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The Spirit and creation

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This article explores the relation between the Spirit and creation, or rather the theology of the Spirit and a theology of creation, with reference to the theology of Michael Welker. The first part of this descriptive article explores what Welker refers to as a reductionist understanding of creation. The second part is an in-depth exploration of Welker's understanding of biblical creation. In this light, the third part examines the relation between this differentiated understanding of biblical creation and the Spirit. The conclusion explored the implications of Welker's theology of creation for his theology of the Spirit. It explains how Welker's understanding of this relation, which allows for a more complex understanding of the Spirit's role in reality, provides impulses, for example, for ecotheology.

Keywords: Holy Spirit; creation; new creation; law; justice; Michael Welker.

Introduction

In *An introduction to Christian theology*, Migliore (2014:97) argues that the 'gravity and scope of the ecological crises give an unprecedented urgency to the task of rethinking the Christian doctrine of creation'.

In *Christian Doctrine* Guthrie (2018), like Migliore (2014), argues for a rethinking of the doctrine of creation in light of the biblical traditions:

> [*I*]t may well be that … interpretation(s) of the biblical creation story has at least indirectly contributed to the ecological crisis of our time: oil spills that pollute the oceans, killing marine and coastal wildlife; dumping of industrial waste that makes the land barren, poisons underground water, and leaves rivers and streams lifeless; clear-cutting of ancient forests that destroys whole species of birds and animal life and upsets the ecological balance of the whole planet; pollution of the air that produces acid rain and creates a greenhouse effect that turns fertile countryside into deserts; massive pollution of land, sea, and air that threatens to destroy all life on our planet, human life included. (p. 148)

Guthrie (2018) argues for a biblical doctrine of creation that asks about God the Creator before asking about creation as that, which is:

> [*T*]he possibility (that the future of the world depends on what we human beings do) is excluded, and Christians can make a unique contribution to the environmental movement, when we seek neither a human- nor an earth- – but a God-centred understanding of the world – a biblical doctrine of creation based on the promises and requirements of the God who is the Creator, Preserver, Saviour, and Renewer of all that is. (p. 148)

In a recent paper presented in preparation for the 11th assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2021, Conradie (2019) asks if and how a theology of God the Creator Spirit allows for impulses towards an ecological theology:[1]

> There is a crucial constructive task for ecotheology that is hardly being addressed, namely to reflect on the question what God is doing (if anything!?) in a time like this … What is God up to … Where can signs of God's presence and creative engagement with the world be found … (p. 40)

In many ways Reformed theology has related the doctrine of creation to the Spirit. In *God in Creation*, Moltmann (1993a:9), for example, argues for an ecological doctrine of creation by way of a doctrine of creation in the Spirit (cf. Moltmann 1993b).

The question, however, is if and how a theology of creation and of the Spirit provides impulses for an ecotheology, that is, a theology concerned also with biblical law, with justice, also the doing of justice in and through the Spirit?[2]

1.For South African perspectives on the theme of the Spirt and creation, cf. Conradie (2001; 2012b; 2019 forthcoming) and Sakupapa (2012). Cf. also an edition, edited by Conradie, of *Journal of Reformed Theology* (2012a), *God's transforming Spirit reflections on mission, spirituality and creation* (2012) and the more recent *Wuppertal Call* (WCC 2019).

2.For a perspective on what ecotheology is, cf. Conradie (2006:3–4).

In many ways, the Reformed theologian Michael Welker have been concerned with both the law and the Spirit. In fact the law, more specifically of the relation between the law and the Spirit, has been one of his main interests since his earliest publications. This is highlighted, for example in the preface to *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Welker 1992). His intention was to begin his lengthier publications on the most important themes of Christian theology with a volume on God's law and God's gospel. The contents and problems, however, '*die Sache die bei der Arbeit daran zu behandeln waren*' (Welker 1992:11), directed his research to a theology of the Spirit, the topic that would in retrospect, frame his entire theology (Van der Westhuizen 2019).

