited and published by students and friends, for example see Richard Palmer, *Gadamer in conversation* (New Haven: Yale University, 2001), also Carsten Dutt (Hrsg.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer im Gespräch* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1995), as well as *Begegnungen mit Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Günter Figal (Hrsg.), (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), short essays celebrating his centenary.

Famous on the theme of conversation was the unsuccessful attempt to have a conversation between Gadamer and Derrida, because the latter, to Gadamer's disappointment, totally refused to engage Gadamer at all in the public conversation that was arranged, see the report by Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer (eds.), *Dialogue and deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida encounter* (Albany: SUNY, 1989). See also Mireille Calle-Gruber (ed.), *Heidegger, philosophy, and politics: the Heidelberg Conference*, tr. Jeff Fort, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), the report on a conversation with Gadamer and Derrida, in February 1988 here in Heidelberg, on the philosophical and political implications of Martin Heidegger's thought, in the very amphitheatre in which, more than fifty years earlier, Heidegger, as rector of the University of Freiburg and member of the Nazi Party, gave a speech entitled “The University in the New Reich.”

Even before I ever visited here, I was sometimes invited to discussions in Stellenbosch on burning issues of our time – by a group modelled after the inter-disciplinary *Akademische Geselligkeit* meeting Sundays in the Weber house.⁴⁵

When I came here the first time I was sometimes invited to discussions in the FEST, the inter-disciplinary Research Center on the hill behind the Castle, established by the Church to focus on future challenges – at the time, our crisis was one of their concerns.⁴⁶

45 When Max and Marianne Weber moved into the first floor of the villa in 1910 they began with this social gathering on Sundays of professors from diverse backgrounds with younger scholars and other intellectuals. Famous names were part of this regular Sunday conversation. After their move to München in 1919 and his death in 1920 she moved back to the villa and in 1924 the former gathering was again started, with the former friends still part of it, together with students and partners, in total a circle of about 70 participants. In 1933 it was forced to become less public, with several members losing their positions at the University while others emigrated, although the central figures stayed together even during the Nazi period. When after the War the group of thirteen intellectuals was formed to revision the University, it was no surprise that six were members from the “Akademische Geselligkeit,” including famous figures like Karl Jaspers, Martin Dibelius, Walter Jellinek and Gustav Radbruch. Marianne Weber in fact continued the Sunday conversations after the War, until her death. Eventually, the University named the villa after Max Weber and began to use it as a center for international students – in the spirit of the Sunday conversations.

46 Over the years, the FEST regularly published reports and studies on the crisis in apartheid South Africa, for example an early volume with important essays on black theologies, including essays by prominent black theologians like Allan Boesak and Manas Buthelezi, *Theologie im Konfliktfeld Südafrika. Dialog mit Manas Buthelezi. FEST Studien zur Friedensforschung, Band 15*, Hrsg. Ilse Tödt (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1976); and also a study on ecumenical political ethics by Christine Lienemann-Perrin, a member of the working group of the FEST on the church’s nature and its social form, *Die politische Verantwortung der Kirchen in Südkorea und Südafrika. Studien zur politischen Ethik* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1992).

Speaking of sites of memory, the FEST was also the venue where the Jewish intellectual Jacob Taubes gave his fascinating lectures published as *The political theology of Paul*, tr. By Dana Hollander, edited by Aleida and Jan Assmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), in their series on “Cultural memory in the present,” during the final days of his life, while suffering from cancer, and intended as his spiritual legacy. The manuscript, his reading of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, became a key text in contemporary political theology, since it is also the text in which he recounts the story of his famous letter to Carl Schmitt, leading to his visit of Schmitt and their long and intimate conversation on Romans 9 to 11.

In his typical fashion, Taubes began his lectures by telling stories, “I want to tell you two more stories. Anecdotes. When you reach my age and the phase I am in, they can make sense as a way to convey something to another generation,” 3.

Strolling towards the International Academic Forum, one can hardly miss this international, inter-disciplinary, ecumenical spirit all around, in almost every building – the Ecumenical Institute, the first of its kind in the world, with the Ecumenical House welcoming students from all over into life together; Haus Buhl, where the Marsilius Kolleg, the University's Inter-disciplinary Center for Advanced Study, was founded; the FIIT, the Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology.⁴⁷

Such an inter-disciplinary and ecumenical spirit of conversation, encounter, and shared search for truth clearly calls for epistemologies of curiosity, humility, teachability, openness.⁴⁸

I had these memories very much in mind when I thought about a theme for today's speech.

