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The God who seems to depart: Noncoercive revelation and self-withdrawing presence as a critique of proselytism and religious spectacle in Luke 24:28–31

Clartje S. E. Awule[1], Marianus Patora[2]
[1]Sekolah Tinggi Teologi IKAT Jakarta
[2]Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Teruna Bhakti, Yogyakarta

Correspondence:
clartjeawulle@sttikat.ac.id

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Abstract: The Emmaus narrative is commonly read through the lenses of paschal hermeneutics, pastoral accompaniment, or table hospitality. Chauvet and Marion have highlighted Jesus's vanishing, yet his gesture of acting "as if he were going farther" (*prosepoiēsato*) has rarely been developed into a category for the ethics of witness. Through a New Testament study employing narrative criticism, in limited dialogue with Louis-Marie Chauvet's sacramental theology and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of revelation, this article reads Luke 24:28–31 as a threefold pattern of restraint, table fellowship, and withdrawal. This pattern of "the God who seems to depart" yields a twofold critique: of coercive proselytism in plural Indonesia and of religious spectacle that measures witness by visibility. Constructively, drawing on the pneumatology of Luke–Acts and its Pentecostal interpreters, the article proposes a "pneumatology of consent": the Spirit opens eyes and hearts as a gift, elicits a free human welcome, and sends witnesses. It thereby offers a framework for attractive witness, distinguished from the attractional church model, and for a church not centered on itself.

Keywords: Emmaus; Luke 24; noncoercive revelation; proselytism; religious spectacle; pneumatology of consent; religious moderation

Introduction

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13–35) is among the most frequently interpreted pericopes in Luke's Gospel. It has been read as a paradigm of Christian hermeneutics, since Jesus "interpreted" (*diermēneusen*) all the Scriptures (v. 27); as a model of pastoral accompaniment, since Jesus walks alongside those who have lost hope; and as the culmination of Luke's theology of the table, since he is recognized in the breaking of the bread. Yet standard commentaries read one detail chiefly as a convention of hospitality: as they drew near to the village, Jesus "acted as if he were going farther" (v. 28).[1] This detail deserves a name: the God who seems to depart. In the risen Christ, God is revealed as one who does not force his way in, who leaves room for an invitation, and who vanishes at the very moment of recognition. This small gesture harbors a weighty question, which this article takes up as its

[1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*, Anchor Bible 28A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1567–68; cf. François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 376–377.

research question: How is God revealed in the Emmaus narrative, does divine revelation ever coerce, and what does this mean for the way the church bears witness amid a plural society and a culture of visibility?

This question is a pressing one for the church in Indonesia. The history of interreligious relations in the country shows that religious propagation is a sensitive domain. Joint Decree No. 1 of 1979 of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs explicitly prohibits religious propagation directed at adherents of other religions through inducements, material gifts, or house-to-house visits.[2] The regulation was born of mutual suspicion during the New Order era, when Muslim anxiety over Christian missionary activity and Christian fear of the Islamization of the state reinforced each other.[3] The stigma of "Christianization" persists to this day and resurfaces whenever evangelistic practices are perceived as aggressive or manipulative.

Alongside the problem of proselytism, the church faces another, subtler temptation: religious spectacle. The growth of Pentecostal-charismatic megachurches in Jakarta illustrates how worship, charismatic leadership, and middle-class identity can fuse into a culture of performance.[4] Digital space has accelerated this tendency. Since the pandemic, encounters with God have increasingly been experienced through screens, while engagement in faith is often measured by clicks, views, and reach.[5] Within this logic, divine presence must seemingly be put on display continually in order to be considered real.

Theological scholarship in Indonesia has already responded to the problem of witness in a plural society. Rante Salu et al. propose a Pentecostal mission rooted in the hospitality of the early church as a moderate way of practicing religion, acknowledging that insensitive evangelism has fueled anti-Christian sentiment.[6] Agasta, Wingki, and Panandu reconstruct the motivation for evangelism through Levinas's ethics of responsibility and John Stott's theology of mission.[7] Siahaya and Siahaan propose a dialectic between prophetic radicality and hospitality. The term "radical" here refers not to radicalism in the sense of extreme religious conduct but to *radix*, that is, a deeply rooted faith identity brought into encounter

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[2] Keputusan Bersama Menteri Agama dan Menteri Dalam Negeri Nomor 1 Tahun 1979 tentang Tata Cara Pelaksanaan Penyiaran Agama dan Bantuan Luar Negeri kepada Lembaga Keagamaan di Indonesia, 3–4.

