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Chapter 12

Experiencing the Spirit: The Magnificat, Luther, and Feminists

Lois Malcolm

IN THE PAST TWO centuries, we have witnessed a gradual but unambiguous shift away from enlightenment rejection of a spiritual world. Many popular books on spirituality have appeared on the market alongside more serious studies of the spiritual practices of the world's major religious traditions. Studies of world Christianity claim that the palpable experience of the Spirit is central to many forms of Christianity practiced throughout the world.¹ There has been renewed interest in the Holy Spirit—as exemplified by the spate of books recently published on the topic.²

An interest in spirituality and the Holy Spirit has also been emerging in the work of feminists, womanists, and *mujeristas*.³ Through spiritual awareness, many women have sought to deepen their own sense of agency and work for justice.⁴ This contemporary interest in the Holy Spirit and spirituality, however, creates a difficulty for Lutheran feminists. On the one hand, Martin Luther was highly critical both of the Augustinian mystical tradition he had inherited and of the spiritual enthusiasts of his day who, in his view, carried his reforms too far. On the other hand, feminists have been highly critical of Lutheran theology for its emphasis on suffering and human passivity before God.⁵

I seek to address this difficulty through an analysis of Luther's commentary on the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), which treats many of his characteristic emphases from a distinctive standpoint—that of Mary's experience of God "seeing her" in the "depths," enabling her to be witness to God's raising the lowly and bringing

down the mighty.⁶ This standpoint opens up new vistas for a pneumatology informed by Luther's fundamental insight about the Holy Spirit: the connection he drew between the Holy Spirit's interceding for us and God's power to create "something" out of "nothing." Not only does this standpoint offer a perspective on the Spirit's work that both resonates with and yet deepens feminist spirituality, but it also broadens the scope of Lutheran spirituality in ways that are, in fact, more congruent with Paul's original use of the metaphor of childbirth to describe the Spirit's work.

Luther's Theology of the Spirit

Luther developed his theology of the Spirit in a critique of the Augustinian mystical tradition he had inherited. What he criticized was the idea that we encounter the Spirit only when we strive to follow the ideals of our "higher nature" (our highest aspirations) in contrast to our "lower nature" (our baser passions and desires).⁷ Later in his life, he criticized those he called "spiritual enthusiasts" for a similar difficulty: they equated their "higher" but immediate charismatic experience of the Spirit with the totality of the Spirit's work.⁸ Instead of finding the Spirit in our highest yearnings or charismatic experiences, Luther argued that it is precisely in "inner conflict" that we experience the work of the Holy Spirit, a theme he developed in his early "Lectures on the Psalms" and "Epistle to the Romans" and one that would remain central throughout his work.⁹

Luther's theology of the Spirit centered on his interpretation of Romans 8:26, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness . . . interceding with inexpressible groans," which he interpreted as describing the "inner conflict" of a sinner tortured not only by guilt and the anguish of hell and death, but also by the struggle with Satan and even with God and the whole creation. Luther wrote that seeing no escape, the sinner ultimately blasphemes God, desiring God to become someone else or wishing that God did not exist. It is precisely here that God's alien work (*opus alienum*) of wrath prepares the sinner for God's proper work (*opus proprium*) of love. In the midst of this conflict, the Spirit intercedes for us, praying to God through our laments.

In this work, the Holy Spirit is always *Spiritus creator* (the creative Spirit). Luther frequently linked Romans 8:26 with Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit moved upon the waters at the first creation and brought light and life into the darkness of the deep.¹⁰ According to Luther, in our laments, the Spirit not only "kills" the old sinful self but also creates us anew, "making us alive" with Christ's life. In our sin and suffering, God puts on a "strange garb," appearing to us not as the victorious Christ but as Christ in his suffering and death. As we cling to God's promises in the lowly signs of the proclaimed Word and the sacraments of bread and wine, the Spirit makes the crucified and raised Christ a living reality for us in the

midst of our sin and suffering. It is here, in the midst of life's struggles and not in our higher strivings and aspirations, that the Spirit works in the strange garb of sin and suffering, showing us a God who is continually turning to those lost in sin and death in order to create new life out of nothing—life out of death.¹¹