Welker (1992:153) describes the question of the relation between the Spirit, or rather the Spirt of *Gerechtigkeit* and the Spirit of creation as the *one* Spirit of God, as belonging to the '*größen theologischen Herausforderungen*'. It is therefore not surprising that in *Gottes Geist*, translated as *God the Spirit* (Welker 1994a), the chapters relating to this challenge received the lengthiest discussion (Welker 1992:153–173; 1994a:159–182).

The relation between the Spirit and creation, however, can only be understood in light of Welker's continually deepened and complex notion of creation as found in the biblical traditions (Welker 1988:1119–1120; 1991a:56–71; 1991b:208–224; 1994b:9–29; 1994c:126–140; 1995a; 1995b: 173–187; 1997a:4–10; 1997b:436–448; 1999a; 2001a:80–94; 2001b:22–32; 2001c:23–25, 28–36; 2005a:34–52; 2005b:48–49; 2006:313–323; 2007:84–88; 2009:15–28; 2010a:27–31; 2012a; 2012b:59–65; 2012c:134–142; 2016:50–57).

'Creation'?

Welker (1991) describes his Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures (only later published as *Schöpfung und Wirklichkeit* 1995a and *Creation and reality* 1999a), as an initial step in critiquing the conventional images of the creator God and its concurrent conceptualisation of reality, that is: 'a *theistischen Zerrbildes von Gott dem Schöpfer und einem entsprechenden religiösen "Wirklichkeitsverständnis"*' (Welker 1995a:2).

These conventional images regard creation as reality, as *that which is*, as that which was somehow brought forth and is, therefore dependent on whoever created it, that is: '*die Totalität, die Welt oder die Natur, sofern sie als hervorgebracht und abhängig angesehen wird*' (Welker 1995a:7; 2001b:26). Welker (1991a:59) highlights that this having been brought forth and being dependent, according to the conventional images, is and remains constant, whether this creation relates to a god, gods or whoever – it does not relate to a specific creator; or creation is the *act* that brought forth that which is dependent, or the activity thereof – it does not relate to a specific creator's act or activity.

This raises two questions: firstly, whether creation is creation out of chaos, or creation out of nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*; and secondly, whether creation is a once-off act or a continuous activity, *creatio continua*. The biblical traditions show these conventional images of creation to be what he refers to as *Fehlabstraktionen* (Van der Westhuizen 2016b:607–720; 2017:429–449; Welker 1995a:7; 1999a:6).

Welker argues that the conception underlying these patterns of thought connects these images of bringing forth and being dependent with power, with *Machtausübung* (Welker 1995a:8; 2001b:31). To understand this power, the *pattern* is to be broken up if a theology of creation were to be at the level of the biblical traditions.

'Biblical creation'

The traditions of the Bible related to the creator God[3] do not regard creation as *that which is*, and not merely as that which was somehow brought forth and is therefore dependent on whoever created it (Welker 1997b:440).

According to Welker, these traditions rather underscore not merely the acting, but also the creator's *reacting* towards that which is brought forth. In fact, they accentuate God's reacting to that which is, through seeing, evaluating,[4] naming,[5] and separating.[6] They also accentuate God's *bringing to*, God's *Eingreifen*, God's reacting to what the human being really requires. God, in fact, acts and reacts in differentiated ways toward what is or has been brought forth (Welker 1997b:441).

Welker highlights that to this is added the activity of that which is brought forth in creation. These traditions refer to the differentiated activity of that which has been brought forth *in* that which is being brought forth. They articulate the participation of that which is created in God's creating activity (Welker 1997b:443). The participation of that which is created, which is in itself a way of bringing forth and creating, is not only a result of being brought forth. The creature's activity is creative activity, part of what these traditions refer to as creation (Etzelmüller 1997:332; 2007:320; Schmidt 2007:342; Yong 2006:196). Welker (1999a) states:

> The creature's own activity, which is itself a process of production, is not only a consequence and result of a creation that is already completed. Rather it is embedded in the process of creation and participates in that process. (p. 10)

The creatures' differentiated activity is in fact, parallel with God's creative activity. This is without the creatures' activity becoming God's activity. The creatures' activity remains their activity (Welker 1991a:62; 1997a:8). This is clear, inter alia, in Welker's essay on the relation between creation and a relation to, or with God (Welker 1994c:126–140; 1995b: 173–187; 2009:15–28).