[3] Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, ISIM Dissertations (Leiden/Amsterdam: ISIM/Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 50–57.

[4] Chang-Yau Hoon, "Pentecostal Megachurches in Jakarta: Class, Local, and Global Dynamics," in *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation*, ed. Terence Chong (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018), 21–46.

[5] Mick Mordekhai Sopacoly and Izak Y. M. Lattu, "Kekristenan dan Spiritualitas Online: *Cybertheology* sebagai Sumbangsih Berteologi di Indonesia", *Gema Teologika* 5, no. 2 (2020): 137-154, https://doi.org/10.21460/gema.2020.52.604.

[6] Syani B. Rante Salu, Harls E. R. Siahaan, Nunuk Rinukti, and Agustin Soewitomo Putri, "Early Church Hospitality-Based Pentecostal Mission in the Religious Moderation Frame of Indonesia," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): a8209, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8209.

[7] Ferialdi Agasta, Wingki, and Desir Hendrik Panandu, "Etika Penginjilan: Merekonstruksi Motivasi Menginjili Berdasarkan Pandangan Emmanuel Levinas dan John Stott dalam Konteks Masyarakat Multikultural", *Tepian: Jurnal Misiologi dan Komunikasi Kristen* 3, no. 1 (2023): 16–33, https://doi.org/10.51667/tjmkk.v3i1.1295.

with openness to the other (*hospitium*); on this basis, the two authors critique a form of religious moderation that tends to be pragmatic and accommodative while lacking theological depth.[8]

These studies locate the ethics of mission within communal praxis or interpersonal ethics. What remains largely unexplored is a more fundamental question: how the structure of revelation itself determines the way the church bears witness. Admittedly, a theological reading of Jesus's vanishing is nothing new. Chauvet made the Emmaus narrative the paradigm of his sacramental theology, and Marion devoted an essay specifically to *aphantos egeneto*, whose title quotes verse 31.[9] The novelty of this article therefore lies not in discovering this narrative detail but in two respects. First, the three movements of verses 28–31—including *prosepoiēsato*, which the commentaries generally treat as a convention of hospitality—are read as a single, coherent pattern of revelation: noncoercive (Christ waits to be invited), centered on table fellowship (he is recognized in the broken bread), and self-withdrawing (he vanishes so that the disciples may become witnesses). Second, this pattern is applied ethically to the church's witness in Indonesia as a critique of coercive proselytism and of religious spectacle that refuses to withdraw.

This study is a New Testament inquiry that employs a hermeneutical-exegetical approach proceeding in three steps. First, and principally, narrative criticism is applied to Luke 24:28–31, with attention to Greek vocabulary, plot, and intratextual echoes within Luke–Acts. Second, the exegetical findings are brought into limited dialogue with two thinkers, Chauvet and Marion. Both were chosen because they make the Emmaus narrative an explicit point of reference and because they complement each other: Chauvet from the side of sacramental theology, Marion from that of the phenomenology of revelation. At this step, a firm distinction is drawn between what the Lukan text says and what these thinkers—including the present author—propose as constructive readings. Third, these findings are brought into a critical analysis of the church's practice of witness in Indonesia that engages Muslim voices, human rights standards on the freedom to propagate religion, and documented cases; they are then formulated into a constructive proposal grounded in the pneumatology of Luke–Acts as studied within the Pentecostal tradition by Stronstad, Menzies, and Shelton.[10] Sources were selected from critical commentaries, works of systematic theology, ecumenical and international documents, and articles in reputable journals.

The discussion is organized into four parts. The first offers a narrative reading of the movement of disclosure in Luke 24:28–31. The second interprets the vanishing of Jesus as presence marked by absence, in conversation with Chauvet and Marion. The third employs

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[8] Johannis Siahaya and Harls Evan R. Siahaan, "*Radix et Hospitium*: The Dialectic of Prophetic Radicalism and Hospitality as a Paradigm of Religious Moderation in the Ecclesiology of the Early Church," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 82, no. 1 (2026): a11410, 1–2, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v82i1.11410.

[9] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 161–170; Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him and He Became Invisible to Them," in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 136–143, https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823275847.003.0011.

