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## Dancing Theology - A Construction of a Pneumatology of The Body

Kristin Kissell

Loyola Marymount University, [kisskris@me.com](mailto:kisskris@me.com)

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*Dancing Theology -  
A Construction of a Pneumatology of The Body*

A Thesis by  
*Kristin Kissell*

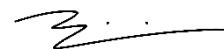
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Director's Signature:



*Matthew Petrusek*      *May 8, 2020*

Reader's Signature:



*Tracy Tiemeier*      *May 8, 2020*

*In the bosom of the Trinity, the Spirit is the power of communion, the bond of love, who insures the fellowship and reciprocity of the divine person with each other. The technical term for this trinitarian commonality is perichoresis, which literally means “dancing around,” and is used to describe the Spirit’s eternal enactment of the deep love and mutuality shared by all members of the Godhead. Perichoretically, the Trinity is the Dance of Life in which the Spirit performs the role of empowering the never-ending communion and relational vitality that is God in Godself.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Mark I. Wallace, “Spirit,” in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 251.

## **Abstract:**

Dance is the language of the soul. Dance, as a theological source, can remind us of who we are in and with the living perichoresis of the Trinity. Dance, as embodied art, can provide us with a new way of viewing and discussing pneumatology and that we too, in our incarnate reality, participate in perichoresis. Within this work I seek to answer the questions of how dance is a source of theology, why a pneumatology of the body is significant, and how dance provides a framework for a pneumatology of the body. The creation of a pneumatology of the body is a rooting or re-membling of the Spirit and our own spirit in incarnational—skin and bones—reality that includes us in Trinitarian perichoresis. Pneumatology of the body is dancing with the Holy Spirit in our given time and space to retrieve the dignity of our embodied inspirited selves as made in the *imago Dei*. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are not abstract concepts. Through dance as embodied art we can move from abstract, intellectual concepts of the Spirit to incarnational truth of our flesh and blood, wounds and joys, where the Trinity dwells within and around.

Dance as a source of theology can provide a framework for a pneumatology of the body. The Holy Spirit as relationality holding all of life together is our Holy Bridge. Within this work, we re-member our foundational belief in the interconnectedness of body and soul, and that we too participate in the Trinitarian perichoresis as part of God's dancing revelation. In a world of division and duality, the Spirit as Holy Bridge brings us back home to the core of who we are individually and collectively, while dance provides a space for honoring difference and duality together in harmony. Dance gives expression to situations and things in our lives that are challenging to grasp conceptually and intellectually, while allowing for the embodied witnessing of a person's and community's story.

A dancing theology as a framework for a pneumatology of the body reminds us that Spirit is our Holy Bridge between body, senses, feelings, challenges, and transformations, between my body soul temple and your body soul temple, and between individual and communal. By dancing with us in our daily lives, the Holy Spirit draws us ever deeper across loving bridges into communion with Trinitarian perichoresis. The Trinity is the Dance of Life in which the Spirit performs the role of empowering the never-ending communion and relational vitality that is God in and with Godself.

**Keywords:** Pneumatology, Holy Spirit, Dance, Body, Soul, Trinity, Perichoresis, Movement, African Ritual Dance, Modern Dance, Theology

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## **Introduction - Dance and Spirit as Home:**

Dance is my home. Dance is the lens through which I view the world. In dance and the choreographic process, I have encountered the Trinity as wisdom, healing, and love. I trust my body as a source of divine revelation and wisdom. My body is a holy dwelling place of Spirit. Our Christian faith is founded on groups of people's experiences of revelation through their own bodies and souls, individually and communally. The meaning of embodied, inspired revelation has come from my own dark night of the soul. I experienced significant loss in a short time period that turned my world upside down in one night and over a year. I lamented over those I loved, crying and wailing to a God I no longer felt connected to. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Nevertheless, beneath ashes and amongst broken bones in the depths of my body and soul, I knew Spirit was and is always with me. I knew and know now that Christ is continually journeying with me along my own road to Emmaus. What I know as truth in my story is that I was a woman wandering in the desert without any sense of direction, no nourishment within miles, and no one to share my deepest pains or descent with. My journey took me beyond the walls of church, and beyond the comforts I once knew. Dance became my church and my sacred space of full expression; for in dance and the choreographic process, I was able to express the fullness of my grief and pain. The act of creation and dancing in the secular and religious worlds became one of my paramount adventures in coming back home to the Trinity. I went from a cradle Catholic to a woman wandering lost in the desert, then back home to a more expansive faith than I could have ever imagined. My faith reminds me that every day is a gift and a mystery wherein I get to dance with the Trinity—the Holy Spirit as my guide and lead.

The Trinity has revealed itself to me through dance, in relationships, and within the mystery of everyday life. Our original sources of revelation are the body and movement before that of words and texts. Augustine's great confessions came from the overwhelming light and love of God, bringing him to his knees filled with awe and wonderment in a garden. An experience of my own confession and healing came when I was given the opportunity to dance in lament and praise at my grandma's funeral. To dance at my Mutter's funeral was a moment I will always cherish and one that fuels my embodied inspired theology. The dance I did in celebrating and honoring my Mutter's life was not only for her but was also for those gathered to celebrate her body, memory, and the overflowing, generous love she had for all. In that dancing moment, I was the Holy Spirit's intermediary between worlds; embodying all the emotions of those present, along with their memories and memories of my own. I was the conduit to invoke the blessings of my grandma for the entire community present and dancing a reminder of God's unending love.

From this experience, along with several other healing moments of revelation, the Holy Spirit has become incredibly prominent in how I live, move, and have my being in the world. The Holy Spirit is my constant guide, always directing and redirecting me to Christ and God. The Holy Spirit is my source of joy, playfulness, constant energy, the energy of love, reminder to trust in ambiguity and difference, and the grace I need every moment of every day to live a beautiful life in the Trinity. I also know, without a doubt, that the Spirit is my continual teacher when I am coaching, mentoring, healing, and providing intuitive work for people wanting to deepen their relationship with God. I am but a channel for the Spirit to be in the world. My work here is academic in essence but beyond that it is also my heart and soul confession of the living Trinitarian perichoresis in my life through a dancing theology.

## Overview of Dancing Theology:

Dance is the language of the soul; for this soul lives, moves, and has its being within the Trinitarian dance.<sup>2</sup> Dance, as a theological source, can remind us of who we are in and with the living perichoresis of the Trinity. Dance, as embodied art, can provide us with a new way of viewing and discussing pneumatology and that we too, in our incarnate reality, participate in perichoresis. Within this work I seek to answer the questions of how dance is a source of theology, why a pneumatology of the body is significant, and how dance provides a framework for a pneumatology of the body.

My work is for theologians who desire to retrieve the relationality of body and soul, body and Holy Spirit, that is inherent in our tradition but often gets neglected in favor of intellectualism, a striving to transcend bodily reality, and preferential development of theologies such as Christology and soteriology above pneumatology. It is for theologians who are interested in theological aesthetics and art, specifically dance, as a source of embodied theology and revelation. The work is also for dancers who desire to express in writing what they know at a body soul level, and who are seeking new ways of connecting to the transcendent through dance as theology and theology as dance.