The Feminist Critique of Luther

Feminist theologians have tended to be highly critical of this story of the Spirit's work.¹² In this story, as Reformed feminist theologian Serene Jones points out, God wrathfully "undoes" (crucifies) the subject. God judges as guilty the arrogant unbelief of the sinner who has defined himself not only according to his own desires, but also according to his own attempts to justify himself. The law reveals the sinner's narcissistic self-understanding—a self-understanding exhibited most vividly in his desire to save himself. The sinner's pretensions to self-definition and pride are broken by the law's harsh, judgmental force. Before God, the sinner is "fragmented" and "lost."¹³

What happens, Jones asks, to the woman who enters this tale having spent her life not in a space of narcissistic self-definition but in a space of "fragmentation" and "dissolution"? What happens to the woman who, as the feminist theorist Luce Irigaray has described, exists without much self-definition, because she has been defined by her culture to be radically "fluid," to be in a space that is always receiving—that is always *in* her relation to others, to a fault. Unlike "man," who lives in an impenetrable container of his own making, she has lived without an "envelope" to hold her.¹⁴ Moreover, because of her lack of self-definition, she has no boundaries to define herself against the onslaught of a culture that also wishes to define her in her fluidity, according to an economy of male desire. Her few borders serve only to have value when they are used by another. In this, she is not allowed to be truly "other"—to be truly a subject in her own right.¹⁵

Jones points out that feminist theory helps us realize that this woman suffers from an illness different from Luther's classical male sinner. Her sin is not that of an overly rigid self-construction; her brokenness lies in her *lack* of containment, in her cultural definition *in relation* to others.¹⁶ The source of her alienation from God is not an overabundance of self, but a lack of self-definition. She lacks the structuring boundaries that could allow her to be an other in relation to God and to others. She exists as one whose will and identity has been diluted in her many relations.¹⁷

What happens, Jones goes on to ask, when this woman encounters Luther's tale? She either may not relate to the story, unable to see herself in the narration, or she may identify with Luther's sinner and take upon herself a script designed for the prideful sinner. Using Luther's understanding, when God meets this woman, who already suffers from a debilitating lack of self-containment, God

potentially recapitulates the dynamics of her oppression and self-loss. Rather than opening into transformation and a new beginning, this conversion story simply reenacts this woman's story of a cultural unraveling she knows only too well—more like sin than the freeing act of divine mercy.¹⁸

Luther's Commentary on the Magnificat

With this feminist critique in mind, we turn to Luther's commentary on the Magnificat. There he developed his characteristic themes, but from a unique standpoint: that of *Mary's experience* of God's "seeing her in the depths"—an experience that leads not only to mystical exaltation, but also to prophetic witness to God's bringing down the mighty and raising the lowly.

In the commentary, Mary speaks out of her experience, where the Holy Spirit "enlightens" and "instructs her." According to Luther, "*Experience is the school of the Spirit.*" We cannot understand God or God's Word without receiving such understanding "immediately" from the Holy Spirit—"without experiencing, proving, and feeling it" for ourselves.¹⁹ Through her experience, Luther observed, Mary teaches us the "art" of understanding the "work, method, nature, and will of God."²⁰ This "art," as we will see, is related to three central insights that Luther wove together in order to interpret Mary's hymn, drawing on both mystical themes (to describe Mary's exaltation in the first part) and prophetic themes (to describe her prophetic witness in the second part).

MARY'S THREE INSIGHTS

What "deep insight and wisdom" does Mary's experience teach us about the Holy Spirit? It teaches us that the Spirit continues to act in the same way that the Spirit has acted since the beginning of time when God created the world out of a "formless void"—out of nothing (Gen. 1:2). Human beings cannot make something out of nothing (an allusion to the old axiom *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, "out of nothing, nothing is made"). By contrast, God always creates out of "nothing"²¹ and God's creative power continues to be an "energetic power"—a "continuous activity"—that "works and operates without ceasing."²²

Nonetheless, Mary's experience also teaches us that the Spirit's creative power affects us differently—depending on our circumstances: God brings down the mighty, the rich, and the proud, and God raises the lowly, the poor, and the humble. Whatever is *nothing*, God makes into something that is "precious, honorable, blessed, and living" and whatever is *something* God makes it to be "nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dying" (see 1 Cor. 1:28).²³ The same divine activity both "comforts" and "terrifies." Those in affliction hear words of comfort; those who are self-satisfied—and oppress others—hear words that terrify them.²⁴