[10] Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke–Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke–Acts*, JSNTSup 54 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 198–204; James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991). For a critical assessment of this position, see Max Turner, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts," *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (2003): 147–149.

these findings to critique proselytism and religious spectacle in the Indonesian context. The fourth formulates a pneumatology of consent as the foundation for attractive witness and for a church that learns to withdraw. Through this progression, *prosepoiēsato* and *aphantos egeneto* are developed into theological categories for an ethics of witness rather than remaining mere narrative details.

The guest who waits to be invited: A narrative reading of the movement of disclosure in Luke 24:28–31

Verse 28 opens the scene at the threshold of the village of Emmaus as evening draws on. Luke has been developing the journey motif ever since Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51), and throughout the Gospel, Jesus consistently appears as one who moves farther than his disciples imagine. Green notes that in the Emmaus narrative, the journey is not merely a geographical setting but a theological frame for recognizing Jesus.[11] When the travelers arrive at their destination, the narrative should come to rest. Yet it is precisely at this point that Luke introduces a tension: the stranger seems about to leave.

The verb *prosepoiēsato* derives from *prospoieomai*, meaning "to act as though" or "to give the impression." This form occurs only once in the New Testament.[12] From early on, many interpreters have felt uneasy about its implications: Did the risen Jesus pretend? Fitzmyer judges that the expression describes the courteous gesture of a traveler unwilling to impose himself rather than an act of deception. Bovon reads this detail within the framework of ancient hospitality conventions: the guest waits for an offer, and the host demonstrates sincerity by insisting.[13]

These two explanations yield two possible readings. The first regards *prosepoiēsato* as the self-restraint of a guest who does not impose his presence. The second, implicit in Bovon's account, regards it as a gesture that tests the sincerity of the disciples' hospitality. Furthermore, "noncoercion" must not be equated with "lack of initiative": it is Jesus himself who approaches the disciples (v. 15), poses questions (vv. 17, 19), rebukes the slowness of their hearts (v. 25), and interprets the Scriptures (v. 27). This article opts to read *prosepoiēsato* as a restraint that opens space, for two reasons. First, in Luke's plot, Jesus's initiative stops precisely at the threshold of the house: on the road he leads the conversation, but at the door he waits, so that what is withheld is not proclamation but presence in a space that belongs to others. Second, the "test" reading does not contradict this interpretation but, in fact, reinforces it, since both place the decision with the hosts. Johnson stresses that Luke deliberately assigns the next initiative to the disciples, so that the recognition of Jesus takes place within the space opened by their invitation.[14] In other words, revelation does not override human freedom. It waits at the threshold.

[11] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 843–845.

[12] Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "προσποιέω."

[13] Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1567–1568; Bovon, *Luke 3*, 376–377.

[14] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 396–397.

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The disciples' response is described with a forceful verb: *parebiasanto*, "they urged him strongly." The same verb, in the singular form *parebiasato*, appears in Acts 16:15, where Lydia urges Paul and his companions to stay at her house; in the New Testament, Luke uses *parabiazomai* only in these two places.[15] In both texts, the insistence comes from those who receive, not from those who are sent. This structure is significant. In the Emmaus narrative, the hosts exert pressure, wishing to keep their guest, not the divine guest who seeks entry. Luke thereby inverts a pattern frequently encountered in missionary practice, in which the witnessing party strives to gain entry by every available means.

The reason for this insistence is simple and human: "Stay with us, because it is almost evening" (v. 29). Hospitality is extended before the disciples recognize who their guest is. Yong describes the Jesus of Luke's Gospel as the exemplary recipient of hospitality; by receiving the hospitality of others, he reveals the hospitality of God.[16] This pattern corrects a unidirectional picture of mission. The risen Christ comes not as the master of the house but as a guest dependent upon a welcome.

There follows a striking reversal. At the table, the guest acts as host: he takes bread, blesses and breaks it, and gives it to them (v. 30). These four verbs echo the feeding of the five thousand (Lk. 9:16) and the Last Supper (Lk. 22:19). Green shows that this chain of echoes situates the recognition of Jesus within the continuity of his ministry rather than outside it.[17] Christ's presence is disclosed not through a dazzling demonstration of power but through an everyday gesture: breaking and sharing bread.

"Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (v. 31a). The passive *diēnoichthēsan* reverses the situation of verse 16, where their eyes "were kept" (*ekratounto*) from recognizing him. Both can be read as divine passives: the God who restrains is also the God who opens.[18] The recognition of Christ is not a cognitive achievement by the disciples but a gift of grace that comes at the very moment the bread is shared; this point will prove important when the relationship between grace and human consent is discussed in the fourth section. Yet the same sentence continues at once: "and he vanished from their sight" (*aphantos egeneto ap' autōn*). The adjective *aphantos* means "invisible," and it too occurs only once in the New Testament.[19]

From this reading, a threefold pattern emerges. First, restraint: Christ does not force his way in (*prosepoiēsato*). Second, table fellowship: he is recognized when hospitality is accepted and bread is shared (*parebiasanto*, vv. 29–30). Third, withdrawal: he vanishes at the very moment of recognition (*aphantos egeneto*). Luke does not end on a note of loss. Verses 32–33 show that this absence instead gives rise to the memory of hearts burning within them and to a journey back to Jerusalem to bear witness. Revelation in this narrative issues not in the possession of Christ but in being sent. It is this threefold pattern that the next section develops theologically.

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[15] Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "παραβιάζομαι."

[16] Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 100–102.

[17] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 849–850.

[18] Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1563, 1568.

[19] Bovon, *Luke 3*, 378.

Presence marked by absence: Luke 24:31 in conversation with Chauvet and Marion

Before entering into theological conversation, it is necessary to state clearly what the text says and what it does not. Luke records that Jesus vanished at the very moment he was recognized (v. 31), but he does not interpret this event as a condition of revelation. Nor does Luke allow absence to have the last word: shortly thereafter, Jesus appears again among the disciples in Jerusalem and affirms the reality of his body (vv. 36–43). The discussion that follows therefore distinguishes three layers: Luke's narrative data, the interpretations of Chauvet and Marion, and the author's constructive reading built on both. This distinction ensures that the category of "presence marked by absence" is not imposed on Luke as a claim he does not make.

Louis-Marie Chauvet makes the Emmaus narrative the paradigm of his theology of sacramentality. For him, every mediation of God's presence always contains an absence that cannot be erased. The risen Christ can no longer be touched directly; he can be recognized only through symbolic mediation—the Scriptures interpreted, the bread broken, and the ethical praxis of the community.[20] Within Chauvet's framework, the vanishing of Jesus is not a failure of revelation but part of the very way in which the risen Christ is present: he disappears as an object to be grasped so that he may be recognized in faith. This is Chauvet's theological interpretation of Luke's narrative pattern, not an explicit statement by Luke himself.

Chauvet also reads the sequence of the Emmaus narrative as the structure of the church's life: encounter with the Word, the meal, and then a return to the community and to witness. With the vanishing of Jesus, his presence is entrusted to the symbolic "body" of the church, yet it is not controlled by it.[21] The implication is incisive. The church never possesses Christ as one possesses an object. It can only point to him, make him present in a form that always exceeds the church itself, and receive his presence anew as a gift. Every attempt by the church to replace that absence with a presence it can control constitutes a subtle betrayal of the sacramental structure of faith.

Jean-Luc Marion reads the same story from the standpoint of the phenomenology of revelation. In his view, the disciples did not fail to recognize Jesus for want of sensory data. They saw and heard him all along the road. The problem was that they lacked concepts capable of accommodating the excess given to them. Christ himself therefore had to provide the hermeneutic, and that hermeneutic culminates in the gift of the broken bread.[22] Revelation does not compel through irrefutable proof. It gives itself in an excess that can only be received, never seized.

In *God Without Being*, Marion distinguishes between the idol and the icon. The idol arrests the gaze upon itself, so that the divine is measured by the capacity of the human gaze; the icon, by contrast, opens the gaze toward the invisible. Elsewhere in the same book, Marion reads the Emmaus narrative within a eucharistic framework: Christ's interpretation of the Scriptures reaches its fulfillment at the table, so that the Eucharist becomes the site of theological hermeneutics.[23] Connecting these two themes—so that *aphantos egeneto* is read as

[20] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 161–170.

[21] Chauvet, 165–168.

[22] Marion, "They Recognized Him."

[23] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10–12 (on the idol and the icon), 150–153 (on the Emmaus narrative within a eucharistic framework).

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Christ's refusal to become an idol—is the author's synthesis, not an explicit claim of Marion's. This synthesis is possible because the two themes converge on a single idea: the divine gives itself without allowing itself to be mastered by the human gaze. Had he remained seated at that table, the disciples might have stopped at the visible face. By vanishing, he ensures that what remains with them is a living recognition, not a frozen image.