Welker refers to the biblical traditions' reference to the creation of light and the concomitant division of light

3.Welker limits himself to Genesis 1 and 2.

4.Genesis 1:4b, 10b, 12b, 21b, 25b, 31a.

5.Genesis 1:5a, 8a, 10a.

6.Genesis 1:4b, 7b.

from darkness,[7] thus creating day and night, and again the traditions' creation of lights in the heavens, concomitantly dividing days from nights.[8]

In this way, he refers to these creation traditions' differentiated concept of reality. The argument is that it is only through the creation of lights in the heavens, that light is conceived on earth. While the creation of light and its concurrent division of light from darkness is not conceived there, it is conceivable in a reality not confined to the earth (Welker 1991a:60).

The creation traditions thus differentiate between a reality that could be conceived as God's creation, and a reality confined to the earth and the heavens related to the earth. For Welker, the traditions concurrently want these differentiated realities to be related. God's creation is also to be discernible on earth. Therefore, the creation of light: '*einer Konstellation, die Erkennen in Analogien ermöglicht*' (Welker 1994c:133). Although this light is different from the lights created in the heavens, it allows for a discernment of the creation of God through analogy.

This is decisive, as these creation traditions are related to traditions referring to a *cultic* relation with God.[9] For these traditions to link with those having to do with a relation with God, where the seventh day culminates in this relation, the creation traditions also refer to God's creational activity in 7 days (Welker 2001c:31).[10] For Welker, this is in fact the climax of creation: relation with God. It is through these relations that the creation of light becomes discernible under the lights of heaven, so that differentiated creaturely activity can be discernible in light of the creative activity of God.

The fact that for Welker, the creature's activity is parallel to God's activity without ceasing to be the creature's activity, is also clear in his essays on heaven and earth (Welker 1999a:56–68; 2001d:216; 2006:313–323; 2013a:16–22; 2013b:6–8). He highlights that the biblical traditions not only refer to the reality of creation, to which human beings have relatively direct access. These traditions refer to the creatures earth and the heavens, to which they do not have this direct access.

For Welker, in the biblical traditions heaven is referred to as the domain, that from a human point of view, lies above the earth. Heaven is conceived of as the domain of reality that is relatively inaccessible, that cannot be manipulated, but that in an accessible way, determines life on this earth.

Thus, when in the biblical tradition unmanipulable powers and forces appear on the earth, they are regarded as an activity that proceeds from heaven. Not only natural, but also cultural forces and powers are, in the biblical traditions, localised in heaven. This on the one hand means that heaven cannot be perceived merely in a naturalistic manner. It means on the other, that heaven cannot be divinised. Heaven, like the earth, is a creature, and is in fact created by God.

Along with the realisation that the perceived heavens are only a part of heaven, and that these parts are perceived differently, in that with heaven, the biblical traditions refer to different relations, that is: '*verschiedene Vorstellungsbereiche und Bezugssysteme*' (Welker 1995a:14), this allows Welker to understand heaven as a field of reference for differentiated totality (Welker 1981). This means that heaven is to be regarded as a field of reference that extends beyond space and time.

Thus, whatever separates creatures in space and time, they have in common that they live beneath heaven, *on earth* (Van der Westhuizen 2016a:472). The earth, in contrast to the heavens, is the accessible domain of creation. To characterise this domain, Welker deliberately does not define the earth as a *house*, as has often been done.

For Welker, it is important to realise that the creation traditions highlight not only the reproductivity of that which is created, but also the conditions for that, which is created to constantly bring forth itself, to be reproductive.[11] For Welker, *the earth* creates the conditions for that, which is created to constantly bring itself forth. He therefore describes the earth as an *Umgebung* that is life-furthering, that brings forth life: 'As an environment that is beneficial to life, that brings forth life, the earth is what is primary' (Welker 1999a:41).