Moreover, Mary's experience teaches us about a fundamental difference between the Spirit's epistemology (the way God "sees" things) and human epistemology (the way human beings "see" things). Here we touch on a theme central to Luther's work—exemplified in the Heidelberg Disputation, where he described how the "theologian of the cross" says what a thing is in contrast to the "theologian of glory" who disguises self-interest by only appearing to be wise and righteous.²⁵ However, Mary's prophetic witness does not attend to the individual's internal conflict between reality (experiencing the cross) and appearance (using the law and wisdom to disguise self-interest); rather, her prophetic witness draws on broader patterns of relationships among people to describe the contrast between God's way of seeing and our human way of seeing. Only God, she witnessed, has that "sort of seeing that looks into the depths of need and misery;" only God is "near to all who are in the depths." Human beings, by contrast, tend to look to what is above them—to what attracts them. They strive after "honor, power, wealth, knowledge, a life of ease, and whatever is lofty and great." There are many "hangers-on" around people who have these things. The entire world gathers around them, gladly yielding in their service, wanting to be at their side to share in their exaltation. No one is willing to look into the depths—into poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery, and anguish. We avoid people afflicted with these things; we forsake them, shun them, and leave them to themselves: "No one dreams of helping them or of making something out of them."²⁶ Because we cannot create what we desire, as human beings we tend only to love or desire what we find attractive and appealing. By contrast, as Luther pointed out in the Heidelberg Disputation, God's love always *creates what it desires*.²⁷

MARY AS AN EXEMPLAR OF FAITH

Having presented these three insights, Luther's commentary goes on to say that we are to honor Mary not because she had a miraculous birth without violating her virginity or because she is an idol to be worshiped but because she is an *exemplar of faith*. According to Luther, Mary taught through her experience and through her words, that when "God sees us in the depths" and thereby creates something out of nothing, our hearts overflow with gladness.²⁸ God could have chosen many other women, women of higher status, but God *chose her*, precisely in her poverty and lowliness, and because of this, she is able to leap and dance with great pleasure:

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for [God] has looked with favor on the lowliness of [God's] servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is [God's] name (Luke 1:46-49).

Mary's words "my soul magnifies the Lord" expressed the "the strong ardor and exuberant joy" she felt as she was "inwardly exalted in the Spirit." Her words flowed forth with "sighs and groaning," and the Spirit came seething with them. Her words live. They have hands and feet. They are fire, light, and life. Not only her words, but her whole body and life strained for utterance. It is as if she said: "My life and all my senses float in the love and praise of God and in lofty pleasures. . . . I am exalted, more than I exalt myself, to praise the Lord." She was so "saturated with divine sweetness and the Spirit" that she was given an exuberance that is not a human work, but a joyful experience that is "the work of God alone."²⁹

With these words, we learn from Mary that faith is about tasting before seeing. When we experience God "seeing us in the depths," we taste a "sensible sweetness" that cannot be proven by reason or empirically verified by the senses, but can only be known by experiencing and feeling it. Such experience affects our whole lives—not only our spirit and minds, but also our bodies and the full range of human emotions including "hatred, love, delight, horror, and the like." God sees both our good parts and our bad parts, and by seeing us in our totality transforms our whole being.³⁰

We also learn from Mary that we are not to put our trust in the *gifts* God gives, regardless of how great they may be (spiritual or temporal). Rather, we are to trust solely in *God's very own* self—even as we can appreciate and not despise the gifts we receive. In the gifts, we may touch God's "hand," but with God's gracious regard for us, we receive God's very own "heart, mind, spirit, and will."³¹

Here Luther's commentary uses *mystical* language, with its logic of double-negation, to describe how Mary trusted solely in "*God's bare goodness*," which at times may be "unfelt," and not in whether she either *had* or *had not* received certain gifts from God.³² On the one hand, Mary differed from "impure and perverted lovers," who only seek the gifts that God gives them and are plunged into despair when they are taken away. Like Job, Mary is a model of faith who loved and praised God evenly, whether in want or plenty (compare with Phil. 4:12). On the other hand, she also differed from the "falsely humble," who think that they need to appear humble, affecting humble clothing, faces, gestures, and words, but with the intention of merely having others *perceive* them as being humble. When Mary rejoiced in God's having "regarded her in her low state," her stress was not on her *low estate* but on the fact that God has *regarded* her. Like Queen Esther, whom God used precisely because of her wealth and power, Mary relied solely on how God *regarded her*—not comparing what she was given to what others were given, but focusing solely on what God was calling *her* to

do.³³ In sum, Mary solely loved "the *bare, unfelt goodness* that is *hidden* in God." Indeed, Luther observed, this is the only way to "equanimity" and an "even mind."³⁴

MARY AS A PROPHETIC WITNESS

Nonetheless, the Magnificat is not merely a hymn about Mary's mystical exaltation. Her ecstatic sighs and groans were directly related to her sense of vocation as a *prophetic witness* to God's great transforming work of justice in history.