These two thinkers complement each other without the need for additional interlocutors. Chauvet explains *where* Christ is now recognized, namely, in the symbolic mediation of Word, bread, and community; Marion explains *why* that recognition cannot be seized, namely, because what is given exceeds the concepts of those who receive it. From both, the author draws a single constructive category: presence marked by absence. This category preserves a healthy distance between the church and its Lord. When that distance is erased, the church is tempted to identify itself with Christ, so that institutional success is taken as proof of divine presence. The category also coheres with the trajectory of Luke–Acts itself: the Christ who vanishes from the table later ascends into heaven, yet he does not leave his disciples without power (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8).

Even so, this reading must be safeguarded against two misunderstandings. First, Christ's absence in verse 31 is not nonexistence. Luke immediately affirms the bodily reality of the risen Jesus (vv. 36–43) and then promises "power from on high" (v. 49), a promise fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2). The absence in question can be read pneumatologically: the space Christ leaves behind is filled by the Spirit, who empowers witness. Second, Christ's withdrawal does not mean that God is passive. Jesus walks, asks questions, rebukes, interprets the Scriptures, and breaks bread. His restraint is, in fact, the most respectful form of engagement with human freedom. With these two qualifications in place, presence marked by absence can serve as a robust category for evaluating the church's practice of witness.

When witness coerces and puts itself on display: A critique of proselytism and religious spectacle in Indonesia

The term "proselytism" must be distinguished from witness. Witness is the proclamation of the gospel in a manner that respects the freedom and dignity of others, whereas proselytism, in its negative sense, refers to efforts to change people's beliefs through inducement, pressure, exploitation of vulnerability, or deception. The document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, produced jointly by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance, describes the use of deceptive and coercive means as a betrayal of the gospel and calls on Christians both to renounce all forms of allurement, including financial incentives, and to reject all forms of violence, including psychological and social violence.[24] The same distinction is recognized within the framework of human rights. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief affirms that noncoercive attempts to persuade others fall within the scope of freedom of religion, whereas coercion, the exploitation of vulnerability, and the linking of humanitarian

[24] World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011), section "A Basis for Christian Witness," no. 6; principles 4 and 6.

aid to expectations of conversion constitute forms of pressure against which the state must provide protection.[25]

In Indonesia, this issue has a long history and must also be heard from the Muslim side. Mujiburrahman, a Muslim scholar who has studied Muslim-Christian relations under the New Order, shows that competition in religious propagation became a principal source of tension, which in turn led to regulations on religious propagation and the construction of houses of worship. Alwi Shihab traces the response of the Muhammadiyah movement to the penetration of Christian missions in Indonesia, showing that suspicion of Christian missions has deep roots in Muslim experience.[26] The churches rejected some of these regulations as restrictions on religious freedom, yet criticism of aggressive evangelistic practices has also come from within the church itself. Rante Salu et al. note that insensitive evangelistic mission has triggered anti-Christian sentiment and the stigma of Christianization.[27] The critique of proselytism is therefore not merely an external demand but a theological necessity for the church.

Such suspicion is grounded in documented cases, though it must not be generalized. After the 2004 Aceh tsunami, a US-based mission agency planned to place some three hundred Acehnese orphans in a Christian children's home and raised funds using missionary language, only to abandon the plan once the Indonesian government barred the adoption of Acehnese children by non-Muslim groups. In response, Christian and Muslim leaders—including representatives of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama—issued a joint statement rejecting any attempt to misuse humanitarian work for Christianization.[28] This case reveals two things at once: practices that tie aid to conversion have indeed occurred, but opposition to them has also come from the mainline churches together with Muslim leaders. Accordingly, the critique advanced in this article targets not evangelism as legitimate proclamation but coercive methods.

Luke 24:28 provides a theological foundation for this critique. If the risen Christ himself waits to be invited before entering the disciples' house, then witness practices that intrude on others' space run counter to the very pattern of revelation. Aid tied to conversion, psychological pressure on people in vulnerable circumstances, or strategies that conceal their true aims—precisely the forms rejected by the ecumenical document and the human rights standards discussed above—are the very opposite of *prosepoiēsato*: not a restraint that opens space but a domination that closes it. Pope Francis, quoting Benedict XVI, sums this up in affirming that the church grows not through proselytism but "by attraction."[29] The attraction

[25] United Nations General Assembly, *Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*, UN Doc. A/67/303 (August 13, 2012), paras. 22, 24, 26, 65, 68.