The creation of a pneumatology of the body is a rooting or re-membering of the Spirit and our own spirit in incarnational—skin and bones—reality that includes us in Trinitarian perichoresis. Re-membering has become a significant theological term used by William Cavanaugh, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Shawn Copeland, Marcia W. Mount Shoop. For Copeland

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<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the mystical work of Marguerite Porete. Charles Crawford, ed., *A Mirror For Simple Souls: The Mystical Work of Marguerite Porete* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990).



and Cavanaugh, re-membering is used as a re-unification of marginalized, physical bodies back to the Body of Christ. D'Angelo re-members Jesus as a prophet within a prophetic tradition and movement of other prophetic women and men.<sup>3</sup> Shoop uses re-member to mean reconnect, reintegrate, and rejoin.<sup>4</sup> Re-member is particularly central in this work as it resonates with my own embodied experience. To re-member is to re-ground and recommit us to our roots of biblical testimonies and witnessing, to re-member movement as our beginnings before language, that body and soul are unified, and that Spirit is our through-line of relationality to everyone and everything. Re-member is also reintegrating aspects of our being that have been lost or denied to trauma, suffering, and systems of oppression. Re-membering is the rejoining of our pieces, bringing each piece carefully, lovingly, compassionately back together for healing and a recreation of the kin-dom of God. Re-membering is bridging the gaps between body and soul, human being and Spirit, and individual and collective for the creation of a pneumatology of the body.

Pneumatology of the body is dancing with the Holy Spirit in our given time and space to retrieve the dignity of our embodied inspirited selves as made in the *imago Dei*. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are not abstract concepts. We are called to live out the Spirit's gifts and fruits in our own unique bodies and souls in each relationship and in our participation in the whole of the Trinitarian perichoresis. Through dance as embodied art we can move from

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Re-membering Jesus: Women, Prophecy, and Resistance in The Memory of The Early Churches," *Horizons* 19, no. 2, (Sep 2014): 199-218. <https://electra.lmu.edu:2070/10.1017/S0360966900026220>

<sup>4</sup> Re-member is a word used by theologian, Marcia W. Mount Shoop. She states, "We re-member the Body of Christ and therefore re-member our bodies as redeemed by the promise of an incarnate God. Re-membering is reconnecting; it is reintegrating. It is rejoining body parts." I will be using her word for reconnecting, reintegrating, retrieving, and re-healing the brokenness between body and soul, body and the Holy Spirit. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *Let The Bones Dance: Embodiment and The Body of Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 10.

abstract, intellectual concepts of the Spirit to incarnational truth—our flesh and blood and our wounds and joys where Trinity dwells within and around—that is the foundation of our faith, hope, and love.

Beginning with why a pneumatology of the body is needed, I start by stating the causes of body and soul separation, then look at how our culture devalues and dehumanizes the body due to a fear of the flesh, along with examining the forgetfulness of the Holy Spirit. I also examine gaps in contemporary apologetics on the Holy Spirit that, while mentioning Spirit as relational and divine, often neglects to mention how Spirit is connected to our bodily reality as incarnations of the *imago Dei* and that Spirit *is* the embodiment of relationality. A pneumatology of the body is needed for a truly embodied theology that helps us deepen our relationship with the Trinity. Dance is the medium by which a pneumatology of the body can be expressed and performed. My theological framework is feminist theology as it mirrors and shares similarities with modern dance choreography. Feminist theology in this context emphasizes retrieval and re-membering of who we are in and with the Trinitarian perichoresis.

The prelude, “Dance as Embodied Inspired Theology,” locates dance as theology within the context of modern concert dance. I also highlight in this section African ritual dance as the foundation for modern dance, and why it is significant for us as Christians to learn from and reintegrate Spirit back into our lives. Modern dance and African ritual dance provide a framework for a pneumatology of the body for the Spirit is not seen as separate from the body nor from reality.

From setting the stage in the prelude, I move to retrieval and re-membering beginning with Act One, “Holy Spirit as Intimate Relationality and Holy Bridge.” Act One is a dance with the Holy Spirit that starts by expanding our understanding of *ruah* as multivalent. Then I discuss

how to discern Spirit in a multitude of ways, re-member Spirit and love as a unit creating holy bridges of transformation, and that Spirit indwells our very own embodied being. Act Two, “Body and Soul as Unified Whole,” then explores theological anthropology through reclaiming the intimate relationality of our own body and soul with Spirit as the Holy Bridge between body and soul, human being and Spirit. Act Two also surveys God’s transcendence as being made known in our vulnerability and woundedness; that our senses, feelings, and wounds are our embodied experiences bringing us deeper into relationality with others and the Trinitarian perichoresis. Act Three, “Movement as Language of Spirit,” provides a biblical foundation of movement as the language of the Holy Spirit by discussing ten dance derived Hebrew words, their embodied connotations, and finally expressing the dancing leadership of Miriam and Judith from struggle to subversive acts to liberation. Act Three is a re-membering that our faith is substantiated on embodied experiences, testimonies, and witnessing of Yahweh and of God incarnate through Christ in and with the Holy Spirit. In the final act, “Dancing as Theology and Theology as Dance,” I share three examples of dance masterpieces that convey how dance and theology can inform and enhance one another, Martha Graham’s *Lamentations*, Alvin Ailey’s *Revelations*, and Bill T. Jones *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land*. Dance as an art medium and example of body, soul relationality can provide a new structure and a new way of imagining theology and a pneumatology of the body; for in dance and the choreographic process, there is no separation between body and soul, body and Spirit because all are part of the dancing whole.

Overall, my contribution to how dance is a source of theology and how it can provide a framework for a pneumatology of the body, is a re-membering and re-claiming of the Holy Spirit as the relationality holding all together—the Holy Bridge—a re-membering of our foundational

belief in the interconnectedness of body and soul, and that we too participate in the Trinitarian perichoresis as part of God's dancing revelation. In a world of division and duality, the Spirit as Holy Bridge brings us back home to the core of who we are individually and collectively, while dance provides a space for honoring difference and duality together in harmony. Dance gives expression to situations and things in our lives that are challenging to grasp conceptually and intellectually, while allowing for the embodied witnessing of a person's and community's story. "Perichoretically, the Trinity is the Dance of Life in which the Spirit performs the role of empowering the never-ending communion and relational vitality that is God in Godself."<sup>5</sup>

### **Why a Pneumatology of The Body:**

Our Catholic tradition is founded on Trinitarian perichoresis, incarnation, and our earthly reality as part of God's revelation. From early Christian followers to theologians today, all have wrestled with the interconnection of body and soul, language describing the Holy Spirit, and giving words to revelatory witnessing of the unconditional, overwhelming, awe-inspiring love of God. However, the Enlightenment, specifically the shift from classical thinking to Cartesian metaphysics, brought a turn to the subject and an emphasis on mind, reason-based truths over communal and embodied ways of knowing. The turning to the subject and mind over matter was cause for incredible ripple effects of change in a multitude of ways.<sup>6</sup> One of the most impactful

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<sup>5</sup> Mark I. Wallace, "Spirit," in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 251.

<sup>6</sup> The Enlightenment, in this context, refers to the shift from classical medieval philosophy that began with God and the outer world in order to understand human existence, to Descartes' philosophy that begins with the individual subject using their reasoning mind to understand human existence. Descartes' work was further expanded upon by Hume who completely rejected the idea or possibility of God, which in turn meant a loss of the *imago Dei* or the sacredness of being human and the interconnectedness of body and soul. The Holy Spirit in this framework has no

effects has been the disconnection of body and soul and communal versus individual well-being. The individual became their own god and other bodies were objectified and abused, particularly those who did not and have not fit societal, religious norms. The Holy Spirit's mystery, joy, and movements lost to the need for certainty, provability, individuality, imperialism, and power. The Enlightenment caused a great chasm between body and soul, body and Holy Spirit, thus creating an excessively disembodied people and disincarnate, dispirited theology.