- 47 The International Academic Forum was founded in 1986 on the occasion of the 600th celebration of the birth of Heidelberg University. It is an interdisciplinary centre for scholarly exchange and a think tank providing a platform for multidisciplinary intellectual engagement.

The Ecumenical Institute was founded in 1946, directly after the War, by Edmund Schlink. Adjacent to the Institute is the Ecumenical Student Residence Hall, in which students from different international backgrounds, denominations and fields of study live together, to demonstrate the importance of life together for ecumenical work and thought.

The Marsilius Kolleg, the University's Centre for Advanced Study, was founded in 2007, as one of the excellence initiatives of Heidelberg University. Named after the first rector, Marsilius von Inghen, its vision is to build bridges between academic cultures and its core activities include weekly inter-disciplinary discussions.

The Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology (FIIT) was established in 2005 and strengthens interdisciplinary research in academic areas relevant to theology and society. It originally also hosted the Global Network for Research Centers for Theology, Religious and Christian Studies, with members on every continent.

These four institutions of course only represent the smallest tip of the iceberg as far as inter-disciplinary and international scholarship all over the streets and neighbourhoods of Heidelberg is concerned.

- 48 See for example still the fascinating small study on the role of curiosity in the history of theology and the birth of modernity, including Luther, by Heiko Oberman, *Contra vanam curiositatem. Ein Kapitel der Theologie zwischen Seelenwinkel und Weltall* (Zürich: TVZ, 1974). On teachability, see for example the study by the Princeton scholar Richard R. Osmer, *A teachable spirit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), in which he underlines the importance of teachability in theologians according to John Calvin. Interestingly, Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* begins – even before the first theological thesis – with words expressing the spirit of the disputation, namely “Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, ‘Do not rely on your own insight’ (Prov. 3:5), we humbly present to the judgment of

These streets reminded me how leading ecumenical figures all described ecumenical spirituality as such an unending willingness to continue to meet and the refusal to give up on others.⁴⁹

A spirituality of openness

Perhaps we could talk about one of them, Edmund Schlink, the founder of the Ecumenical Institute, while walking back.⁵⁰ His

all those who wish to be here these theological paradoxes, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ, and also from St. Augustine, his most trustworthy interpreter.”

- 49 See for example Walter Cardinal Kasper, *A handbook of spiritual ecumenism* (New York: New City Press, 2007), at the time President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, having served as its president from 2001 to 2010, as well as his *Harvesting the fruits. Basic aspects of Christian faith in ecumenical dialogue* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009). Capturing the results of Catholic dialogues working on doctrinal “consensus, convergences and differences” with the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican and Methodist world bodies since the Second Vatican Council, Kasper underlined that beyond all these theological dialogues, ecumenical dialogue is “a dialogue of love and life; at its heart it is a spiritual dialogue,” 6.

See also from Geoffrey Wainwright, the British Methodist systematic and liturgical theologian and longstanding leading figure in the Faith and Order Commission as well as in bilateral dialogues, “Ecumenical spirituality,” in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold (eds.), *The study of spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 540-548, as well as his overview “Faith and Order,” in Geoffrey Wainwright & Paul McPartlan (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of ecumenical studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Wainwright quotes with approval the famous Cardinal Mercier on ecumenical spirituality, namely that “in order to unite with one another, we must love one another; in order to love one another, we must know one another; in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another.” This meeting, Wainwright says, often begins with “strangers beginning to meet.” Together, they find “conditions of travel” together. What is most needed is “the profounder process of reception” in which not merely documents and texts are recognised and affirmed but the people behind these documents and texts” – and their shared longing, desire, and prayer. In 1957 Gadamer was invited to deliver the Cardinal Mercier guest lecture in Louvain, translated as “On the problem of historical consciousness.”