[26] Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened*, 50–57, 83–99; Alwi Shihab, *Membendung Arus: Respons Gerakan Muhammadiyah terhadap Penetrasi Misi Kristen di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998).

[27] Rante Salu et al., "Early Church Hospitality-Based Pentecostal Mission."

[28] Seema Sirohi, "Counting Sheep?," *YaleGlobal Online*, January 28, 2005, https://archive-yaleglobal.yale.edu/node/49096; "Interfaith Press Statement Concerning Humanitarian Work in Aceh," Jakarta, January 15, 2005, no. 1, https://www.globalministries.org/interfaith_press_statement_conce_10_10_2014_1054/.

[29] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), §14, quoting Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass for the Opening of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Aparecida, May 13, 2007, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007): 437.

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in view is the attraction of lived witness, not of programs or facilities, as the next section will explain.

This critique must not be misconstrued as a call to silence. The Emmaus narrative in fact contains extended and forthright proclamation: Jesus rebukes the slowness of the disciples' hearts and interprets all the Scriptures (vv. 25–27). The issue lies not in the courage to bear witness but in how they bear witness. David Bosch describes this posture as "bold humility," that is, firm conviction without domination.[30] Luke 24:28–31 shows that such humility has a Christological foundation: the Word is proclaimed clearly, but presence is not imposed.

The second problem is harder to recognize because it does not appear to be a transgression: religious spectacle. Guy Debord described modern society as a society of the spectacle, in which social relations among people are mediated by images.[31] Byung-Chul Han extends this analysis by characterizing contemporary society as a society of exhibition, in which things are deemed valuable to the extent that they are displayed and seen.[32] Within this framework, faith is readily transformed into content. God's presence comes to be measured by how often it appears, how many people watch it, and how strongly it captivates.

Pete Ward shows that celebrity culture has become part of contemporary religious life, including in the evangelical world, where spiritual leaders appear as mediated, consumable figures.[33] In Indonesia, Hoon demonstrates how Pentecostal megachurches in Jakarta have grown among the urban middle class through worship packaged as performance, charismatic leadership, and transnational networks.[34] These findings cannot be generalized into a portrait of the church in Indonesia as a whole, since mainline churches, the Catholic Church, and rural congregations live in different contexts. Yet these findings bear directly on the tradition from which this article draws its constructive proposal, so that the critique of spectacle applies to Pentecostalism itself and will be treated as self-critique in the following section. The megachurch phenomenon is not necessarily negative; it opens access and builds community for many people. However, when success is measured primarily by numbers, stages, and spotlights, the church risks treating God's presence as something that must be perpetually put on display.

Digital space reinforces this tendency. Online worship, livestreams, and spiritual content on social media do open new possibilities for witness. However, Sopacoly and Lattu observe the emergence of faith communities shaped by "click activism," that is, a spirituality whose strength depends on a screen-mediated collective imagination.[35] Within the algorithmic ecosystem, what does not appear is presumed not to exist. As a result, witness is tempted to be always present, always posting, and always seeking attention. Luke 24:31 challenges this logic radically. Christ vanishes precisely at the moment he is most fully recognized, as though refusing to become a spectacle.

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[30] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 489.

[31] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), thesis 4.

[32] Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs, 2015), chap. 2, "The Society of Exhibition."

[33] Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship* (London: Routledge, 2020), chap. 9, "Evangelical Celebrity Culture," https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429503788.

[34] Hoon, "Pentecostal Megachurches in Jakarta."

[35] Sopacoly and Lattu, "Kekristenan dan Spiritualitas Online."

These two critiques converge on a single root: the desire to control presence. Proselytism forces its way into the homes of others before being invited, whereas religious spectacle refuses to leave the stage once it has been recognized. The former violates *prosepoiēsato*; the latter refuses *aphantos egeneto*. Both treat God's presence as something the church can manage for the sake of its growth or its image. According to Luke, however, the presence of Christ is always a gift that originates with him, is welcomed through hospitality, and is released so that it may become mission. This critique leads to a constructive question: What kind of witness is faithful to this pattern of revelation?

