

REDEFINING SPIRITUALITY: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL APPROACH BASED ON THE  
WORKS OF ELIZABETH JOHNSON AND JURGEN MOLTSMANN

*“We are a spiritually impoverished generation, we search in all places the Spirit ever flowed in hope of finding water. For if the Spirit is living and never dies, the Spirit must still be present wherever the Spirit once was active forming human life and the work of human hands. Not in a trail of monuments, however – in a secret, mysterious life. The Spirit is like a small but carefully tended spark, ready to flare, flow and burst into flame the moment the Spirit feels the first enkindling breath”*  
-Edith Stein<sup>1</sup>

For Christian theologians, and students of theology, the concept of spirituality in today’s North American culture poses a particularly perplexing problem. Clearly a popular concept, the term spirituality is used in such varied contexts, with so many implied meanings, that theologians are left to wonder if there is any theological grounding left for the term at all, and if so, what it might be. Yet, to dismiss the term out of hand and consider it lost to secular society is to ignore both a deep hunger welling up in today’s culture as well as a rich Christian tradition with possible resources for meeting the world’s need. The question, then, for theologians is twofold: what do we, as academics committed to the Christian faith, mean by spirituality? And what does a specifically Christian spirituality look like?

Given that spirituality is taken to mean many things, knowing where to begin in constructing a definition poses the first problem. Yet, there is a linguistic link between spirituality and spirit that seems to push in a theological direction and provides a place to begin our exploration. Etymologically, the term spirituality is derived from the Latin word, *spiritualitas*, which in turn was a translation of the Greek word *pneuma*, or spirit.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while the linguistic link between spirituality and spirit seems clear, theologically it is more complicated.

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<sup>1</sup> David Tracy, “Recent Catholic Spirituality: Unity and Diversity.” *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, Eds. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 42.

What does one mean by spirit? Is it the Holy Spirit? Or the human spirit? Is the spirit particularly Christian or a more pervasive spirit common to all faith traditions? Each question focuses our understanding of spirituality in a particular way, and all may be appropriate in certain contexts. But, if we minimally agree that spirituality is a way of life, or a set of practices that puts us “in touch with,” or reorients us toward the divine, the theological referent for spirit must be the Holy Spirit rather than the human spirit since it is God’s<sup>3</sup> initiative that begins and sustains the divine-human relationship. While our human spirits are involved, it is only in response to God’s divine invitation that we have any relationship with God. Historical understandings of spirituality, at least until the twelfth century and the rise of scholasticism, support this referent for spirit by defining spirituality as “living within the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet there are limits to the historical understandings of spirituality. While the tradition was rich prior to the twelfth century, after the rise of scholasticism the Church’s understanding of the Spirit began to dwindle and the role of the Spirit was frequently ceded to the role of the Son as spirituality was separated from theology and relegated to the interior, individual life.<sup>5</sup> While the term came back into vogue in the seventeenth century, it remained primarily relegated to the personal life of devotion. The history is far more rich and complicated than this brief sketch, but one is able to see the way in which spirituality and the Spirit have often been relegated to the realm of the individual throughout history. More recent reconstructions of spirituality in feminist

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<sup>3</sup> Theological language is particularly tricky in this day and age as we recognize the powerful way in which language shapes our understanding and molds our beliefs. To avoid the more traditional male-language for God, I have chosen two approaches. The first is to use the term “God” to refer to the Triune God, rather than God the Creator. When speaking of the persons of the Trinity, I have intentionally used the terms “God the Creator,” “God the Redeemer,” and “Spirit” or “Holy Spirit” (these last two being interchangeable for the sake of brevity and variety). The second approach is to use “She” when referring to the Spirit in a gendered way. Elizabeth Johnson argues that making the Spirit the feminine dimension of God is not an appropriate response to the diminution of the feminine in the Godhead. Aware of this, I have nevertheless chosen to use a gendered term for the sake of readability and chosen to be intentionally provocative in doing so in order to challenge traditional assumptions of the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Sheldrake, 43.

<sup>5</sup> LeRon Shults, *The Holy Spirit*, draft format (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008) forthcoming, 15.

and liberationist theologies have shown the limitations of this in their retrieval of the communal and public nature of spirituality.