We are disembodied people, for we have embodied a fear of the flesh through our attitudes, beliefs, and actions, along with the forgetfulness that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our flesh is God's handiwork. Our flesh is our soul-filled channel for this journey in this time and space. In *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Shawn Copeland, while arguing for the self-transcendence and revelation of black female embodiment, sheds light on the "persistent *somatophobia* or a fear of flesh."<sup>7</sup> She continues to define this fleshly fear as stemming from distorted conceptions of Neoplatonism, which tended towards discomfort with the material world and mistrusted ambiguity, and fear of flesh coming from Pauline and Augustinian warnings regarding the body as well.<sup>8</sup> The impacts of having a fear of the flesh, along with dehumanizing the flesh, and disconnecting it from the soul can be seen in a myriad of ways which include: human trafficking, body image alterations, religion of thinness, marginalized bodies used and abused, lack of honoring what the body needs, even knowing how to recognize when the body is asking for help, disconnection between sex and sacred sexuality, hookup culture, filling our

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reality either, for we cannot know something that we cannot observe, prove, or provide rational reasoning for its existence. For further reading on Descartes' philosophy and turn to the subject see Gary Hatfield, "Rene Descartes," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/descartes>.

<sup>7</sup> Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

bodies and minds with anything less than what we would fill a temple or holy dwelling space with. The list continues. A return to an authentic love of body and reuniting soul with body as temples of the Holy Spirit can help bring healing to so much brokenness. Copeland, writing on black bodies as sites of divine revelation, reminds us that, “The body is the medium through which the person as essential freedom achieves and realizes selfhood through communion with other embodied selves.” The body and indwelling soul, through the movements of the Holy Spirit, are the catalyst for essential freedom and realization of self in the Trinity.

Our freedom and realization of self does not only happen individually but happens in the context of community and relationality; as perichoresis shows us that each part is made whole in and with the other. Dance is the expression of freedom and realization of the full self as one body soul dances with another body soul. As a work of creation, dance moves the individual and community into wholeness, healing, and revelation; revelation as re-membering the unity of body and soul, that our differences are good and beautiful in the Creator’s eyes, and Spirit is the constant energy enlivening all, testimonies of people (dancers), witnesses (audience), space and time.

Our Catholic tradition and theology are full of wondrous works that illuminate body and soul as whole and unified in and with Trinitarian perichoresis. However, our teachings and theology are not always easily accessible, can be challenging to comprehend, and are not always taught in affective and effective ways. The Spirit is given little voice, and our bodies seem to get lost in repetitive prayers and heady homilies, theologies, and apologetics. Church doctrine and dogma, while important and necessary, can sometimes feel like a heavyweight or burden when not communicated effectively and connected back to our own flesh and bones reality. My work here though is not to critique specific church doctrine and dogma. My work is to retrieve and re-

member aspects of our tradition—body and soul as whole, body and Holy Spirit as dancing together—that have either been lost or have not been communicated effectively in mainstream Christianity. The work of many feminist, liberationist theologians have already eloquently and clearly stated concerns and criticisms regarding doctrine, dogma, and various oppressive theologies.<sup>9</sup>

However, I am critiquing contemporary apologetics for much of our apologetics still leave holes and gaps between body and soul, human being and Holy Spirit. My main concern is that contemporary apologetics have an impact on what is being communicated to Christians and non-Christians alike, and without a re-membering of body and soul as unified, and that the Holy Spirit is integral in our everyday lived experience, we are missing the foundations of our faith and what makes Christianity unique. In researching and reading contemporary apologetics, arguments are made for the divinity of the Holy Spirit against specific Christian denominations who deny the Spirit as part of their doctrine, along with pneumatologies that site the history, fruits, gifts, sins, and importance of Spirit proceeding from God and Christ. A history of pneumatology is important, but the application of the doctrine of Spirit to our lived experience becomes lost. Also, even though the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit, along with the sins against

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<sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth A. Johnson for language of God, symbols and connection with speech, how to connect feminism with classical wisdom, and feminist methodology in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. See Serene Jones for demystifying patriarchy, five faces of oppression, and definition of feminist theology in *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*. See Tina Beattie for body's grace, incarnate hope, sexuality as gift, and body as microcosm of universe in *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theology*. See Marcella Althaus-Reid for sexuality and theology, gender identities, and liberation theology in *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics*. See Clifford for an introduction to feminist theology, biblical formation, social location and intersectional work, gender binaries in *Introducing Feminist Theology*. See Kwok Pui-lan for postcolonial feminism, reimagining epistemology, deconstructing universalism, “re-signifying gender, re-queering sexuality, redoing theology,” in *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*. See Rita N. Brock for redefining familial structures, redefining sin and grace, critique of patriarchy, and reimagining Eros in *Journeys By Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*.

the Holy Spirit, are listed and defined, only one article discussed Spirit's interconnection to our bodily realities—at certain points the spirit of God is the soul of a person.<sup>10</sup> If we believe in the *imago Dei*, then is not our soul and body the spirit of God always? The Spirit is argued for being personal and divine,<sup>11</sup> in relation to God and Christ. Yet, the personal and relational aspects of Spirit in connection with being human become relegated to gifts, fruits and the simple imagery of a dove or fire. The relational aspects of Spirit are much more expansive, which I will discuss further on in this work. One important relational aspect to mention here is that of our body. Our body as inspirited flesh is missing from the conversation and dance with Spirit. There is still an undercurrent of fear of the flesh that keeps us from connecting our own incarnational, inspirited reality to the dance of the Trinity, for we tend to fear what we do not understand, and our bodies and the Spirit are quite mysterious and ambiguous at times.

Contemporary apologetics on Spirit, also heavily reference the New Testament for their arguments while only sparsely referring to the Hebrew Bible for sources of Spirit's validity. While I recognize the importance in using New Testament hermeneutics to argue for Spirit as divine, relational, and proceeding from God and Christ, I find it problematic that the depth and breadth of Spirit language within the Hebrew Bible is not taught or used in such arguments more. The Spirit being God is what creates form from chaos and is the life-breath within each of us. The Hebrew Bible is full of words and stories symbolizing and expressing Spirit as relational through what we as Christians profess as the gifts of the Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord or fear of Yahweh. Examples of each abound in

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<sup>10</sup> J. Forget, "Holy Ghost: The Third Person of The Holy Trinity," *Catholic Answers*, no date, <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/holy-ghost>.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Staples, "The Divinity of The Holy Spirit," *Catholic Answers*, March 1, 2008, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-divinity-of-the-holy-spirit>.



Proverbs, Psalms, Job, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, and Sirach; to name a few, Proverbs 4:5-7, Ecclesiastes 2:12-14, Isaiah 28:29, Job 4:6, Sirach 10:26-27 (NRSV). I also argue that the stories of Ruth and Esther are filled with profound examples of women embodying the Spirit of Yahweh to save their people. The Spirit is our everyday living and breathing. By examining the Hebrew Bible's embodied and movement-oriented words, as well as the people's embodied expressions of Yahweh, we can begin to understand the Spirit in broader, multivalent terms.

As Christians, specifically Catholic and Protestant, we have forgotten the incredible power of the Spirit in leading us closer to the enjoyment and fullness of our humanity and of our joy and unconditional love in and with the Trinity. Our love of the Trinity is made known when we claim our truest identity and relationality as part of perichoresis for we glorify God in our humanity. "The glory of God is humanity fully alive!"<sup>12</sup>—all of humanity and all of creation. Unfortunately, not all of humanity is fully alive. What would happen if we healed and mended the brokenness (split) of body and soul with a re-remembering of the Holy Spirit individually and collectively? If we re-remembered that our soul encompasses our body, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that the Trinity dwells in our being—including every particle and cell in our body—how would we care for our own being differently, and how would we see and care for those around us? What transformative impact would this have? What divine presence would be reflected, and glory of God performed? Dance as embodied inspirited movement expressing the relationality of Spirit, can shine light on contemporary apologetics and theology by bridging the connection of Spirit with our own incarnational realities in more concrete and embodied ways, so

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<sup>12</sup> Molly T. Marshall, *Joining The Dance: A Theology of The Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 103.

as to offer a pneumatology of the body that supports people in deepening their relationship and participation in Trinitarian perichoresis.