A pneumatology of consent: Attractive witness and a church that learns to withdraw

To answer this question, it must first be acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Luke 24:28–31. The pneumatological basis for this reading is drawn from the broader narrative arc of Luke–Acts: the space left by the Christ who vanishes and subsequently ascends into heaven is not left empty but is filled by the promise of the Father, namely, power from on high (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8). Pentecostal scholarship on Luke–Acts maintains that, for Luke, the Spirit is above all the Spirit of prophecy, who empowers witness. Stronstad reads Luke as a charismatic theologian; Menzies shows that Acts 1:5–8 links the promise of the Spirit with power to bear witness; and Shelton highlights the Spirit as the source of a witness that is "mighty in word and deed." Turner cautions that, for Luke, the Spirit also brings about the experience of salvation and restoration, so that missiology and soteriology cannot be sharply separated.[36] This article designates the framework built upon this narrative arc a "pneumatology of consent": the Spirit makes Christ present not by overriding human freedom but by opening eyes and hearts, eliciting a response of welcome, and sending forth witnesses without making them proprietors of the divine presence. This pneumatology is a narrative-canonical construction drawn from Luke–Acts, not a claim that Luke 24:28–31 itself speaks of the Spirit.

How does "consent" relate to grace? This question requires an answer because the first section has shown that the disciples' eyes were opened through a divine passive (*diēnoichthēsan*, v. 31): recognition is God's work. Luke repeatedly uses the verb *dianoigō* for God's act of opening: the opening of eyes (Lk. 24:31), of the Scriptures (24:32), of minds (24:45), and of Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14). In Lydia's story, the Lord's opening of her heart is immediately followed by her urging the messengers to stay at her house (*parebiasato*, Acts 16:15), whereas at Emmaus the disciples' urging (*parebiasanto*, Luke 24:29) precedes the opening of their eyes. This difference in sequence indicates that grace and human response are interwoven, yet the initiative remains with God: Jesus first draws near (24:15), and God opens. A pneumatology of consent therefore does not denote a synergism that places the human will on a par with grace, nor does it mean that revelation depends on the human will. The ecumenical formulation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* supplies apt language: human consent to God's work is understood as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities.[37] That is to say, God's grace works in a way that

[36] Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*; Menzies, *Development of Early Christian Pneumatology*, 198–204; Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed*; Turner, "Work of the Holy Spirit in Luke–Acts," 149, 152–53.

[37] Lutheran World Federation and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), §§19–20.

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respects and liberates the human will: God is the one who opens, but God opens without breaking down the door.

Within the Pentecostal tradition, Amos Yong provides a rich resource for this idea. He reads Pentecost as the event in which many tongues give rise to many practices. Through this diversity, the church embodies divine hospitality toward the world, including toward people of other faiths. Yong also emphasizes that Christians are perpetual guests: first and foremost guests of God, and then guests of their neighbors. Accordingly, the fitting posture is that of a recipient of hospitality, even when Christians occupy the position of host.[38] Such a pneumatology accords with the Emmaus narrative, in which the risen Christ is present as a guest before he becomes the host.

Two clarifications are needed here. First, the term "attraction" must be distinguished from the "attractional church" model. Frost and Hirsch criticize the attractional mode—a church that hopes the world will come, drawn by its events, programs, and facilities—and propose instead an incarnational mode, in which the church is sent into the midst of society.[39] Such an attractional mode is, in fact, close to the very spectacle this article critiques. By contrast, "attraction" in the sense of *Evangelii Gaudium* is the attraction of lived witness—joy, love, and faithfulness that draw others without coercion; this article terms it attractive witness. Second, because this proposal rests on the Pentecostal tradition, the critique of spectacle must also target Pentecostalism itself. Luke provides a model for such self-critique. After the healing at the Beautiful Gate, Peter refuses to become the focus of the crowd's gaze: "Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12). At Lystra, Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes when the crowds seek to worship them as gods (Acts 14:14–15). In Acts, the power of the Spirit is power for witness, not power for display. A Pentecostalism faithful to Luke therefore possesses internal resources for resisting spectacle.