- 50 For a helpful biography of Schlink, see Eugene M. Skibbe, *A quiet Reformer. An introduction to Edmund Schlink's life and ecumenical theology* (Minneapolis: Kirk House, 1999). He was actively involved in several important and far-reaching ecumenical initiatives, with the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as well as with other Protestant traditions. He co-founded two influential ecumenical journals. He served as delegate to the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 as well as several later Full Assemblies of the WCC and also attended the Second Vatican Council as observer and wrote about his impressions. In addition to his well-known and widely influential *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress,

inaugural lecture as professor in 1947 was on the University sceptre from 1388, still to be seen in the Museum downstairs. On top of the staff is a small open-sided room in which the twelve-year-old Jesus teaches four figures, the four faculties, equal and together, listening. He used this image to argue for inter-disciplinary search for truth, united in service for the good of all, and pleaded for intellectual humility – appealing to Luther’s *theologia crucis*.⁵¹

His inaugural lecture as rector in 1953 again used the theology of the cross extensively, now arguing for an epistemology of love.⁵²

1961 [German edition, 1940]) and *The doctrine of baptism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), Schlink made major contributions to ecumenical work and methodology, some of them collected in the volume *The coming Christ and the coming church* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), and published a ground-breaking *Ökumenische Dogmatik: Grundzüge* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983).

Some of his influential notions included the idea that different faith traditions may actually express the same faith in structurally different ways, explained in his essay “Die Struktur der dogmatischen Aussage als ökumenisches Problem,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 3 (1957), 251-306, translated in the volume with collected essays, as well as his plea for a Copernican revolution in theological knowledge, taking seriously the fact that other church traditions do not revolve around our tradition as center, but that all traditions revolve around Jesus Christ, a key notion in his ecumenical dogmatics.

During Schlink’s commemoration in 1984 in Heidelberg’s Alte Aula, his successor as Director of the Ecumenical Institute, Dietrich Ritschl, spoke about Schlink’s understanding of truth under the title “Theologie als Erkenntnis,” in Ritschl, *Konzepte* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1986), 167-178. He explained that it was no longer possible to think and argue like Schlink and his theological generation, but that his ground-breaking initiatives in ecumenical dialogue and theology, his respect for an inter-disciplinary search for knowledge and his convictions about truth as existential and living wisdom rather than a system of propositional insights remained important.

In South Africa Schlink’s ecumenical theology also found resonance, see Piet J. Naudé, “Edmund Schlink (1903-1984). Telling his story from a South African perspective,” in Henco van der Westhuizen (ed.), *Pathways in theology. Ecumenical, African and Reformed* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), 109-125; Dirk J. Smit, “Confessional and ecumenical? Revisiting Edmund Schlink on the hermeneutics of doctrine,” in Robert Vosloo (ed.), *Remembering theologians – doing theology. Collected Essays* 5 (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2013), 543-561.

- 51 Edmund Schlink “Das Szepter der Universität Heidelberg: Christus und die Fakultäten,” in *Aus Leben und Forschung der Universität 1947/1948*, Hg. W. Kunkel, (Heidelberg: Springer, 1947), 31-50; also in Schlink, *Ausgewählte Beiträge: Kirchenkampf – Theologische Grundfragen – Ökumene, Schriften zu Ökumene und Bekenntnis*. Vol. 2, ed. Ursula Schnell (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).
- 52 As Rector, Schlink spoke about wisdom and foolishness and their consequences for the life and work of a university, arguing from Luther’s *Heidelberg Disputation*. The speech was published as the first contribution in the then newly established ecumenical

journal, *Kerygma and Dogma*, as Edmund Schlink, “Weisheit und Torheit,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1955), 1-22. In later years, Schlink would revisit the theme of theology, knowledge, and wisdom in at least three further contributions. Following Luther from beginning to end, he concluded the speech with remarkable final words on an epistemology of love. “Der Glaube an Christus *befreit den Menschen zum Erkennen in der Liebe*. Das wahre Erkennen kann nicht losgelöst werden von der Verantwortung, die der Forscher für seine Mitmenschen hat. Die methodisch richtige Forderung, daß die wissenschaftliche Arbeit um ihrer selbst willen zu geschehen hat, kann nicht losgerissen werden aus der faktischen Einheit, in der der Mensch als Denker zugleich Glied der menschlichen Gemeinschaft ist, mitverantwortlich für ihre Erhaltung und ihr Gedeihen. Nicht zufällig hat Luther in seinen Aussagen über das natürliche Gesetz Vernunft und Liebe im engsten Zusammenhang gesehen. Ist doch die Erkenntnis der Weisheit Gottes die Erkenntnis der göttlichen Lieben, die er am Kreuz der Welt erzeugt hat, und der göttlichen Geduld, mit der er die Welt trotz ihrer Bedrohtheit erhält,” 21-22.