This paper explores an understanding of spirituality grounded in its root word, spirit, through the pneumatologies of Jurgen Moltmann and Elizabeth Johnson. In doing so, I will offer a definition of spirituality that is entrenched in an understanding of the Spirit and the work of the Spirit in our midst. Such an understanding of spirituality allows Christians to remain faithful to Christian theology while at the same time allowing for new movements of the Spirit. As members of a faith tradition struggling to be both faithful and relevant, this understanding of life in the Spirit helps us hold onto what we believe, but also expand beyond ourselves to reach a world we often, as a whole, fail to engage. In the process, this paper will broaden traditional understandings of spirituality to include not only the individualistic, interior life, but more recent understandings of God's presence in the public sphere and in the whole of creation.<sup>6</sup> Finally, this paper will model one way in which a constructive relationship between spirituality and pneumatology can be established.<sup>7</sup>

To this end, the pneumatologies of Moltmann and Johnson have been chosen because both work imaginatively and faithfully to reconstruct and rethink theology in light of our increased awareness of who God is and how God interacts with the world. They intentionally root their pneumatologies in the line of tradition and scripture, yet they allow themselves ample room to expand and re-form traditional understandings. Moltmann offers a more extensive pneumatology rooted in the Reformed tradition, while Johnson offers a pneumatology in the

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<sup>6</sup> Creation is a term that has had many meanings. I am using it throughout this paper to refer to all that God has created rather than the act of creation itself.

<sup>7</sup> Other models may argue that pneumatology and spirituality ought to be one and the same, see for example Eric O. Springsted, "Theology and Spirituality; or, Why Theology is Not Critical Reflection on Religious Experience" in *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen*, Ed. Eric O. Springsted (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

midst of her feminist theology, which stands in the Catholic tradition. Both understand the Spirit to be God engaged in the midst of creation and history, though the ways in which they approach and elucidate their theologies differ. In exploring both, this paper benefits from two perspectives and is enriched by two traditions. Once the broad themes of their pneumatologies have been laid out, it will then be possible to reflect on the implications of their pneumatologies for spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF JURGEN MOLTSMANN

In *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*<sup>9</sup> and *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*,<sup>10</sup> Moltmann approaches pneumatology not only through classical systematic methods, but primarily through experience. His development of a phenomenology of experience allows him to include in the conversation both lay readers as well as theologians since all are capable of experiencing the Spirit. This move broadens and shapes the whole of his endeavor as he ultimately describes a Spirit who pervades the whole of life and continually works for justice and liberation. Moreover, in choosing an experiential methodology alongside a systematic strategy, Moltmann is able to subtly shift the seat of control from humanity to the divine. In systematic theologies, it is humans who are constructing their images and understandings of God, trying, in many ways, to get a handle on what is ultimately beyond them. By shifting to an experiential emphasis, Moltmann implicitly acknowledges humanity's lack of control over the Spirit (one cannot, after all, force an experience of the Spirit) and places

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<sup>8</sup> While the pneumatologies of both Moltmann and Johnson are innovative and creative reconstructions of traditional doctrines of pneumatology, it would be naïve to believe there are not precedents for their thinking in the Christian tradition. Many of the characteristics of the Spirit they highlight have been lifted up by former theologians as well. The innovative nature of Moltmann and Johnson resides primarily in their ability to reshape and re-present these doctrines in a relevant manner for this generation.

<sup>9</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

theologians in the humbling position of continually having to look again, and think again, in their attempt to glimpse and understand the divine. Finally, a focus on experience forces theology to the center of what it means to be human – theology that begins with experience can never be completely abstract and irrelevant, but will always meet humanity at its center.<sup>11</sup> In many ways, this methodology, though not without its concerns,<sup>12</sup> models the similar qualities to those Moltmann uplifts in his pneumatology; it is holistic, trinitarian, and eschatological. In unpacking each of these three themes individually, even though they overlap and intersect, it will be possible to gain a broad understanding of Moltmann’s pneumatology.