Welker thus highlights that creation through the earth is *differentiated*. The earth does not bring forth itself. It brings forth through the creation of that, which in itself, is reproductive and by bringing that which is reproductive into diverse interdependent relations. It is a life-furthering *Umgebung*, through the creation of the conditions for these differentiated interrelations (Welker 1999a):

> The earth is rather an active, empowering agent that brings forth life in the form of various interdependent processes of self-reproduction. At the same time, the earth is to be understood as an environment of various heterogeneous life-processes (p. 42).

Earth therefore, is not a mere house. The earth is active and *kraftspendend* in bringing forth life. Without the earth, life on earth is not thinkable. The argument thus is, that life is to be thought of in terms of differentiated interrelations and forms of interdependence. In fact, according to Welker (1999a):

> [*T*]he creation account makes clear that the processes of reproduction deriving from individual living beings, even chains and networks of such processes of reproduction, are insufficient to define and understand 'life'. (p. 42)

7.Genesis 1:3–5.

8.Genesis 1:14–19.

9.Exodus 24.

10.In addition, Welker (1992:138) argues that the seven days disclose the differentiated understanding of the various developments apparent in creation in biblical tradition, that is '*einen differenzierten Zusammenhang von Ereignissen und Prozessen, die wir heute physikalisch, biologisch und im weitesten Sinne kulturtheoretisch zu beschreiben versuchen*'.

11.Genesis 1:11–12; 12:24–25.

Thus both the heavens and the earth, these *different* but interrelated creatures, which are, in themselves, differentiated in the biblical traditions, themselves creating, are through creation brought into differentiated interrelations and forms of *interdependence* (Welker 2005a:37).

According to the creation traditions, however, human beings have a specific position in creation, if not *the* central position. How, in terms of these relations, does Welker conceptualise the creative activity of *human beings* in creation?

For Welker, human beings, as it is with the heavens and the earth, take part in the creative activity of God (Deuser 2007:271–298; Welker 2012a:27). Their creative activity is parallel to God's activity without ceasing to be their activity. He highlights that human beings not only take part in the creation of that which is; they also create *culture*.[12]

This diverse activity is the topic of his essays on the image of God and the meaning thereof for human beings in creation (Welker 1997b:436–448; 1999a:60–73; 2001a:80–94), where he relates the *imago Dei* to the *dominium terrae*.[13]

For Welker, the image of God does not merely refer to the differentiation of human beings into female and male and their multiplication throughout the earth. It refers to these differentiated humans' *mandate*: 'The image of God is male and female who exercise dominion as they multiply and spread over this earth' (Welker 1999a:68).

Welker highlights that the dominating mandate has to do with the fact that human beings and animals share the domain of earth. Together they live from what the earth in diverse ways brings forth. Tension in different ways develops, because they live together in, and from what the earth brings forth. These tensions *necessitate* the mandate of dominion of differentiated interrelations and forms of interdependence (Welker 2001a:86).

According to Welker, the reference in the creation traditions to dominion relates literally to the domination, inter alia, of slaves. The mandate of dominion refers to human beings and animals living together in, and from the domain of earth on the one hand, and to humans' dominating the animals in the way slaves were dominated on the other hand, as Welker (1999a) explains:

> Human beings have primacy over animals. The vocabulary is unequivocal inasmuch as the ordering is anthropocentric. In no case may an animal be given higher status than a human being. That is radically excluded. (p. 71)

The biblical traditions, however, relate the way in which slaves were to be dominated by the law, or rather the differentiated interconnection of *Recht* and mercy. For Welker, this relation of domination not only to *Recht*, but to *Recht* interrelated with mercy, relates the mandate of dominion to the image of God. It is as the image of God, for whom *Recht* is inseparably related with mercy as the *likeness* of this image, that human beings have dominion in their living together with animals in and from the earth.

Human beings thus, in the likeness of the image of God, take part in creative activity through the *responsibility* of the mandate of dominion, *which is not to be confined to their living together with animals*. Despite their multiplication throughout the earth, human beings as female and male, are in the likeness of the image of God to take responsibility through their mandate of dominion.[14] This taking part in creation, is a task that moves beyond humankind's tendency to look out for its own interests (Welker 1999a:72). In fact, it is a dominion qualified by *welfare, care, relief, aid, protection, benevolence,* and *provision*. All of this is qualified by dominion. 'The exercise of dominion is qualified by caretaking and caretaking is qualified by dominion' (Welker 1999a:72).