Today there are of course many epistemological approaches which underline love, humility and openness as integral to the pursuit of knowledge. The Templeton Foundation, for example, who originally funded the annual Prize for Theological Promise, supported a project called the Humble Approach Initiative, named after a work by John M. Templeton himself, *The Humble Approach* (London: Collins, 1981), in which he attempted to make readers aware of their relative position in the vast web of life as we know it. He was convinced that the way to know God was quite literally through humility and that humility should even drive the scientific quest for data about the universe and for ultimate truth. Today, the John Templeton Foundation still supports inter-disciplinary research into “intellectual humility” under the theme of “the joy of being wrong,” as “the most foundational virtue” when “it comes to their interests.”

In pneumatology, the systematic theologian Ephraim Radner has for example recently argued somewhat in this spirit for an understanding of the Spirit within the contexts of contemporary experiences of the harsh realities of existence including social confusion and suffering, in his *A profound ignorance. Modern pneumatology and its anti-modern redemption* (Waco: Baylor University, 2019).

In his 2018 Gifford Lectures on *History and eschatology. Jesus and the promise of natural theology* (Waco: Baylor University, 2019), the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright has in somewhat of a similar spirit argued for an epistemology of love. Following the famous quote of Ludwig Wittgenstein that it is love that believes the resurrection, Wright argues that “love is the most complete form of knowledge, including not bypassing historical knowledge in particular; and the resurrection is the most complete form of event, not simply a random ‘fact’ but an event which conveys both meaning and power,” see especially 187-214.

Perhaps one may even remember in this spirit the intriguing study by Andreas Pangritz, *Vom Kleiner- und Unsichtbarwerden der Theologie* (Tübingen: Theologischer Verlag, 1996), on the shrinking position and prestige of Protestant theology in the universum of modern universities over against the paradoxical ways in which Jewish public intellectuals – Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno – acknowledged the “implicit theology” of their critical theory – with a fascinating introduction by Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt. Marquardt begins with the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker who claimed, during the debates about nuclear arms,

In the Museum is also the University's Seal since 1386, with the words *semper apertus*, "the book of learning is always open."⁵³ For me, they served as painful reminder of the *Freedom Charter* back home, saying that "The doors of learning shall be opened." This ground-breaking non-racial statement of 1955 was abruptly denounced as treason, the democratic movements were banned and to possess or quote the *Charter* was declared illegal.⁵⁴ At our University of the Western Cape, where Tutu was Chancellor, these words were put on our main gate, as public act of defiance and resistance – and promise. Over years, this main gate became a site of memory – and hope – for thousands of students. The doors of learning shall be opened.⁵⁵

that theology belongs in universities as living reminder of the only truth that reaches deeper than the scientific truth on which the nuclear age is based and of knowledge rooted much deeper than modern rationality. He concludes with Luther – in the spirit of the *theologia crucis* – and the difference between apostles and metaphysical thinkers.