### **Feminist Methodology, Key Dancers, and Terminology:**

A pneumatology of the body using dance as the framework is grounded in feminist theology that dialogues with concert dance. Feminist methodology, similar to the choreographic process in dance, provides the space to question, retrieve, recreate, and reimagine. Feminist theology is the inquisitive process of questioning power, sex, gender, race, and societal constructions. By seeking to understand the depths of layers and spaces of exclusion, feminist theology also reveals, uncovers, and discovers what has been oppressive and denied those on the margins. Feminist theology questions power dynamics, who's body matters and why, sex and gender constructions, what assumptions lie underneath such structures, who is being privileged, and who is oppressed. Feminist theology seeks to bridge gaps, reveal unjust systems of oppression, and retrieve what has been lost to bring weary souls back to rest in God's unconditional loving embrace.

Feminist methodology begins with a moment of experience. The moment of experience may be an insight, a questioning, or a curiosity of concern. A moment occurs that awakens one to an inequality or a dissonance within a text, tradition, practice, or system of thought. Feminist theology is the movement between worlds, of what has been, of what is missing, and what can be. As a foundational theologian on feminist methodology, Elizabeth Johnson provides a detailed framework for doing feminist theology in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*.

Feminist theology engages in at least three interrelated tasks: it critically analyzes inherited oppressions, searches for alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new interpretations of the tradition in conversation with women's lives.<sup>13</sup>

The risk of a new interpretation of the tradition within this work is using dance as a framework for doing theology to highlight it as a source of revelation, and a way to retrieve the body and soul as a unified whole rather than two separate entities or subjects. Professional dance and the choreographic work of Bill T. Jones, Alvin Ailey, and Martha Graham offer exquisite, transformative examples of how dance is an embodied medium that continually risks new interpretations of life and Spirit, that include various embodied experiences moving together to create a dynamic, embodied, dancing theology. A dancing theology with the Holy Spirit can enhance our lives by reminding us who we are as we participate in Trinitarian perichoresis.

Perichoresis is the interplay and movement of the Trinity, the relationality of God, Christ, and Spirit. Perichoresis expresses the uniqueness of each and how each are continuously moving in relation to the other. The uniqueness of each does not negate that all are one in the same God. Molly T. Marshall, a professor of theology and spiritual formation, describes perichoresis in *Joining the Dance: A Theology of The Spirit* as,

Perichoresis depicts a relationship of mutuality in which persons draw their identity from being related to others. It is an ecstatic dance in which the Trinitarian persons literally “stand outside themselves” as they evoke the life of their divine counterparts. It is movement, an interplay of self-giving that calls forth reciprocal sharing of life. Perichoresis “grasps the circulatory character of the eternal divine life.” This delightful divine choreography, which calls forth and deepens relationship, has implications for our dynamic self-understanding in the community of creation.<sup>14</sup>

Marshall and Catherine LaCugna both seek to bring in the human person into the relational self-giving perichoresis. I am also engaging perichoresis in such a way as to bring human persons into perichoretic dance as a re-membling of who we are in and with God. As I see it, it is the

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 30.

<sup>14</sup> Molly T. Marshall, *Joining The Dance: A Theology of The Spirit*, 7.

human person in their fullness, body, soul, and Spirit that is continually dancing with the Trinity on a daily, moment to moment basis. While Marshall and LaCugna, along with other theologians, use the word dance and language of dance as a metaphor to express the complexities of the Trinity, I see the value of exploring and expressing dance as theology in concrete, body terms by using examples of concert dance that can provide visual, kinesthetic experiences of what pneumatology and theology seek to describe. The divine perichoretic dance is an invitation for us to be in communion and relation with each aspect of the Trinity and with one another.

Marshall quoting LaCugna states,

The divine dance is indeed an apt image of a person in communion: not for an intra-divine communion but for divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it. The one perichoresis, the one mystery of communion includes God and humanity as beloved partners in the dance.<sup>15</sup>

Since body and soul are inextricably linked in the dance of divine life, the Holy Spirit as mover of the soul must be reclaimed as equally crucial within the Trinity, not as other or less than God and Christ. The Holy Spirit is fire of passion and moves within all of creation. The Holy Spirit is breath of life, grace, and wisdom. The Holy Spirit is also the creative life force and energy of atoms moving from chaos into form and back again. There are no words or complete adequate theologies to express the depth and complexities of the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Herein lies the beauty of Spirit for providing “boundary-crossing space...and new energy for faithful living.”<sup>17</sup> The Spirit in and through God and Christ guides our actions and our lives if we are open and willing to be moved into the fullness of God’s promise of new life.

God not only reveals God’s self through Christ and Spirit, but through our own body and soul being, our very existence. Anthropology is the study of the nature of human existence i.e.,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Mark I. Wallace, “Spirit,” in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 241.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 241.

origins of humanity and what it means to be human, how is human nature connected to life and nature itself, and what is the relationship of humanity to ultimate reality. Copeland succinctly describes theological anthropology as “seeking to understand the meaning and purpose of existence within the context of divine revelation.”<sup>18</sup> Our bodies and souls as the *imago Dei* are in constant relation with divine revelation.

The body, at a micro-level, is made of matter, thoughts, beliefs, characteristics, a human being within a given time and space, with the ability to reason. The human body feels, knows, reasons, reflects, and envisions, which then allows for cognitive action. Being human is “reflecting the image of God and grappling with the burden of that reflection in everyday life.”<sup>19</sup> Body and being human includes freedom and responsibility, identity and alterity, time and memory. Our bodies are made of the same material reality as the cosmos. Therefore, the body is intertwined with all of creation and is also interconnected to a specific community, historicity, and specific cultural conditionings.

Drawing on the work of Gerardus van der Leeuw, Kimerer LaMothe describes the body as movement. “Every human being is a body moving. Its movement is its life.”<sup>20</sup> Body is movement. All bodies, even those considered dis-abled or resting in a coma, are bodies moving and are therefore part of life and part of the Trinitarian dance, for a biological dance within them still exists. There is constant movement within the body from a beating heart to neurons firing, from the tiniest bacterial organisms breaking down food to oxygen being filtered through the lungs—the body is movement. The movement, the source of life for the body in Christianity is

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<sup>18</sup> Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Human Being,” in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 79.

<sup>20</sup> Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Between Dance and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2004), 182.

the soul. When movement ceases so too does life, for the body and soul are inextricably linked and body and soul is how we experience God's self-manifestation.

Revelation is God's self-manifestation. God's full revelation to humanity was made manifest through the life and body of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, and continues to be manifest in our lived experiences and through participating in the Eucharist. God's self-manifestation or revelation also moves through our hearts and beings every day. God is in constant relationship with God's people through the movement of the Spirit. Also, God's daily revelations are possible when we but slow down, become more aware, more attuned to our bodies, and therefore to our soul's longings—longings that are part of God's self-manifestation in and for our lives.

We experience God's revelation through body and soul, through our embodiment. In describing embodiment, the work of Kimerer LaMothe is helpful here. As a dance and religious studies scholar, LaMothe draws on the theological and phenomenological work of Gerardus van der Leeuw to disconcert notions that dance is somehow inferior in the study of religion, and I would add subordinate to theological discourse. LaMothe states,

Bodily movement is the medium in and through which human beings do everything that they do—think, feel, work, create, and pray. A body is present in all moments of life, in all processes of life, registering the passage of time, the passing through space. Dancing, then by displaying a body in motion, displays the medium in which all manifestations of human life—all thoughts, emotions, and actions—occur. In doing so, it connects all persons in any given society as members in and through the range of individual tasks and activities their bodies perform. The process of being and becoming body is a condition which all humans share.<sup>21</sup>

Embodiment is movement, and it is also performative. Performative, in this context, are intentional choices; who we are choosing to be, what we are choosing to express, as well as hide in our daily lives. Copeland provides a concrete example of embodied performativity when

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<sup>21</sup> Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Between Dance and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies*, 182.

discussing Jesus and gender performance. “Through his preaching and practices, living and behavior; Jesus performed masculinity in ways that opposed patriarchal expressions of maleness.”<sup>22</sup> Jesus made intentional choices with his entire being by living out each moment from Eros as an embodied example to follow. We make daily performative choices by the ways in which we live, move, and have our being in the world. Our embodiment is the daily dance of life where we can make purposeful choices for a flourishing, joy-filled life that leads us and others from potentiality to actuality, from enslavement to liberation in the Trinity.