All this, Welker underscores, is what the biblical traditions refer to as creation. He therefore, describes biblical creation as constructing and maintaining activity, whereby different interrelated creatures – inter alia the heavens, the earth, and human beings – themselves creating and taking part in the creating activity, are brought into differentiated interrelations and forms of interdependence, that is both fruitful and life-furthering (Welker 1988:1119–1120; 1991a:56–71; 1991b:208–224).

How does Welker understand the relation between the Spirit and the complex notion of creation as found in the biblical traditions?

The Spirit and 'biblical creation'

In light of Welker's complex conceptualisation of creation, it is clear that the Spirit of creation is not merely the specific creator, the actor who brought forth *that which is*, that which is, dependent on this actor. The Spirit, or the creative activity of the Spirit, in this sense *is not merely to be read off that which is*.

Welker (1999a:21–32) is critical of *natural revelation*, of revelation that is linked to reality, whether to *the whole* or reductionist understandings thereof.[15] In his critique, he refers to John Calvin's thoughts on natural revelation.

Calvin argues that there is within human beings a *natural sense of deity*.[16] This natural sense, however, is an *äußerster Vagheit*. If this natural sense has to do with knowledge of God, for him this knowledge is *eitel und flüchtig*, that is *vague, fleeting and vain*. It is not specific knowledge of a specific creator.

12.Genesis 2:19–20.

13.Genesis 1:26, 28, 29.

14.Cf. in this regard Van Huyssteen (2005), who writes: '

> In … Michael Welker's writings there is a very conscious move away from theological abstraction towards seeing the imago Dei in a highly contextualized, embodied sense that respects the sexual differentiation between men and women, even as they exercise responsible care and multiply and spread over the earth (p. 122).

15.Romans 1:19–20.

16.Welker refers to chapters 3–5 of the first book in Calvin's *Institutes*.

Yet this unspecific knowledge of a creator is by no means trivial. For Calvin this natural sense of deity is powerful. The power of the natural sense precisely lies in its merely being a sense that is vague. It is a vague knowledge of a vague power, but this means that human beings can neither get a firm grip on it, nor fend it off (Welker 1999a:25). In this manner, for Calvin, the natural sense of deity is a power that *torments* Welker (1999a) comments:

> We are ensnared in a reality with which we must struggle, or with which we think we must struggle, because it continually challenges us, surrounding us while refusing to be domesticated. (p. 25)

According to him, the natural sense of deity does allow for degrees of *transparency*. But it is precisely these degrees of transparency that are problematic, for they disallow human beings the ability to discern adequately between God and fantasy.

Welker, in this light, refers to natural revelation as that which discloses human beings' inability to, *on their own*, have determinate knowledge of God, that is, of God the Spirit. The question therefore remains: *How does Welker understand the relation between the Spirit and creation?*

The Spirit's creative activity, which is to be distinguished from *that which is*, is differentiated activity (Welker 1994b:17). The Spirit is not abstractly working in *all* that is (Welker 2005b:48; 2016:52–53). Welker (1994a) stipulates that the Spirit is not interested in all in an indeterminate way, but is in a determinate way interested in all:[17]

> Admittedly, the recognition of the differentiated interconnections between the 'Spirit of righteousness' and the 'Spirit of creation and new creation' is obstructed by many attempts to characterize the 'Spirit of creation' by abstract reference to 'ubiquity, universal effectiveness', and 'universal rule'. (p. 158)

For Welker, it is therefore important that the differentiated activity of the Spirit in creation is discerned *in the flesh*. The Spirit of creation acts in and through what is fleshly. Through the Spirit, that which is fleshly is given a share in the *breath* of God, that is, in the Spirit of God, the *breath of life*.[18] The withdrawal of this breath, this life-giving Spirit from that which is fleshly, not only results in the losing of life,[19] but in losing that which is shared by those who live. The creative Spirit thus holds that which is fleshly together inasmuch as that which is fleshly is given a share in the *life-giving Spirit*. In this way, the Spirit creates differentiated *interrelations*, according to Welker (1994a):