[God's] mercy is for those who fear [God]
 from generation to generation.
 [God] has shown strength with [God's] arm;
 [God] has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
 [God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
 [God] has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
 [God] has helped [God's] servant Israel,
 in remembrance of God's mercy,
 according to the promise God made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever (Luke 1:50-55).

Here Luther's commentary uses *prophetic* themes from Jeremiah 9:23-24 to describe what Mary has to teach us in the second part of the hymn, organizing his comments around three kinds of divine works of God and three classes of people:

1. God's *kindness* shows *mercy* to those who are "poor in spirit," but *breaks the spiritual pride* of those who boast in their *wisdom* (in their spiritual possessions and all the gifts they bring—not only "popularity, fame, good report" but also "intellect, reason, wit, knowledge, piety, virtue, and a godly life");
2. God's *justice* *exalts* the oppressed, but *brings down* those who boast in their *might* (their "authority, nobility, friends, high station, and honor, whether pertaining to temporal or to spiritual goods or persons");
3. God's *righteousness* takes care of the poor and all who "lack life's necessities," but sends away those who boast in their *riches* (their wealth, good health, beauty, pleasure, strength, and so on).³⁵

These different modes of "divine work" are intrinsically related to God's way of "seeing only in the depths." As demonstrated when Christ was powerless on the cross, God performs God's greatest work—conquering sin, death, hell, the devil, and all evil—precisely at the points where God's power appears to be most

contradicted. In turn, God's strength ends precisely when human beings try to have everything under their control. "When their bubble is full-blown, and everyone supposes them to have won and overcome, and they themselves feel smug in their achievement, then God pricks the bubble, and it is all over."³⁶

Luther's writing elaborates at great length on how God "breaks the spiritual pride" of those who boast in their "false wisdom." No one—whether rich or mighty—is so "puffed up and bold" as the "smart aleck" who feels and knows that "he is in the right, understands all about a matter, [and] is wiser than other people." When he finds that he ought to give way and confess himself in the wrong, he becomes "so insolent and is so utterly devoid of the fear of God" that he dares to boast of "being infallible"—declaring that "God is on his side" and the "others on the devil's side," with "the effrontery" of appealing to God's judgment. When such a person has power, he rushes "headlong, persecuting, condemning, slandering . . . all who differ with him, saying afterward he did it all to the honor and glory of God. . . . Oh, how big a bubble we have here!" Luther exclaimed. People like this *must* have their way. They cannot imagine that they could be wrong or give way. They simply assert, "We are in the right" and "that is the end of it."³⁷

Ought we not to defend the truth and what is right? Are we merely to remain passive in the face of evil? Are we not to defend a righteous cause? Everything depends, Luther responded, on a "proper understanding of *being in the right*." Of course, we are to defend the truth and what is right—and even suffer for it. This is what martyrs have done throughout the ages. Nonetheless, we are not to defend righteous causes by means that negate the very things we are seeking to defend. That would be to turn "the right" into "a wrong." We need not "rage and storm" and assert our will "by force" or "sulk impatiently." Once we have made our case and "confessed" its "goodness" with "equanimity," we can "*let such things go*"—that is, such things as our "need to be right"—and "cleave to God alone."³⁸

The Magnificat and Feminist Spirituality

We can see that Luther's commentary on the Magnificat presents us with a very different picture of the Spirit's activity than the one usually given in Luther's writings. In this commentary, we do not find God—to use the language Jones uses—"wrathfully crucifying" ("undoing") a sinner, revealing his "narcissistic self-understanding," a self-understanding most evident in his desire to save himself.³⁹ Rather, we find a woman seen by God in her depths, what could be described as her "fragmentation" and "dissolution." Seen precisely in her fluidity, in the lowly estate by which she had been defined by others, Mary was given a new identity. Inwardly exalted by the Spirit, she became fully alive. She experienced an ecstasy that overflowed with such exuberance that she was lifted out

of her state of ignominy and empowered to become a powerful agent in her own right—a bold exemplar of faith and prophetic witness to God's bringing down the mighty and raising the lowly.