Defining and reimagining the words perichoresis, body and soul, anthropology, body, embodiment, and revelation sets the stage for a dancing theology. I am risking a new interpretation of a pneumatology that includes the body and arguing for a performative anthropology that is grounded and framed in dance. Our tradition and faith are founded on movement and the revelation of God through flesh and bones.

### **Prelude – Dancing Theology as Interdependent Arising:**

Dance as an embodied theology is a flourishing of life and liberation, liberation as freedom found in and with the Trinity. Dance is also a medium of interdependent arising.<sup>23</sup> Interdependent arising is the interdependence and co-creation of relationships that dance with dualities and non-dualities. In Catholicism, we honor each unique aspect of the Trinity while knowing that together they transcend their own uniqueness. In dance, each dancer is unique, but

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<sup>22</sup> Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Interdependent arising is a concept inspired by the work of Rita Gross in *Religious Diversity, What's The Problem?: Buddhist Advice For Flourishing With Religious Diversity*. She speaks on the importance of understanding how duality and nonduality work together in creating relationships based on interdependence and co-arising, that we are not separate nor are we independent from one another. Gross states, “And who I am is also partially determined by my interactions with others.” Rita Gross, *Religious Diversity, What's The Problem?: Buddhist Advice For Flourishing With Religious Diversity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 121.

all arise interdependently to create a work that speaks to and for others. Dance expresses the interrelatedness of life by bringing into harmony varying elements, paradoxes, and emotions of life. Interdependent arising is conveyed in dance as dance has the capability of enacting unity.

In *Between Dancing and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies*, Kimerer LaMothe, dancer, philosopher, and religion scholar, researches the work of phenomenologist and theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) to retrieve and reclaim dance as significant in our understanding of the divine. “Dance enacts unity,”<sup>24</sup> she states. Dance as a phenomenological practice is imaginative empathy and a medium that is willing to move between chaos and form. Within dance, there is also a suspension of intellectual judgment and ceaseless movement that occurs between reason and experience. Reclaiming van der Leeuw’s work, LaMothe maintains dance as epistemologically equal to that of words and texts.

Dance is the most universal of all the arts [including religion]...It is an expression all the emotions of the spirit, from the lowest to the highest. It accompanies and stimulates all the processes of life...To dance, one needs nothing...nothing at all except one’s own body. Man can produce for himself the rhythm which induces the body to dance...Verbal art has just as little need of material or instruments, but it needs thought which is articulated in an image. The dance is its own articulation. In the greatest simplicity, it remains constant, century after century.<sup>25</sup>

Dance has always been a constant throughout history and is an articulation of humanity and of life itself. It is in the dance of body and soul—with God, Christ, and Spirit—that creation and revelation come into being. It is in the constant individual and collective dance with Spirit as Holy Bridge that God’s self is made manifest. Dance is the articulation and manifestation of the relationship with each other and with the Trinity.

Dance and the body express the interrelatedness of life that within much of Christianity seeks to distinguish by separating the sacred and profane.<sup>26</sup> Modern dance, with its roots in

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<sup>24</sup> Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Between Dance and Writing: The Practice of Religious Studies*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.



African ritual dance, offers concrete examples of the movement of Spirit with the body and soul bringing the sacred and profane together. It is the spiraling dance of paradoxes and the complexities of life coming to peace and harmony with the Holy Spirit at the center of the dance, the energy bringing the paradoxes together. Allowing oneself to be in the dance with the Holy Spirit has the power to retrieve the dignity of the human body and the soul that encompasses it as divine for a pneumatology of the body.

Before we begin our encounter with dance, it is imperative to encounter art as a subject rather than an object. Art is multifaceted and has a life of its own to learn from and honor. In a *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*, Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu describes her encounter with a painting of *The Last Supper* by John August Swanson. Encountering the artwork as a subject rather than an object allows for the painting to share its own existence, presence, and story. The encounter becomes “a possibility that is full of mystery,”<sup>27</sup> when we but open ourselves to receive its message. She continues to describe the expansiveness that is inherent within aesthetic mediums,

It is fitting to celebrate the mingling of art and the religious in their common work of facilitating revelatory wonder-making... The idea of art's role of mediating revelation, by positing firstness as the artwork's individual existence, and secondness as the event whereby we are brought into contact with it, we have allowed the experience of art to have a life outside our subjectivity, thus affirming “that human knowing has a sensuous origin and engages symbolic mediation.”<sup>28</sup>

Dance as theology and theology as dance is the shared work of “facilitating revelatory wonder-making” and, whether participating in dance or witnessing dance, we are engaging in an embodied experience and embodied testimony or witnessing. Dance provides space for the expression of an individual or communal experience and a space for that expression to be heard and witnessed by a community or an audience. The individual and community move together in

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<sup>27</sup> Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*, 68.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, 69.

empathy and in the creation of “symbolic mediation.” Dance gives voice to the things in our lives that do not make sense, that are challenging to grasp conceptually and intellectually, and it allows for the witnessing of a person’s or community’s story.<sup>29</sup> Honoring dance as subject and an expression of the individual and community is therefore important as dancing theology and for a framework of a pneumatology of the body.

Dance as theology is a co-creative act and an interdependence between various processes and expressions of life, and between choreographer, dancer(s), and audience. As a medium for interdependent arising, dance can, like the Holy Spirit, provide boundary crossing space transcending dualities of individual and communal, race, class, religion, creed, gender, etc. As each person of the Trinity is honored and valued, through dance and a construction of a pneumatology of the body, we can begin to honor, embrace, and learn from one another as embodied inspirited beings arising together for the greater glory of God.

### **Modern Concert Dance & African Ritual Dance:**

In the context of this paper, modern concert dance is the medium of dance with which I will be using as my framework. Modern dance includes partnership, individual, and group movement, as well as vast creative freedom. Modern dance grapples with boundaries, convergence, time, space, people, individual experience, and cultural experience. Bill T. Jones,

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<sup>29</sup> In the article “Expanding Testimony: Dance Performance as a Mode of Witnessing in Richard Move’s *Lamentation Variation*,” Victoria Thoms pursues to engage trauma studies with dance as a medium of testimony and mode of trauma expression. She aims to suggest that “dance as a vehicle of expression provides as yet under-explored possibilities for testimony because its embodied character offers new forms of affective witnessing.” Victoria Thoms, “Expanding Testimony: Dance Performance as a Mode of Witnessing in Richard Move’s *Lamentation Variation*,” *Dance Chronicle* 42, no. 3 (2019): 322-341, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2019.1673111>

world-renowned choreographer, dancer, and social activist states, “Dance has the ability to both make sense of chaos and learn to live with chaos.”<sup>30</sup> It is the dance of our inspired bodies with the Trinity in coming to peace and harmony with the complexities and ambiguities of life. We can begin to understand how dancing with the Trinity provides a sense of harmony with the paradoxes of life by first looking at African ritual and sacred dance.

Modern dance has its roots in African ritual dance. African sacred dance is significant to discuss as a ritual because it is deeply interwoven in the history of a people in which my life has been shaped and molded, and which much of modern dance has been founded. The dance masterpieces that will be discussed more in-depth in the final act of this paper have their roots in African ritual dance. *Revelations* and *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land*, provide us with an understanding of the connection between Spirit, body and soul, individual and community through their multiplicity and integration of spirituality. Both masterworks of art, awaken the divinities within the dancers and observers, reminding us that we are all interconnected and arising together, as well as reminding us that there is dignity in our flesh and bones. Dance can be medicine.