#### A HOLISTIC PNEUMATOLOGY

Recognizing the ways in which pneumatology has been stifled and limited over the centuries, Moltmann works to construct a holistic pneumatology that encompasses human beings in their totality as well as the wholeness of creation. Since the creational aspect of Moltmann’s pneumatology is also developed under the ‘Trinitarian’ theme, it shall suffice here to say that a holistic pneumatology is not content to develop a theology of the Spirit in relation only to humanity, but rather seeks an understanding of the Spirit that embraces, vivifies, and protects all forms of creation.<sup>13</sup>

In speaking of the whole of what it means to be human, Moltmann is recognizing the many ways in which the Spirit’s connection solely to the ecclesial has closed off an

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<sup>11</sup> Moltmann, *Spirit*, 17-25.

<sup>12</sup> While Moltmann does make the argument that individual experiences that cannot be expressed are not experiences we can rely on, he fails to adequately address the larger systemic question of how we can take subjective experiences and turn around and create objective theologies (though he does acknowledge the philosophical shift that made experience seem problematic); rather, Moltmann deals with more theological issues regarding experience. Richard Sharf has a helpful argument outlining some major critiques of using experience in this way: “Experience.” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Moltmann, *Spirit*, 37.

understanding of the Spirit as embracing the material as well as the spiritual dimensions of life.<sup>14</sup>

We can see the consequences of this today in spiritualities that deny the body and exist only to help individuals escape the world for the higher, purer, unsullied realm of God. A holistic pneumatology counters this tradition by affirming the Spirit's presence in the very messiness of what it means to be human and live in this world. In this way, the Spirit is seen as pervading the whole of humanity.

Yet, a holistic pneumatology moves beyond the concepts of body and soul to embrace the whole of human *life*. The Spirit embraces not only our body and soul, but our social being as well as our interior being. We encounter the Spirit at work in our communal and social lives as well as our individual lives. The Spirit is not excluded from the structures and systems of society, but works to liberate and justify creation, pushing it always to its divine telos. For Moltmann, a holistic pneumatology is critical – the Spirit must exist in all the spaces of our lives, broken and whole, in order that God might work through them to bring us into community with one another, with creation, and ultimately with God.<sup>15</sup>

#### A TRINITARIAN PNEUMATOLOGY

The second descriptor of Moltmann's pneumatology is trinitarian. Rather than attempting to explore the Spirit apart from its triune relationality or relegating the Spirit solely to its relationship to the Son, Moltmann explores the Spirit in its relationship to both God the Creator and God the Redeemer.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>16</sup> This is distinct from many pneumatologies which connect the Spirit solely to the work of God the Redeemer. Moltmann argues that this is a consequence of the *filioque* clause and argues strongly against its inclusion, for this very reason, in the Nicene Creed. See *Spirit*, 4.

As the Spirit not only of redemption, but also of creation, it becomes possible to recognize the Spirit in all that affirms life and resists its destruction.<sup>17</sup> The Spirit is “the divine energy of life, animating the creation of all things.”<sup>18</sup> The Spirit is always working to renew and recreate the whole of creation. Uplifting both the Spirit of Creation and the Spirit of Redemption not only opens our eyes to the work of the Spirit in creation, but also affects our understanding of redemption. A Spirit who works to renew creation will not redeem us *from* this world, or *from* our bodies, but will redeem the world itself. Rather than redemption *from* creation, this will be a redemption *of* creation.

In talking about the Spirit of creation, Moltmann draws heavily on the biblical images of *ruach*, interpreting this Hebrew word traditionally translated as spirit, breath, or wind as a tempest of God, a force that brings life.<sup>19</sup> This is not a force that creates and steps away, but a force that continues to enliven, renew, and recreate creation. *Ruach* means life rather than death, that which is moving and active rather than that which is stagnant and paralyzed. Yet it is not only in the initial process of creation that Moltmann sees this life force at work. Drawing on the stories of the judges and the prophets, Moltmann lifts up the work of the Spirit in individuals who redeem and renew the life of the whole community.<sup>20</sup> The Spirit works through creation and individuals to accomplish its goal: life abundant. Nonetheless, the Spirit as a force of life cannot only be understood as nurturing, it must also be recognized as fiercely protective, not only of human life, but also of creation’s life. This fiercer side of the Spirit is one that tradition has often overlooked in thinking of the Spirit as humanity’s possession rather than God at work in God’s creation.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 44.