The Magnificat does not tell a tale of God meeting a prideful sinner. Rather, it tells a tale of God meeting a woman whom society had seen as insignificant and giving her a new status (as an exemplar of faith alongside Abraham, Job, and Esther) as well as a new sense of agency in God's coming reign (as a prophetic witness alongside the prophets of old). Her story of God's "seeing" her undid not her pride, but the "cultural unraveling" she knew only too well. Far from recapitulating the dynamics of her previous life, Mary was transformed and entered a new beginning.

Nonetheless, this tale of Mary's mystical exaltation and prophetic agency is not merely a tale about a reversal of power. Its tale of transformation is much more profound than this. Mary's experience was rooted in a divine sort of seeing—God's regard for her—that always creates out of nothing. God's regard for Mary made her a prophetic witness to a much more fruitful potency than anything wealth, power, and wisdom could create. This divine epistemology, which always creates what it desires, is very different from human ways of perceiving and responding to life. In other words, this divine creative potency does not merely reverse roles in an existing finite system of relationships when it brings down the mighty and raises the lowly (even though it also does this). It does not merely shift the placeholders of who has the most power or wealth, or who is the wisest or most "in the right." Rather, it brings about a more radical transformation in how human beings relate to one another—one that is rooted in the Spirit's fecundity of righteousness, justice, and kindness. God's sort of seeing not only gave Mary equanimity in the face of want or plenty, it also enabled her to make her prophetic case without needing to be in the right or powerful or wealthy. Far from being a passive acquiescence to the status quo, this equanimity was rooted in a creative potency that has the power to change the *very terms* that define how human beings perceive and respond to one another.

In sum, Mary's experience gave witness to God's raising the lowly and bringing down the mighty (recall Mary's second insight about the Spirit's work). Her standpoint provides us with a fruitful context for understanding Luther's chief contribution to pneumatology: his insight into the Spirit's capacity to create out of nothing, a capacity that characterizes what lies at the heart of God's sort of seeing (recall Mary's first and third insights about the Spirit's work). The standpoint of Mary's experience enables us to appropriate this pneumatological insight in ways that not only empower many women but that perhaps also *deepen* that empowerment with a much more freeing way of being in the world. Mary's tale not only resonates with a feminist spirituality that seeks to undo all such cultural unraveling, but her tale also deepens such a spirituality with a way of

perceiving and responding to life out of the Spirit's potency to create the very conditions for just, righteous and compassionate relationships in the first place.

The Magnificat and Themes in Paul's Theology

Moreover, if Mary's tale resonates with and deepens feminist spirituality, then it also *broadens* the scope of Lutheran pneumatology. Because Mary's witness encompasses both those who are high and those who are low within human scales of perception, it encompasses a much more *comprehensive* perspective for understanding the Spirit's work than simply that of the torments of an individual conscience. Furthermore, it does so in ways that are, in fact, more *congruent* with the apostle Paul's original formulation of these themes.⁴⁰

THE SPIRIT'S GROANING THROUGH OUR WEAKNESS

In his letter to the Romans, Paul located the Spirit's "groaning" (*stenágmōis*) (Rom. 8:26) not only in relation to the inward "groaning" (*stenazámen*) of those who have the "first fruits" of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23) but also in relation to the entire creation's "groaning" (*sustenázei*) in the face of its own "futility" as it awaits the full disclosure of God's purposes for history (Rom. 8:19-22).⁴¹ For Paul, the conflict at the heart of this groaning, the conflict between the *flesh* and the *Spirit* (Rom. 8:5-8), was not simply that of a tormented conscience—although it included such torment (see Rom. 7:14-25)—but, rather, the more fundamental apocalyptic conflict between the "old age" of this passing world, which is enslaved by the unraveling patterns of sin and injustice, and death as a consequence, and the "new age" of the Spirit ushered in by Jesus' death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45).⁴² In the language of the Magnificat, the conflict between the old age and the new age is precisely the conflict between human ways of perceiving and responding to life (based on power, wealth, and even wisdom) and God's sort of seeing that always creates "something" (a new world, a new pattern of relationships, based on God's righteousness, justice, and kindness) out of "nothing" (sin, injustice, disease, and death).