African ritual dance is a social medicine for all worlds within African cosmology. In *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, professor of African religious traditions and noted scholar of African indigenous religions, Jacob Olupona states, “African diaspora dance...augments the sensitivities of both performers and observers, first as music and dance, then as healing medicine for life.”<sup>31</sup> African ritual dance is an embodiment of the spirits, of

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<sup>30</sup> *Dancing to The Promised Land: The Making of Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land*, DVD, directed by Bill T. Jones (New York, NY: V.I.E.W. Video Catalog, 1994), 45:03.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings and Expressions* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000).

ancestors, of knowledge, and life itself. The dance seeks to awaken the divinities within each person, performer and observer for the well-being of the community. A dancing body is seen as powerful, ingenious, wise, and healthy. The dancer is initiated into the sacred dance and learns the rituals, ceremonies, chants, and music of the people.<sup>32</sup>

African ritual dance is not only essential for the well-being of the community and the self, but it is also critical in providing knowledge, creating philosophies, and integrating self with Greater Self. The dance, coupled with music and chanting, is dynamic, transformative, and evolutionary. There is an understanding of multiplicity and integration that occurs within the dance that mimics life itself. Stories of the people, their creation narratives, and calling on ancestors and deities are woven into each ritual dance. The body in motion supports the community in interpreting events and actions. The dancer(s) are the link between the living, the ancestors, and their deities. African ritual dance is for the betterment of every level of being within their cosmological understanding and framework.

Dance as social medicine and a medium for grappling with boundaries and experience through African ritual dance supports a dancing theology. Through African ritual dance, we as Christians, can learn to embrace and live with the grey areas and mysteries of life. We can also learn to embrace and re-member that our faith is circular and not linear, or at least a spiral that dances with Spirit towards actuality. Modern dance and African ritual dance provide a

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<sup>32</sup> Upon her travels to Haiti, Katherine Dunham<sup>32</sup> was not only welcomed into the Haitian community but was initiated into sacred dance rituals of a particular community. Before her initiation into sacred dance, Dunham knew that the only way she could truly understand the dances was to first engage with the people in their daily lives; for the Haitian people, their everyday life, spirituality, and dances are intimately linked. She states about the Haitian community, “The people are able to shape their own way of being, their own sense of self, on their own terms, and that is what dance is about.” *Free to Dance: A Three-Hour Series on African American Dance*, DVD, co-produced by The American Dance Festival and The John F. Kennedy Center For The Performing Arts (New York, NY: PBS, no year), 45:00.

framework for a pneumatology of the body because the Spirit is not seen as separate from the body nor from reality. The Spirit is the Holy Bridge allowing for the creation of embodied epistemologies, performative anthropologies, and the integration of self with Higher Self, or in Christian terminology, body soul with Trinity.

### **Act 1 - Holy Spirit as Intimate Relationality and Holy Bridge:**

As dance is a container for interdependent arising, the Holy Spirit is the energy and movement of interdependent arising. The Holy Spirit is the Holy Bridge between body and soul, individual and communal, and being human with Trinity. Beginning a pneumatology of the body begins by dancing with Spirit's foundational biblical element, *ruah*. *Ruah* has many meanings in the Hebrew Bible, divine spirit, wind, and breath. In "Spirit, Wind, or Breath: Reflections on the Old Testament," Andrew R. Davis, theologian and associate professor of the Old Testament, makes two arguments concerning the word *ruah* and its association with Spirit. The first is *ruah* as the source and spark of human life. The Spirit of *ruah* animates our beings and all of creation. Secondly, *ruah* is the active agent or rather energy continually moving and empowering humanity towards God's divine will.<sup>33</sup> Through Davis' associations of *ruah* as source, energy, and divine agency, he then connects *ruah* with multivalence, for Spirit is multivalent. Davis argues that the two words commonly associated with *ruah*, wind and breath, do not offer us an expansive or a deeper understanding of the meaning inherent in the Hebrew word. There is a problem when we conflate Spirit with wind and breath. I would argue the same when we conflate Spirit with a dove; that makes Spirit intangible and separate from our earthly realities and bodies.

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<sup>33</sup> Andrew, R. Davis, "Spirit, Wind, or Breath: Reflections on the Old Testament," in *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*, eds. Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2017), 66.

By understanding Spirit, *ruah*, as multivalent, we open ourselves up to the multiple ways that Spirit speaks, moves, and lives with and in us. Dance can enliven the word *ruah* by providing a more extensive understanding and experience of Spirit that goes beyond wind, breath, and dove. Dance is a concrete example of multivalence.

Reclaiming Spirit as multivalent and re-membering Spirit as part of our fleshly embodied experiences allows for an ever expanding and deepening relationship with the Trinity. Seeing and knowing Spirit as multivalent means that we can experience God in a multitude of ways in unexpected people, spaces, and places. “The Spirit provides boundary-crossing space where...new energy for faithful living can be found.”<sup>34</sup> The Spirit calls us to the thresholds of life awakening in each of us a holy unique path that is our dance with and in perichoresis. The thresholds of life are the spaces and places that draw us out of our comfort zones and contentment to be agents of God’s love. Each threshold and path are unique, nonetheless we are called to trust the Spirit in guiding our footsteps. How do we come to know Spirit as our guide leading us through multivalent reality to transcendence? In *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, theologians have danced together to discern the markings of the Spirit in our lives.

The six aspects of discerning Spirit are: prophetic, performative, particular, processual, paradoxical, and primordial. The Spirit is prophetic as we are transformed through Trinitarian love, resurrection, and renewal of our flesh, and then inspired to be instruments of liberation and justice. The Spirit is performative simply by the mere fact that Spirit acts and enacts in and through us. She is particular for she is always shedding “light upon a particular situation, in a

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<sup>34</sup> Mark I. Wallace, “Spirit,” 241.

particular time and a particular place. The Spirit is not an abstraction but a particularization, a realization of particular possibilities to which you and I are particularly called.”<sup>35</sup> Spirit is also processual for he calls us into an endless process and journey of transformation. The Spirit is also paradoxical for they bring energies of tension, contradictions, and dualities together into a unified form without conflating differences but rather making a new dance with each. Lastly, Spirit is primordial. Spirit is the greening of our soul, the greening of our great elemental home. “The Spirit is a primordial, earthen reality who is biblically figured according to the four primitive, cardinal elements—earth, wind, fire, water—that are the key components of embodied life as we know it.”<sup>36</sup> Each aspect of Spirit here is important when understanding dance as theology and theology as dance, for inherent in dance are similar qualities.

St. Augustine’s *De Trinitate* holds possibilities of reclaiming aspects of the Spirit connected to our bodily selves that are lost in misinterpretations and critiques of his work. Augustine declares that love is the Spirit and given by the Spirit in our hearts and in the Trinitarian relationship. Augustine establishes the topic of love and Spirit through a reading of 1 John 4: 13. He states that the role of love and the Holy Spirit are a unit, and through that unity, we can assert that God dwells in us and we in God.<sup>37</sup> Augustine concludes, “And so the love which is from God and is God is distinctively the Holy Spirit; through him the charity of God is poured out in our hearts, and through it the whole Trinity dwells in us.”<sup>38</sup> We know God through Spirit’s love in the fullness of our being and we attune to that relationality of loving God in turn.