The first practical implication is witness as a shared journey and as interpretation, not pressure. Jesus walks with the disciples, asks about their experience, and listens to their disappointment before he interprets the Scriptures. Witness modeled on this pattern is dialogical without forfeiting conviction. Siahaya and Siahaan show that the early church sustained a dialectic between a deeply rooted faith identity (*radix*) and hospitality toward the other (*hospitium*), so that firmness of identity did not turn into hostility.[40] The second implication is the church's willingness to receive hospitality and not merely to extend it. In Indonesia's plural society, the church often lives as a minority that depends on the acceptance of neighbors of other faiths. The Emmaus narrative shows that the guest's position is not a weakness to be overcome but the very place where the risen Christ chose to be recognized. Rante Salu et al. demonstrate that the hospitality of the early church can serve as a model of mission within the framework of religious moderation.[41] This article supplies its christological-pneumatological foundation: Christ himself waits to be invited, and the Spirit works through hospitality both received and given.

The third implication concerns simplicity in sacrament and in leadership. If Christ vanishes at the moment of recognition, ministers of Word and sacrament are called to point to

[38] Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 100, 131–32.

[39] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003).

[40] Siahaya and Siahaan, "*Radix et Hospitium*."

[41] Salu et al., "Early Church Hospitality-Based Pentecostal Mission."

him rather than to themselves. A liturgy faithful to the Emmaus pattern focuses not on the grandeur of the stage but on the bread that is broken and the Word that is interpreted. Chauvet underscores that the sacraments make Christ present precisely by marking his absence, so that the church can never take the place of its Lord. For church leadership, including in Pentecostal-charismatic churches, this means a willingness not to be the center: building ministries that can continue without a central leadership figure, preparing for succession, and rejecting the cult of personality that Ward critiques in religious celebrity culture.[42]

The fourth implication is an ethics of digital presence. The church need not reject digital media, but it must test the logic at work within them. A pneumatology of consent rejects measures of success based solely on audience numbers, engagement, and virality. Instead, it encourages the practice of "self-withdrawing presence": content that directs people toward embodied fellowship rather than dependence on the screen; witness that respects the privacy and vulnerability of others; and a readiness not always to be on display. Han warns that a society demanding that everything be put on display loses both mystery and trust.[43] The fifth implication is mission as the fruit of absence. After Jesus vanishes, the disciples do not remain in Emmaus to guard the site of the appearance. "That same hour," they return to Jerusalem and recount what has happened (vv. 33–35). Green notes that this return transforms the disciples from people who left the community into witnesses to it.[44] A church that understands this pattern will not measure its faithfulness by its ability to keep the divine presence within its buildings, events, or platforms, but by its readiness to be sent as a witness into the midst of the world.

Finally, a pneumatology of consent contributes to the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs defines religious moderation as a way of perceiving and practicing religion that understands and enacts religious teachings without extremism.[45] Siahaya and Siahaan, however, show that moderation shaped primarily by the state's framework tends to be pragmatic and accommodative while lacking theological depth.[46] A pneumatology of consent offers Christians an internal foundation: refraining from coercion is not merely compliance with regulations but fidelity to God's own mode of self-revelation. Accordingly, a moderate stance does not weaken faith. On the contrary, it springs from a faith that knows Christ as the guest who waits, the host who gives, and the Lord who withdraws so that his disciples may become witnesses.

Conclusion

This article sets out from the question of how God is revealed in the Emmaus narrative and what this means for how the church bears witness. The answer is encapsulated in its title: the God who seems to depart. A narrative reading of Luke 24:28–31 reveals a threefold pattern: restraint at the threshold, recognition at the table, and a withdrawal that gives rise to mission. In conversation with Chauvet and Marion, this pattern was formulated as presence marked by absence—God's self-giving does not coerce, and God's presence cannot be possessed—

[42] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 177–178; Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, chap. 9.

[43] Han, *Transparency Society*, chap. 2.

[44] Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 851–853.

[45] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious moderation] (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 17–18.

[46] Siahaya and Siahaan, "*Radix et Hospitium*."

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while the data of the Lukan text were consistently distinguished from constructive interpretation. This pattern yields a twofold critique grounded in revelation itself rather than merely in state regulation: coercive proselytism violates Christ's restraint, whereas religious spectacle, including within the Pentecostal tradition, refuses his withdrawal. Constructively, the pneumatology of consent drawn from the narrative arc of Luke–Acts understands the human welcome as the fruit of the Spirit's grace, who opens eyes and hearts and then sends forth witnesses. From this emerge a dialogical, attractive witness; the church's willingness to be a guest; simplicity in sacrament and leadership; an ethics of digital presence; and a mission born of Christ's absence. Future research could test this framework empirically—for instance, through case studies of the evangelistic practices and digital ministries of churches in Indonesia—and extend it into mission education curricula in theological schools.

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