It is within this context that Paul described how faith and baptism into Christ's death and life enables one to have a foretaste, a "first fruit," of the Spirit's giving birth to a new age not only through our own "inward groaning"—our own personal cries for something better—but also through the entire creation's yearning for something beyond its seeming futility.⁴³ Paul used the biblical metaphor of the pangs of childbirth to describe how we live between these two ages in the interim period, the hiatus, between Christ's resurrection and his final return when all things will be created anew and God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). As the Spirit "groans" through our "groaning," we now can, indeed, perceive that we are, in fact, a "new creation." We no longer need to view one

another in the same way (2 Cor. 5:17).⁴⁴ The cultural cosmos of the ancient world—founded as it was on distinctions between male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free—no longer exists (Gal. 3:28).⁴⁵ It has been replaced by a new age of the Spirit's fecundity of justice and mercy ushered in by the "foolishness" and "weakness" of the cross. A new people now exists, whose old selves have been crucified with Christ and whose new selves are now enacted by a shared faith in Christ (Gal. 2:20).

Nonetheless, the evidence of our lives and of the world around us presents us with a different picture. This new way of seeing things is a matter of *faith* and not of sight. Moreover, there is a difference between the way the Spirit "groans" (and thereby creates out of nothing) and the way we "groan" (yearning for something better)—a difference that serves a *critical function* in the way we perceive and respond to life.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul illustrated this critical function when he described how the Spirit discloses the "secret and hidden" *wisdom of the cross* (1 Cor. 2:7). Within the context of a congregation beset with factions and internal conflicts,⁴⁶ Paul urged the Corinthians to boast only in the wisdom of "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:30-31). Echoing Jeremiah's contrast between "boasting" in wealth, power, and wisdom and "boasting" in God's righteousness, justice, and kindness (Jer. 9:24), Paul urged his readers to boast not in human wisdom and power, but in the "weakness" and "foolishness" of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

He went on to say that although the Spirit's way of understanding things stands in sharp contrast to the "wisdom" of this passing age, with its strictly empirical ways of knowing (1 Cor. 2:6-16), it is not merely an ethereal perception divorced from the realities of everyday life. Indeed, it is enacted precisely amidst our very human, and often very petty, conflicts over wealth and power, and who has the most superior wisdom (and therefore is "in the right")—continually creating life anew, enabling us to discern that it is in the most weak and needy among us that God's power is most radically at work (1 Corinthians 12). In other words, it is precisely amidst our petty human conflicts that the weakness and foolishness of the cross manifests God's power and God's wisdom by creating something out of "nothing" (the lowly and despised), even as it reduces to nothing those who think they are "something" (the rich, the powerful, and the wise) (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

In the midst of these conflicts, Paul boasted (in a fashion similar to the way Mary "exalted" in her experience) in the truth he was given to proclaim. Like Mary, he did so not because he had more wealth and power or even more wisdom than his hearers, but because he had faith in the Spirit's abundant fecundity. He had an ecstatic confidence in the Spirit's capacity to bring about new life even amidst the despair and dysfunction of a community torn apart by factions and competing claims over who was most in the right. The Spirit's fecundity, which

Paul experienced the most profoundly precisely when he was the most vulnerable, enabled him to endure with equanimity the paradoxes of being an apostle: "treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:7-10).

Conclusion

Luther's commentary on the Magnificat describes the art of understanding the Spirit's work from the distinctive stance of Mary's experience of mystical exaltation and prophetic witness to God's raising the lowly and bringing down the mighty. In light of a feminist critique, this opens up new vistas for a pneumatology informed by Luther's fundamental insight into the Spirit's creative power. Not only does this stance offer a perspective on the Spirit's work that resonates with and deepens feminist spirituality, but it also offers a perspective that *broadens* the scope of Lutheran pneumatology. This broader scope is, in fact, more congruent with Paul's original description of how—in spite of all the empirical evidence in our own lives and in the world around us that would appear to contradict the Spirit's life-giving power—the Spirit continues to transform our laments and cries for a better world into potent agency for God's new age of justice, righteousness, and mercy.

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