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<sup>35</sup> Mark I. Wallace, “Spirit,” 244.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>37</sup> Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Spirit is the Holy Bridge of relational love. Love as Spirit and Spirit as love are not abstract concepts but are felt in our bodies and soulful beings. The Spirit is continually moving in and through waking us up to the glory and gift of being involved in the perichoresis of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup>

With the Spirit of love dancing through us, we are to re-member that we are tender, glorious temples of the Holy Spirit. Colleen M. Griffith, theologian and professor of the intersection of theology and spirituality, in “The Spirit and The Nearness of God,” uses the metaphor of our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit to emphasize the intimate closeness of God that draws us ever deeper into a relationship with the Trinity. Griffith focuses on the dwelling places of Spirit, mainly the body as embodied members of Christ. The Spirit has a physical dimension, and we know this through the Johannine words dwell, remain, and abide.<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting on such language, Griffith states, “It is an astonishing thing that God has chosen to live in and with us in the kind of intimate relational proximity that has given rise to the language of ‘indwelling’.”<sup>41</sup> The Spirit continually reminds us of the nearness of God in tangible embodied ways each and every day<sup>42</sup> since the Spirit is our Holy Bridge of hope, joy, and love.

Griffith continues her theological exploration of embodied Spirit by turning to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16. Paul is continually calling each of us as individuals and as community into the incarnation of the Body of Christ. “The work of the Spirit vivifying

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<sup>39</sup> Augustine continues this claim by stating that our Christology and soteriology are connected, created, held, and embraced by none other than the Spirit—Holy Spirit as Holy Bridge. Pneumatology is also that of Christology and soteriology for Spirit was and is the breath of life, moving all into being, including Christ, our own lives, and then our lives into resurrected life. We are called into movement with the Trinitarian perichoresis “with the charity that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”<sup>39</sup> Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate*, 127-128.

<sup>40</sup> Colleen M. Griffith, “The Spirit and The Nearness of God,” in *The Holy Spirit: Setting the World on Fire*, eds. Richard Lennan and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Colleen M. Griffith, “The Spirit and The Nearness of God,” 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



individual bodies binds them to others, uniting them in the experience of Christian community.”<sup>43</sup> We are individual embodied selves, and we are embodied people participating and moving in perichoresis together.

Dance is multivalent and is about relationality. Spirit is multivalent and *is* intimate relationality. Our bodies are the temples and channels for the Spirit to dance in the world expressing God’s love and for us to experience God’s love. We experience the six aspects of the Spirit through our embodied realities. I am arguing that we cannot limit Spirit to dove, fire, fruits, and gifts. Spirit is our dancing partner in life. A pneumatology of the body is necessary for the re-membering and healing of body and soul, human being and Holy Spirit. Dance as a source of theology provides concrete examples and kinesthetic experiences of Spirit moving in reality. Spirit as movement and being connected to the body as indwelling space is no longer mere metaphor but a witnessing through dance.

## **Act 2 - Body and Soul as Unified Whole:**

Our humanity, in all itself fullness including our vulnerability and fragility, is good and we re-member this by reclaiming the dignity and intimacy of body and soul, human and Spirit as inseparable. A theology of body and soul to re-member and retrieve is that of Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus is known for developing theology and defending Christianity against Gnosticism around c. 130. One belief that Gnosticism emphasized was that the soul is the only lasting part of our earthly reality. Irenaeus, however, asserted that the body is an integral whole with soul and Spirit, that the body is what it means to be a human being made as the *imago Dei*—the body with

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.

the soul is part of our lasting reality. Speaking on 1 Corinthians 2:6, Irenaeus argues that being spiritual is partaking in the Spirit with our flesh as we are, it is not “because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual. (*Against Heresies V.6.1*).”<sup>44</sup> Human flesh, the human body, is our path to growth and development in God and truly living as the *imago Dei*. Irenaeus continues in his language of the time, “But when the spirit here blended with the soul is united to God’s handiwork, the man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who were made in the image and likeness of God. (*Against Heresies V.6.1*).”<sup>45</sup> The body as physical matter is God’s creation or handiwork and is necessary to the whole of salvation.

Writing further on Irenaeus, constructivist theologians state,

Irenaeus insisted that salvation involved the whole person, including the body as well as the soul (*Against Heresies V.6*). Working from this perspective, Irenaeus argued that when Paul spoke of “spiritual” people in his letters, he was referring not to individuals whose identities were independent of their bodies, but rather to those who have subjected their bodily existence to the rule of God’s Spirit.<sup>46</sup>

The body is a unified whole with our soul and with Spirit; there is not one part of the body or one aspect of what it means to be human that is independent from the divine image, from our participation in and with the Trinity, or from salvation. For Irenaeus and myself, the divine image encompasses the whole of our being, body, mind, heart, and soul. Our theology of body and soul is a holistic one embracing all of who we are in and with the Trinity. Culturally there seems to be a resurgence of a modern-day type of Gnosticism. I have encountered several people in my work that desire to transcend their bodily realities when the opposite is true; we must learn

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<sup>44</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). V. 6. 1. Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103506.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 6. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Human Being,” 86.

to accept our bodies as the catalyst for growth and deepen further into relationship with the Trinity.

While Augustine is critiqued for his theology of the flesh and granting the intellect more epistemological authority, retrieving certain aspects of his theology suggest renewed ways of seeing and beholding the body as good, as the divine image, and our means of salvation. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is an exemplary statement of the body and soul as undivided and whole in God's handiwork. Augustine experiences the glory and light of God through his flesh, senses, and body first. He then uses his rational thinking to begin to explain his experience. His body was the catalyst for God's Spirit with and in him. Augustine becomes attuned in body and soul through the grace of Spirit infused in his being moving him into action in the world. He later argues for the goodness of the material world and for our physical bodies against the positions of the Manicheans and Pelagians.<sup>47</sup> Augustine expresses God's transcendence as paradoxically being open to and completely vulnerable in creation with us in our flesh.<sup>48</sup> God's transcendence is made vulnerable in the body and blood of Christ, by which we ourselves are intimately connected through the Eucharist. In the *City of God*, Augustine speaks of wounds and the body in connection with the wounds of Christ. Our wounds and marks will remain as Christ's have, eventually transfigured through the grace of the Holy Spirit into marks of glory representing the unconditional love and transcendence of God.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For a more in-depth historical look at what Augustine was arguing against see Ian A. McFarland, "Human Being," in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 91.

<sup>48</sup> Ian A. McFarland, "Human Being," 94.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Another aspect of Augustine's theology that incorporates the Spirit and flesh is his theology of the senses. Augustine describes the senses as the bridge between body and soul. "The sense is at the borderline between the body and the soul...it [what is impressed upon the body and soul] happens in the body, and through the body in the soul; it happens in the sense, which is neither without body nor without soul."<sup>50</sup> Our senses are the bridge between our external and internal realities. They can neither be separate from the body nor the soul, for as the soul encompasses the body and the body is a temple of the soul, our senses become the communication between the two. Augustine expresses, "Yet the soul commingled with the body perceives through a corporeal instrument, and that instrument is called sense."<sup>51</sup> We perceive through the communication of our senses in body and soul. Augustine declares that all of our senses are indeed important but makes a strong argument for knowing the Trinity through sight. We must be wary of using sight as our only means to know the Trinity though for we tend to "see" with glasses of our own desiring(s) and beliefs. The other senses are necessary to guide and inform our sight; therefore, awakening us to reality that is beyond our own. God reveals God-self through all of our bodily senses. "In revelation we are in the presence of God's act of self-manifestation."<sup>52</sup> God's act of self-manifestation is made known through our senses in body and soul. How often do we stop to reflect and discern what our senses and our body are sharing with us that can move us into deeper relationship and participation with Trinitarian perichoresis?

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<sup>50</sup> Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 191.

<sup>51</sup> St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Arthur West Haddan. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 3*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). 9. 2. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130111.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 123.