In understanding the Spirit as the Spirit of creation, Moltmann is not disassociating the Spirit from Christ. Indeed, for Moltmann, Spirit and Word are inextricably connected.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on another biblical image for the Spirit, breath, Moltmann describes the relationship between God the Spirit and God the Word as the relationship formed in the creation of speech. The Spirit is the breath that gives force and voice to the Word, while the Word provides content and meaning for the breath. In this way Word and Spirit rely on one another and yet are unique and equal – there can be no words without breath and there can be no content to breath without words.<sup>22</sup> In this image, the Spirit and Word work together to accomplish God’s common mission.

#### AN ESCHATOLOGICAL PNEUMATOLOGY

Finally, Moltmann’s pneumatology is eschatological. While some theologians argue for different dispensations, allotting different ages to each person of the Trinity,<sup>23</sup> Moltmann sees the Spirit at work throughout the history of the world, but ultimately describes its orientation as eschatological or pointing beyond itself to the fulfillment of the kingdom. This emphasis emerges naturally out of the Spirit’s relationship with Christ, who collaborates with the Spirit, both urging creation to the fulfillment of Christ’s ministry, which the Spirit makes effective in our midst.<sup>24</sup> This means the Spirit is not only concerned with creation and re-creation, but also with justice and liberation. God’s vision for each creature is a life open to the possibilities of God’s good grace. A life of slavery or injustice is not the life God creates for us; it is the Spirit who works to correct the sinful structures we have created to imprison other people and creation, freeing us all to live into God’s majestic vision for life here and now.

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<sup>21</sup> Moltmann understands the relationship of the Spirit and the Word not to be one of subservience or hierarchy, as is often implied in the *filioque* clause, but rather a relationship of reciprocity, as the image of word and breath illustrates. In this way, Spirit cannot be reduced to Word nor Word reduced to Spirit.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>23</sup> See William C. Placher’s explanation in “Where are we Going? Eschatology” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 333. As well as Shults, 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 81.

Moltmann draws on a number of biblical texts and images from both the Old and New Testament to illustrate the liberative and justice-seeking nature of the Triune God. Referring back to Exodus, God's most dramatic act of liberation in the Old Testament, Moltmann notes the introduction of the term 'Lord' to describe God's liberating nature in this story. Working forward, Moltmann points out the frequent use of the term to describe Christ, who came to liberate humanity from the sin and sickness holding us hostage. Finally in II Corinthians, the term is used to refer to the Spirit, who comes in "the power of the Exodus."<sup>25</sup> Seeing a common term used throughout the biblical narrative to point to a God passionately engaged in the liberation of God's creation, and ultimately as referential to the work of the Spirit in our midst, Moltmann attributes this work of the Triune God to the Spirit, who moves throughout creation, calling it back to God's vision. Moltmann also draws heavily on the Isaiah texts, particularly the Servant Songs, which connect Spirit and justice in explicit ways.<sup>26</sup> Finally, he talks about the life and ministry of Christ as the one who came to liberate and judge the world in order to bring new life, and whose work the Spirit continues today. The Spirit works throughout history to judge and liberate, and ultimately points beyond itself to God's ultimate vision for the world.<sup>27</sup> In the end, the Spirit is the "loving, self-communicating, out-fanning and out-pouring presence of the eternal life of the triune God;"<sup>28</sup> a force who comforts and renews, judges and liberates in order to coax life into every nook and cranny of creation.