> God's Spirit enlivens, is creatively and life-givingly effective, inasmuch as the Spirit produces this intimate, complex, and indissoluble interconnection of individual and common life. (p. 160)

For Welker this is also true of the renewal of creation through the recreating Spirit, the Spirit of new creation. This renewal goes hand in hand with a renewal of fleshliness, that is, of mortality, of fragility, dependence and frailty.[20] Welker in this instance, doesn't refer to an orientation towards that which is fleshly, which would lead to death in the midst of life. Welker (1994a) describes this death in detail:

> The appearance of life is still maintained; the functional processes seem still to be intact; from an external point of view, it still looks like life. Yet as soon as it is addressed, as soon as an attempt is made to move it, to change it, it becomes clear that the heart is numb, the heart is of stone. The interchange with its surroundings, the exchange of internal and external perspectives no longer works. The processes that are still at hand are insensitive to changes coming from the outside. They are immune to such changes. They are incapable of behaving in a surprising, creative, lively manner and of influencing their surroundings. They are dead. (p. 167)

He refers rather to an orientation towards the Spirit. Through the renewal of fleshliness, a creatureliness that corresponds to the activity of the Spirit, the Spirit brings differentiated fleshly life into *interdependent* life-furthering fleshly relations. The renewal of these relations extends *beyond nature*. The Spirit does not bring this life back to *that which is*, to nature, *which lives at the expense of other life* (Welker 2007:87; 2010a:27–31).

The Spirit does not merely bring this life back to nature, but to what Welker refers to as *wohlgedeihende Vegetation* (Welker 1994a:163). The differentiated relations of interdependence *flourish* as the Spirit brings about diverse life-furthering natural *and* social relations; relations that are reciprocally beneficial to each other.

Welker, however, especially discerns the Spirit's recreation and new creation of diverse *social* relations. Where people are estranged from each other, they are brought into new relations to each other, and this is due to their being renewed through the Spirit. *This* is the creation of the Spirit: 'the power of God that creates new life relations and peace in situations of mutual enmity, foreignness, relationlessness, indeed in situations where each side has written off the other' (Welker 1994a:166).

This renewal, however, do not concern only *these* people. In a differentiated way the Spirit renews not only their relations with themselves, but their relations with those from whom they have become estranged, and others, who have in a way been estranged from them all along. In fact, for Welker these relations are only realistically renewed when they are also renewed in the view of the others. It is through the view of those from whom they have become estranged, through the renewed view of the others, those who have been estranged from them all along, that the Spirit's creational activity becomes a reality:[21]

17.Psalm 139:1–7.

18.Genesis 2:7.

19.Psalm 104:29–30; Job 34:14–15.

20.Ezekiel 11:17b, 19–20; 36:26–28.

21.In reference to Ezekiel 8–11, Welker refers to the relations between the people who are not in exile (having a distorted view both of their own and the exile's relation with God), people who are in exile (also having a distorted view both of their own and those not in exile's relation with God), and external perspectives on them. For Welker, the Spirit creatively renews by reciprocally recreating these relations to become life-furthering, *not* only for one of the peoples referred to. Those who have not been exiled and those with the external view, are renewed by the way in which God renews relations by bringing back those in exile. They are brought back as *Selbsterweis Gottes*, renewing the views of those who have not been exiled and those with an external perspective. This reciprocally, renews those having been brought back from exile through the recreated relation with these others.

'The recognition of this recursiveness of the action of the Spirit is indispensable if we want to understand the Spirit and the Spirit's creative, recreative power' (Welker 1994a:175).

It is a reality, however, *only* through the Spirit, through the recursiveness of the creative Spirit's activity. It is only through the Spirit that those in these differentiated relations are not dead in the midst of life, but again able *to be shifted, to be changed*. Through the Spirit they are realistically able *to act surprisingly, to act creatively*, to have resonance *in their surroundings*.[22] For Welker (1994a:176) the activity of the creative Spirit, therefore 'must not be sought any longer in the clouds or in realms of fantasy'. The activity rather is realistic in the Spirit's creation of new life-furthering relations of interdependence.[23]

Preliminary conclusion

In a recent article based on the paper presented in preparation for the 11th assembly of the World Council of Churches, Conradie (2020:3) inquired about the four tasks of Christian ecological theology. He argues that Christian ecotheology has a critical and a constructive task.