- 53 The motto stems from the first rector of the University, Marsilius von Inghen. He was born around 1330 in the Netherlands and gave his inaugural lecture at Paris University in 1362, where he served as rector in 1367 and 1371, while he also represented the University in 1368 and 1376 as envoy at the curia in Avignon. In 1386 he became the founding rector of Heidelberg University, and afterwards he repeatedly held this office.
- 54 On the contribution of the *Freedom Charter*, the most important political document from the circles of the anti-apartheid opposition, within the context of ecumenical contributions and debates on the legitimacy of the apartheid state during the 1980s, see Christine Lienemann-Perrin & Wolfgang Lienemann (Hg.), *Politische Legitimität in Südafrika* (Heidelberg: FEST, 1988). This interdisciplinary research project took place within the "Working Group South Africa" at the FEST at that time.
- 55 My predecessor as professor of systematic theology at the University of the Western Cape in Bellville, South Africa, and later the vice-rector of the University, J.J.F. (Jaap) Durand, is for example well-known for an iconic picture of him taken on the campus and close to the main gate during student protests in the 1980s. In August 1984 the security forces were in the main road outside the University threatening and intimidating the protesting students inside the gates and on the grounds of the campus. On Monday 27 August 1984, without any warning, police stormed 300 UWC students gathered at the main gate on Modderdam Road staging a placard demonstration and shot at them with rubber bullets. The bullets narrowly missed Durand, speaking to the students, trying to calm the situation. While the students fled, away from the firing police, Durand angrily walked towards them, to stop the attack and demand accountability from the police. The next morning, the local Cape Times newspaper carried a report on its front page, with this picture that would become an iconic representation of Durand and the struggle, see Dirk J. Smit, "... '(T)hose who pray and do justice and wait for God's own time ...': On Jaap Durand," in Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel, & Robert Vosloo (eds.), *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the struggle for justice. Remembering 1960-1990* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013), 293-302.

Of course, in many places in our world doors of learning are still not open – for children, women, minorities, the poor, many on the margins. Sometimes they may even seem open without really being open, since many who enter may still not feel welcome, recognized, respected, heard. This may be true in many ways – from subtle to blatant. Academic culture only too often still breathes a spirit of supremacy and exclusion.⁵⁶

On theological promise

Back from our walk,⁵⁷ it was hopefully clear that we were actually all the time talking about theological promise. I can speak only for myself, but for me the fascination of these Awards is that they are for Theological Promise – not achievement but promise.

You obviously convinced us by the quality of your previous work, but we were also looking for signs of promise. That is why we meet in person, to share future passions and hear how our issues appear from the perspectives of others. We meet in the hope that friendships and networks will form.

56 Princeton Theological Seminary, where I now teach public theology, recently published a historical Slavery Audit in an attempt to face some of the ways in which their theological imagination failed in history. Still, it remains an ongoing journey to allow voices that had been excluded and marginalized to speak for themselves. Recently, Renita Weems, the first African American woman to earn a PhD in Old Testament Studies at Princeton Seminary and also the first African American woman to earn a PhD in the field of Old Testament Studies at all, gave the Prathia Hall Lecture on campus, on “Learning to think better than we have been trained: Black Women and the academic study of religion,” and spoke about the ongoing challenges and struggles for Womanist Theologians, even after they began to enter the doors of learning, because their experiences and insights and questions were just not part of the dominant discourses.

57 Again, there are so many other sites of memory in Heidelberg as well. My own list of sites of memory, of course seen through my particular South African lenses, would in fact have been almost endless – and others would obviously be much better able to add many more. In fact, the same is probably true of the university towns where all the recipients come from – that is precisely the nature of the intriguing and exciting conversation which we all are – and share. We all belong to histories (Gadamer) and we all can only see from our own limited perspectives – and therefore we need one another.

My own hope is for next generations who understand that much is at stake in what we say about God and spirituality; that our convictions matter; that a spirit of gratitude can be a great gift; that not every spirit is from God and the powers of the human spirit also create abysses of darkness;⁵⁸ that

58 Over several decades, works by Michael Welker, by his doctoral students, and by many of his colleagues have argued how the divine spirit and the human spirit should not be confused. Already in his early, ground-breaking pneumatology called *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994 [German 1992]), Welker followed Biblical trajectories concerning the Holy Spirit claiming that God as Spirit should not be equated, as has only too often been done, with predominant metaphysical concepts of spirit in the reception histories of Aristotle and Hegel, respectively, but should rather be seen as the public person of God's Spirit in the midst of creation.

He developed these ideas further in collaboration with colleagues from many contexts and backgrounds, in consultations and international and inter-disciplinary networks, and in several edited volumes of papers, including for example Michael Welker (ed.), *The work of the Spirit. Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006) as well as Michael Welker (ed.), *The depth of the human person. A multidisciplinary approach* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014). Together with his colleague and friend Sir John Polkinghorne they often described the church as a truth and justice seeking community.