#### CHALLENGES

Moltmann's work provides a number of important contributions to pneumatology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Understanding the Spirit to be God at work in the world, Moltmann's grounding in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 136, 138.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 289.

trinitarian theology allows him to connect the Spirit both to God the Creator and God the Christ, acknowledging the liberative work of the Spirit in both creation and redemption. Yet, Moltmann struggles to adequately develop the relationships between the Spirit and the other two persons of the Trinity. Working against the *filioque* clause, Moltmann takes great pains to liberate the Spirit from solely being connected to the work of Christ, but his illustration of the remaining relationship is vague. The concept of Word and breath leaves the reader wanting more details as to the nature of the working relationship between the Spirit and the Christ as well as the relationship between the Spirit and Creator. Although Moltmann clearly places the Spirit in the work of creation, he fails to establish the nature of the Spirit's relationship with the Creator leaving the reader curious as to the distinction between the work of the Creator and the work of the Spirit in creation and recreation. Finally, there is a tension in Moltmann's pneumatology between the Spirit as a communal force and individual experiences of the Spirit that remains troubling. Working against prevailing assumptions that the Spirit is for individual consumption, Moltmann highlights the Spirit's work for the good of the whole creation; but, in so doing, he fails to give due recognition to individual experiences of the Spirit and establish their relation to communal understandings of the Spirit.

In the end, one is appreciative of the ground-breaking work Moltmann does to open up new spaces for the Spirit, but desires a more systematic grounding for his pneumatology. Such a grounding would help the reader place Moltmann's holistic, trinitarian, and eschatological pneumatology in the context of the Christian tradition, allowing not only the creation of new spaces, but the broadening of more traditional understandings as well.

In contrast to Moltmann's exclusive focus on pneumatology in *The Spirit of Life* and *The Source of Life*, Elizabeth Johnson's pneumatology emerges in the midst of her larger feminist reconstruction of theology. In *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*,<sup>29</sup> Johnson explores traditional language for God, posits a need for feminist language about God, and ultimately concludes with a constructive theology that examines each person of the Trinity. In the midst of this constructive work, Johnson's pneumatology emerges as a challenging and provocative new look at the work and presence of the Spirit in our midst. In *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*,<sup>30</sup> Johnson furthers her pneumatology by looking specifically at the ways in which the marginalization of the Spirit has corresponded with the oppression of both women and creation.<sup>31</sup> Throughout both texts, Johnson describes a Spirit passionately engaged as a force of liberation in history and in the midst of creation. For Johnson, the whole of the world is ripe for experiences of the Spirit:<sup>32</sup> the Spirit is found not only in prayer and holy visions, but also in the grit of every day life. Three main emphases emerge in Johnson's understanding of the Spirit: the personal and involved presence of the Spirit, the liberative action of the Spirit, and the push of the Spirit toward communion with the whole of creation.

#### AN ENGAGED SPIRIT:

For Johnson, the Spirit is God passionately engaged in the world.<sup>33</sup> The Spirit is "God as She-Who-Dwells-Within, divine presence in compassionate engagement with the conflictual world" as well as "God drawing near and passing by in vivifying, sustaining, renewing, and

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *She Who Is*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 82-83, 86, 125, 127, 133, 137-138.

liberating power in the midst of historical struggle.”<sup>34</sup> In *She Who Is*, Johnson provides multiple images and definitions for the Spirit; common to all is the underlying assertion that the Spirit is the means by which humanity (individually as well as collectively) encounters God in their lives. Rather than an ethereal being or spirit that can be imagined but never encountered, the Spirit meets us in our daily activities through nature, relationships, and in the scripts of individual lives, connecting us to the divine life.

Johnson highlights three means through which both individuals and communities experience the Spirit: the natural world, personal and interpersonal experiences, and structural systems that foster community.<sup>35</sup> In nature, Johnson points to moments “of wonder when we are overtaken by the grandeur of the natural world as it exists beyond us and without us, simply there in its own givenness and beauty, fragility and threatened state.”<sup>36</sup> In these moments creation reveals the Divine, and humanity is able to experience the Spirit at work in creation

In relationships, individuals experience the Spirit in their love for and from one another: “we seek and are found by the Spirit in the person-creating give and take of loving relationships.”<sup>37</sup> In the pain of broken relationships individuals often experience both divine absence as well as the divine compassion of the Spirit sitting with us through our pain. In the whole process of coming to know both others and ourselves in relationships we encounter the Spirit who creates humans as unique individuals, yet also calls us to be in relationship with one another.<sup>38</sup>

Not only is the Spirit found in creation and in relationships, it is also present in the systems and structures that liberate creation and create community. According to Johnson,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 86, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 126.