Ecotheology, Conradie (2020:3–7) argues, allows for a dual critique, namely both an ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. An ecotheology, however, also is constructive (Conradie 2020:7–10). In light of the above, it is clear that Welker's realistic pneumatological doctrine of creation allows for impulses towards the mentioned tasks of Christian ecotheology.

Welker's understanding of the relation between the Spirit and creation allows him to move away from the mentioned reductionist conceptions of creation. He critiques the conventional images of the creator God and its concurrent conceptualisation of reality with the complex notion of creation in biblical tradition. In light of these complex notions, it is clear that the mentioned models are not able to differentiate between the different *relations*, for example the relations among creatures, and the differentiated relations between the creator God and these diverse creatures. In addition, these models are not able to disclose different relations of *interdependence* between different creatures, such as the creatures of heaven, earth, and human beings.

The disclosing of these *relations of interdependence* is important for an understanding of the relation between the Spirit and creation, able to discern between different relations of power. For Welker (2001b:31–32). A theology of creation is about relations of power and how these relations are to be regulated creatively, that is, with a creativity that takes into account, for example, the important relation between the Spirit of *Gerechtigkeit* and the Spirit of creation; a relation that inter alia leads to a differentiated conceptualisation of theological humanism (Welker 2012c:140–141).

The Spirit's creative activity, in light of this differentiated conceptualisation, for example of his understanding of human beings, that as females and males reflect the image of God, not only questions the way in which the creation traditions are, with their mandate of dominion still used to support inhuman *gender* relations. It also questions the ways these traditions are used to support *ecological* inhumanity (Welker 2009:25–28). The relation between the Spirit and creation can, in more differentiated ways, contribute to a determination in these questions.

His understanding of different creaturely domains that are brought into interdependent relations through the creative activity of the Spirit, *also* leads him to recognise the limitation of those through which the Spirit creates: 'Knowledge of creation is specific, differentiated knowledge of experiences of limitation, powerlessness, and finitude in realms of the creaturely'(Welker 1999a:31). It is this recognition of limitation that is lost in *sin*.

In an essay on creation and sin, Welker questions the relation between the traditions' reference to the *knowledge of good and evil*, that is, of that which is beneficial and detrimental to life *of humanity*, and *a human being who have become like one of us* (Welker 1999a:74–82).[24] The traditions' reference to a human being in the midst of plurality, for Welker, highlights human beings' having loosened themselves from relations of interdependence, and in this being loosened, having knowledge of good and evil. For him, this means that human beings have lost their knowledge of being limited. Without knowing that they have lost this knowledge, they rather have knowledge of good and evil, limited knowledge of that which is beneficial and detrimental to life, without knowing the limitation.

Welker's (1999a) theology of creation therefore highlights the importance of its relation to a theology of the Spirit. It is a pneumatological theology of creation that heightens the theological recognition of the *realities in which we live*:

> Biblically oriented knowledge of creation heightens the experience of human distress – but it also sharpens the perception of the divine powers whose goal is the deliverance of human beings. The knowledge of creation makes us sensitive to repressed areas and conflicts in the realities in which we live and contributes to the renewal of our outworn definitions and schemes of reality. (p. 82)

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Competing interest

The author declares that no competing interest exists.

Author's contributions

The author is the sole contributor to the article.

22.This was the title for Welker's first *Festschrift* (Etzelmüller 1997).

23.This of course, is not all there is to the Spirit's renewal, recreation and new creation. This, he argued, can only be understood by means of a theology of the Trinity (cf. Van der Westhuizen 2020). For his understanding of the Trinity, cf. especially Welker (1999b; 2005a; 2010b; 2011; 2014). For his perspective on Christology, see Welker (2012d; 2013c). Cf. also Van der Westhuizen (2015).

24.Genesis 3:22.

Ethical consideration

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