It may be instructive to quote Welker himself at some length. In “Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom!” in Len Hansen, Nico Koopman, Robert Vosloo (eds.), *Living Theology* (Wellington: Bible Media, 2011), 73-90, he summarizes some of his main convictions well. “General talk of the ‘spirit’ is highly ambiguous. The English word ‘spirit’ (as with its German counterpart *Geist*) covers a broad range of meanings: it can be linked, for example, with an individual’s character or personality (‘Goethe was a leading spirit’) or can refer to ghostly apparitions (‘He saw a ghostly spirit and we feared for his sanity’). Yet, to this day the word ‘spirit’ continues primarily to designate an authority, medium or power which unites and orients the thought, behaviour and activity of a particular group, institution, society, culture, or even epoch (‘This school is filled with a good spirit’; or indeed the adoption into English of the German word *Zeitgeist*: the ‘spirit of the age’). How can we designate these understandings and introduce some clarity into this opaque discussion of spirit?” He then offers a brief but insightful description of the diverse and complex powers of the human spirit and continues “This simple sketch of our mental (*geistige*) capabilities is almost cause enough for us to sing the praises of the human spirit. And yet, we must be acutely wary of any untampered glorification of the spirit. We ... must take into account ... also the many possibilities to use mental communication (both consciously and unconsciously) to the severe detriment of humanity, culture and nature. We are not dealing here only with the continual global distribution and communication of helpful and wholesome abstractions and reductions but must rather also face entire streams of trivializing and banalising ideas, thoughts and emotionalisations which have been mentally exported and have now become ingrained in our communications and cultures. Fanaticising, brutalizing and destructive dispositions and views are placed into circulation via the power of this same spirit (*Geist*) and gain incredibly binding social and political power. Over long periods of time, brutal mentalities spread, subtly and insidiously destroying and impoverishing everything around them. Countless appearances of the spirit are highly ambiguous and ambivalent ... (S)uch reductionist thought can blind people and

being human involves caring and imagining life through others' eyes; that thinking involves listening in humility and with openness.

May this Award and consultation be sites of memory for you all – and also sites of promise.

entire societies, cultures and epochs in incredibly dangerous ways and can commit them to naïve ideologies and understandings of the world. An 'evil spirit' then begins to rule the people and uses many of those great and praiseworthy mental abilities to destroy and corrupt the conditions of human and creaturely life. (F)rom the outset associating the spiritual (*das Geistige*) world with goodness, the promotion of life, freedom or even the divine is dangerously negligent ... These observations on the deep ambivalence of the power of the spirit have shown us that ... we must try to understand the ways in which the human spirit and the divine Spirit relate to each other ... When we understand the reality of the human spirit, its power and its ambivalence, and even its danger, then we can understand *why continual testing and 'the discernment of the spirits' is such a vital and indispensable theological task, one that is not only important for faith communities but also for their social and cultural surroundings ...* But how are we to know that a spirit comes from God?" (my italics).

In several collections of essays published in his honour by friends and colleagues, similar ideas on God's Spirit and human spirituality were at work, but particularly in the volume dedicated to him by former students called *Gottes Geist und menschlicher Geist*, edited by Gregor Etzelmüller & Heike Springhart (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), including contributions by several former recipients of this Award.

In his own 2019/2020 Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh, published as *In God's image. An anthropology of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2021), Welker offered an innovative natural theology by way of "bottom-up" thinking, arguing that popular ideas of humanity as the image of God are hardly convincing, given "the abysses of the human spirit" that are so painfully obvious in our time. Instead, he argued that being in the image of God rather means to be called to grow *into* justice, freedom, truth, and peace.

Welker was my host during later visits to Heidelberg as Humboldt fellow, and he also had an important impact in South African theological circles, hosting many colleagues in Heidelberg and visiting South Africa to teach and speak at conferences and to study groups. For Welker's far-reaching influence and impact in South African theological and church circles, see the recent study by Henco van der Westhuizen, *Faith active in Love. On the theology of Michael Welker* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

Much of his own way of doing theology – together with others, in international, inter-disciplinary and inter-generational research projects, consultations, networks, and joint publications, including the impressive present series of eleven simultaneous studies on the formation of values in different social spheres in contemporary societies together with John Witte and others – exemplifies the spirit of theological promise acknowledged and rewarded by the Manfred Lautenschlaeger Awards for Theological Promise.