“whenever a human community resists its own destruction or works for its own renewal; when structural changes serve the liberation of oppressed peoples . . . wherever diversity is sustained”<sup>39</sup> there the Spirit is present, working to bring individuals into community and liberate all for full flourishing. In these situations, the Spirit is the foundation of freedom that calls humanity into liberating systems. Rather than an ethereal presence only glimpsed in sanctuaries or prayerful visions, Johnson describes a Spirit engaged in the very grist of daily life: in creation, in social systems, and in relationships. The whole of the world, the whole of our lives, and the whole of who we are is open to the presence of the Spirit. There is no place the Spirit cannot intercede.

#### A LIBERATIVE SPIRIT:

As the previous theme implied, the Spirit is known by its liberating activities. The Spirit liberates humanity from whatever binds it, be it poverty, hunger, depression or addiction, so humans can fully flourish in their *imago dei*. For Johnson, the concept of full flourishing is crucial to our understanding of what God desires for creation: “the glory of God is *homo*, the human being, the whole human race, every individual person, fully alive. Because God is the creator, redeemer, lover of the world, God’s own honor is at stake in human happiness.

Wherever human beings are violated, diminished, or have their life drained away, God’s glory is dimmed and dishonored.”<sup>40</sup> God creates us for full flourishing and the Spirit is continually at work, in our individual lives, in our communal structures, in unjust situations, to liberate us for this flourishing.

Yet, the Spirit does not merely liberate from, but also liberates *for*: for flourishing, certainly, but also for agency. The Spirit liberates us so that we can turn around liberate our neighbors. Liberation is not for individual enjoyment alone because no one is fully free until all

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 14.

are liberated.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, for Johnson, liberation (especially of women and creation) is the criterion by which we can discern the Spirit.

#### A COMMUNAL SPIRIT

While the Spirit may be a force in individual lives, it is ultimately a force that pushes toward community, both with other individuals and with creation. For Johnson, full flourishing as creatures of God happens not in isolation, but in community with one another and with all that God has declared good. Johnson's model for community and her insistence on its importance stems from her understanding of the Trinity. Avoiding both modalism as well as tritheism, Johnson highlights the personhood of each member of the Trinity and then establishes their communal nature with one another. The Triune God, in other words, is inherently relational and shows us the importance of both affirming our unique identity *and* recognizing that our full humanity is constituted only in relationships. Johnson argues that the historical logic for this theological understanding is experiential: "three experiences come to human beings from one God. Therefore three sorts of relationships are possible with one God."<sup>42</sup> Though one might quibble with her logic or question the stress she places on humanity's knowledge of God and experience, her emphasis on community as a relational model is clear and appreciated. The Trinity is neither a hierarchy nor an argument about who preceded whom; rather, the Trinity is whole only as a holy community.<sup>43</sup> And humanity is no different. Individuals are whole and complete, open for full human flourishing, only when they find themselves in communion with one another and with God's creation.

#### CHALLENGES:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>43</sup> Many of today's theological debates on Trinity focus on the problematic *filioque* clause. Johnson is moving us away from this debate in order to focus on the communal nature of the Trinity and the way in which the persons work together and complement one another. Ibid., 216.

Like Moltmann, Johnson's pneumatology broadens and deepens a Christian understanding of the Spirit. By exploring the Spirit through the lens of feminist theology, Johnson highlights the liberating and communal dimensions of the Spirit's work and identifies the presence of the Spirit in our midst. Where Moltmann struggles to acknowledge individual experiences of, and relationships with, the Spirit, Johnson is able to affirm individual experiences while still acknowledging the Spirit's communal and universal pull for the liberation of all creation. Yet, Johnson also leaves the reader wondering about the problematic nature of experience. For example, Johnson's contention that God is known as three persons because of humanity's experience of three different dimensions of God raises questions of divine revelation. Can humans truly know the immanent reality of God through their experiences? Is it possible to build a systematic theology around a structure of God revealed in human experience? Further, like Moltmann, Johnson also fails to fully flesh out the relationships between the three persons of the Trinity. She uplifts their mutuality and equality but fails to establish the details of the inter-Trinitarian relationships. Finally, Johnson's lack of emphasis on the connection between the Spirit and Christ seems to divorce the Spirit from scriptural testaments to its presence and relationship with Christ. The lack of an intricate relationship between the Spirit and Christ lessens both when traditionally they have enriched one another in their complementary ministries. For Johnson, liberation is the criterion by which humanity can know the Spirit, yet traditionally Christ has been the criterion and Johnson's switch leaves the reader wondering if liberation is a stringent enough criterion for discerning the presence of the Spirit.

SPIRIT-SPIRITUALITIES.<sup>44</sup>

Having explored the pneumatologies of Moltmann and Johnson, some common denominators clearly emerge. For both, the Spirit is a force for life and liberation; the Spirit frees creation from the bonds that ensnare it and inhibit full flourishing as creatures created and loved by God. Moltmann enriches this understanding and grounds it in reality by linking liberation and justice, for there can be no full liberation without justice. Johnson adds an intentionally communal dimension in her insistence that none are fully free until all are free.

Second, the Spirit is holistic. Moltmann highlights this understanding in his insistence that the Spirit incorporates the whole of creation: body and soul, human and creature. For Johnson, the Spirit is actively holistic in its ability to bring all the pieces of our lives into a sacred unity. When the whole of what it means to be human and the whole of creation are pulled together in a sacred, liberating communion, the Spirit is at work.

Finally, both Johnson and Moltmann understand the Spirit as an engaged presence in the world and in history. Johnson intentionally defines the Spirit as “She-Who-Dwells-Within” in order to work against the understanding of the Spirit as an ethereal being, above and beyond us. For Johnson, the Spirit is personal and involved, always prodding us toward full flourishing. For Moltmann, understanding the Spirit as both the Spirit of redemption and creation illustrates the various ways in which the Spirit affirms all life and fights anything that threatens creation. The Spirit is no longer understood to reside only in the church or only in our hearts. The Spirit is wholly free, engaging all of life in its liberating movement.

Having explored reconstructions of pneumatology, and having established that spirituality is integrally connected to the Spirit, it is now possible to reconstruct spirituality based

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<sup>44</sup>I am indebted to Robert Davis Hughes III for this term, which helps clarify Christian, Spirit-centered spiritualities from other spiritualities being offered. See “The Holy Spirit in Christian Spirituality” in *Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, Ed. Arthur Holder (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher, 2005), 211.

on our new understandings of the Spirit. For the purposes of this paper, I will define spirituality as our reception of, and response to, the Spirit. In other words, spirituality is the way we recognize and construct a relationship with that which is holy. Through a “spiritual life” we respond to God’s invitation and begin to participate in the divine life. This definition is broad, but firmly roots spirituality in a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. With Johnson’s and Moltmann’s carefully discerned characteristics of the Spirit, it becomes evident that spirituality too ought to be holistic, engaged, and liberative.

#### HOLISTIC:

A spirituality based on the pneumatologies of Moltmann and Johnson must be holistic. It must be concerned not only with our souls, but with our bodies as well. A holistic, embodied spirituality reclaims the image of our bodies as temples for the Spirit (I Cor. 6:19-20) rather than prisons or holding cells for our soul. It values the created, material part of who we are and embraces the fragility and resilience of our bodies, taking seriously issues of health and healing, sexuality and embodiment. Disciplines such as walking the labyrinth or movement prayer are uplifted because they integrate body and soul and recognize the innate connection between the two. Here Moltmann’s understanding of redemption as *of* our bodies rather than *from* our bodies plays an integral role.

Moreover, a holistic spirituality will not only be concerned with the relation of an individual’s body and soul, it will also be concerned with the communal, the public, and the social. Holistic spirituality does not reside solely in our houses or the closed confines of a sanctuary. It enters the public sphere and engages the whole of our lives. It is not possible to separate the spiritual and secular; the Spirit lays claim to the whole of our lives, the whole of who we are as creatures created in the image of God. The implications of this understanding are

broad and far reaching. Rather than a realm we dabble in “when the Spirit moves us,” spirituality becomes a way of life. Our business practices reflect our relationship with the Spirit as clearly as our church attendance or prayer life; our personal lives and choices as well as our public decisions reflect the responses we are making to the divine invitation at each stage in our life. This is not a spirituality one can hide under a bushel, but is one that shines forth whether we want it to or not.

To go even further, a holistic spirituality is not concerned solely with humanity and its relation to the Spirit, but involves creation as well. In this way, it is not only human life that is divinely sanctioned and fiercely protected, but creation’s life as well. We can no longer content ourselves with being simply stewards of creation, we must instead become lovers of creation, intimately caring for and protecting that which God has created and declared good. As Johnson makes clear, when we begin to forsake or forget the least among us, be it creation, women, or the Spirit, we risk the slippery slope of losing sight of God in our midst.<sup>45</sup>

This care for creation takes into account the triune nature of the Spirit. Moltmann’s claim that the Spirit participates in both the work of the Redeemer and the Creator as well as engaging in it’s own ministry means we too are called to participate in redemption and creation, including the redemption *of* creation. Humanity is called to be co-creators with God. The work of creation, both its continuation, preservation, and redemption, is our work as well as God’s. A holistic, triune, embodied spirituality broadens our scope to include the ministry and work of God the Redeemer as well as the work of God the Creator and God the Spirit. Broadening our focus in this way allows us to remain rooted in an intentionally Christian understanding of spirituality,

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<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Women*.

but also allows us to acknowledge and respond to the current realities and crises in our world, where God is surely still at work and calls us to be as well.

#### ENGAGED

Both Johnson and Moltmann describe a Spirit who is present and engaged in this world. Not a Spirit afraid to get Her “hands” dirty, this is a Spirit for whom the messiness of life is an everyday reality. Shattering any notions of a pristine, uninvolved, above-the-fray deity, both Moltmann and Johnson highlight the everyday ordinary places we encounter the Spirit. Spirituality, then, must also be engaged and active in the world. Definitions of spirituality that involve only individual, reflective practices will not pass muster with this new reconstruction. Rather, spirituality must engage the entirety of life. A holistic, engaged spirituality embodies the balance of both individual, reflective periods, which reorient and re-root us in the presence of the Spirit, and communal, active periods where we work out of our relationship with the Spirit, calling one another to accountability and change for the sake of living into God’s vision for our world and our lives.

#### LIBERATIVE:

Finally, the Spirit that both Moltmann and Johnson describe is a liberative Spirit. Actively caring for the preservation and re-creation of the world, the Spirit liberates and calls forth justice in order that all may fully live the life God has given them. A liberative spirituality necessarily involves works of both compassion and justice that push our society and the world towards full flourishing. Moltmann’s eschatological emphasis reminds us that Christians are called to God’s vision of how the world ought to be (was created to be) rather than how it looks now. With this vision in mind, the work of spirituality always involves the continual call for justice and liberation both in our individual lives, our own communities, human society as a

whole, and all of creation. Johnson's definition of, and insistence on, full flourishing for all creation reminds us not only of God's vision for creation, but of our own responsibility for that vision. We are liberated in order that we might also liberate. Spirit-spirituality will uplift not only the importance of liberation in general, but our specific responsibility for making liberation a reality for all creation.

#### CONCLUSION:

A spirituality rooted in the Spirit is perhaps the best hope of the church, not only for regeneration in an age of consumerism and secular disdain, but also for communication and cooperation in an age of pluralism and interfaith dialogue. Theologians need not fear nor reject spirituality despite its multiplicity of meanings. Rather, spirituality provides a way in which to connect to the deep, religious hunger that exists in our world (across faith traditions and denominations) and root our response in the triune God who is present in our very midst. Spirit-spirituality draws on the rich resources of the Christian tradition, recognizing and affirming God's presence throughout the ages, but also broadens our horizons and helps us recognize God's presence in this age. By rooting our understanding of spirituality in continually re-forming pneumatologies, we continue to seek out God's presence and rethink the best response to the Spirit's presence in our midst, never allowing ourselves to become complacent in thinking we have God pinned down. Spirit-spirituality becomes the practical way in which we recognize the Spirit and respond to Her presence by participating in Her life-giving, justice-filled, holistic work.

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