Shawn Copeland, as a critical voice on body, race, and being, continues to provide expanded theological concepts of body, wounds, senses and what it means to be human. She contends, “The body is always with us...It is the mediator of our engagement with the world. But the body is no mere object with which we are confronted: *the body is something that we ourselves are.*”<sup>53</sup> Our bodies are our memories, our wounding, our senses, our deepest desires and longings, and when we attune our bodies with our souls as temples of the Holy Spirit, we attune our lives to growth and relationship in the Trinity. Copeland continues this conversation in light of the incarnation and *koinonia*. Jesus’ body in a given time and space, along with his difference and his marks, are significant. His body, his difference, and his marks are our reminder and conviction in God becoming flesh and that we too, in our inspirited flesh, are to participate in the body and blood of Christ, to embody Christ.<sup>54</sup> The body of Christ is not just a metaphor. We truly are Christ’s hands and feet in the world. The bodies that have been most marginalized are our partners in learning about the body of Christ. “We share the body of the Lord, we become the body of the Lord,” and quoting Augustine’s guidance, “Because you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your own mystery that lies on the altar, it is your own mystery that you receive...Be what you see [there], and receive what you are.”<sup>55</sup>

To share in the body of Christ and become what we receive, it is important to acknowledge our wounds and marks—for in that space is where Spirit resides and where Jesus is calling us to rise up and come out from our tombs to unbind ourselves. Speaking on the

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<sup>53</sup> Ian A. McFarland, “Human Being,” 97

<sup>54</sup> For more in-depth theological discussion from Copeland on “Performing and Subverting Eucharist,” Shawn Copeland, “Constructive Proposal: Body, Race and Being,” in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 108-114.

<sup>55</sup> For further theological discussion on “Embodying Christ and Transformation of the Social Order,” see Shawn Copeland, “Constructive Proposal: Body, Race and Being,” 115-116.

enslavement of black women and the markings lashed on every part of her body during slavery, Copeland states that, “In order to restore her body to wholeness, the freed woman had to love her body; and to love her body meant dealing with the wounds of slavery, a slate upon which others had written.”<sup>56</sup> The body holds memories of pain, whether psychic, emotional, or physical. Particular bodies have not always been considered a part of the image and likeness of God. Our individual and communal bodies need healing and embodied rituals that provide space for expressions of grief and memories of oppression. Our freedom for healing and self-love come in the darkest depths and in acknowledging the wounding that has occurred. The freedom that the Trinity so desires for us is not separate from our bodies, nor is it separate from the communal body of Christ. When one of our brothers or sisters is hurt and grieving the entire human body grieves and moans. Through healing our own body distortions and beliefs by naming our brokenness and wounding first, then taking personal responsibility in how we have wounded others, we claim the body as dignified and sacred with the soul in and with the Trinity.

I am arguing here that dance and dance as a source of theology allows for sacred space to name and express senses and feelings. Our senses and feelings can be seen as sources and movements of the Holy Spirit pointing us to greater truths that help us deepen our relationship with the Trinity.<sup>57</sup> Dance and dancing theology also provide expressions for re-membering broken bodies, individually and collectively, ultimately leading to healing and transformation

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<sup>56</sup> Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 50.

<sup>57</sup> For further research and to understand how our feelings and senses point us to deeper truths, longings, and areas of unease that God desires to heal and provide for us see Joan D. Chittister, *Scarred By Struggle, Transformed By Hope*, (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *Transforming Our Painful Emotions*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), and Karol K. Truman, *Feelings Buried Alive Never Die*, (St. George, UT: Olympus Distributing, 2003).

i.e., freedom.<sup>58</sup> The body and soul are a unified whole and are a part of our eternal reality. Our bodies are resurrected and made whole in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Since our bodies and souls are unified and are temples of the Holy Spirit, it is imperative to care for our bodies as such by being intentional with what we put into our bodies, what we surround ourselves with, the thoughts and stories we tell ourselves, and taking personal responsibility for our choices and how they affect others. A pneumatology of the body reminds us, with Spirit as our guide, of how to care for ourselves, each other, and our beautiful planet, and it bridges the gaps between body and soul, human being and Spirit.

### **Act 3 - Movement as Language of Spirit:**

Thus far, in this dancing theology, I have discussed the Spirit as *ruah* and multivalent in reimagining and reminding us of the multiple ways that Spirit speaks, moves, and lives with us. Act One concludes with love and Spirit as a unit, and that unit of loving Spirit is the indwelling of our soul. With the embodied knowledge of Spirit, in Act Two, I reclaim the intimate relationality of our own body and soul with Spirit as the Holy Bridge. I also seek to embrace our bodily senses, feelings, wounds, vulnerability as dignified holy means of relating to others, and

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<sup>58</sup> In order to heal individually and collectively, Copeland shares the story of Baby Suggs in Tony Morrison's *Beloved* for us to find freedom in healing, proper self-love, and in naming our own brokenness. "She commands the people to love their flesh, to love their bodies, to love themselves and one another into wholeness. She names each bruised and tortured body part...Her naming re-members broken bodies, heals torn flesh. Baby Suggs prophesies deliverance of body and soul, flesh and blood, heart and mind through passionate love. To reject one's heart is to reject all possibility and power of life, of freedom, of being human." (Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 52.) Baby Suggs is arguing here for a passionate love grounded in the Eros of the Trinity, rather than distorted Eros and passionate love our culture tends to emphasize and oversexualize. Eros is our energy, breath, creative fire, and the movement of life. In essence, Eros is the Spirit embodied in being human that "enhances our capacity for joy and knowledge...that steadies us as we reach out to other bodies in reverence...and it empowers and affirms life." *Ibid.*, 65. For more on redefining Eros as embodied spirituality and how Copeland integrates this with gender performance, sex and sexuality, and post-colonialism see Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* 61-81.

to deepening our relationship and participation in Trinitarian perichoresis. By honoring our bodies and souls as sacred dwelling space of Spirit, we give testimony and witness to our embodied, inspirited experiences individually and collectively as we participate in the Trinity. Moving onward, I turn to Act Three, where our biblical foundation provides glorious examples of dance as a medium of testimony and modes of expression that include effective witnessing. Dance, body and soul, and Spirit are all intimately connected in testimonies of our biblical foundation.

Beginning the dance of re-membering our biblical witnessing, I retrieve the embodied verbs in the Hebrew Bible to express a pneumatology of the body. I am also retrieving two stories of women's dancing testimonies of leadership and liberation to highlight dance as a source of theology. As Christians, we can retrieve and re-member that the language of Spirit is movement. Movement as the language of Spirit is revealed through embodied testimony and witnessing of the biblical people. Unfortunately, we have lost much of our ancestral knowledge of embodiment to the privileging of words and power. Without the body—its senses, mind, heart, and breath—no life, no knowing of the transcendent would exist, for God reveals God-self through flesh. The biblical texts would not exist without a peoples' experience and wrestling with the transcendence in and through their lives. By retrieving specific embodied words in the Hebrew Bible, we can begin to re-member Spirit's language as movement embodied in the heart, body, and soul of people. Within the Hebrew Bible ten known verbs describe body and movement. All ten verbs, including worship and praise, have kinesthetic meanings. Movement and embodiment were critical aspects of the ancient Israelites and early Christians' lives, and therefore, important for us to reclaim for a deeper connection to the Trinity.



The embodied connotations of ancient Hebrew verbs and their inherent multifaceted meanings are lost when translated into English. Consequently, we lose the original intention and full depth of meaning that our ancestors sought to convey in their testimonies of Yahweh. The Hebrew verbs are to be embodied, to fill our senses, and inspire us into covenant with Yahweh and perichoresis with Trinity. We are to move all of our limbs in great gratitude and even in lament to our God. The depth of meaning inherent within the Hebrew verbs, as well as their roots, are not only lost in translation but also are lost in the way in which the biblical texts are “habitually and poorly interpreted and exegeted through the lens of an anti-body bias.” Nevertheless, scholars and theologians are taking a closer look at the ten Hebrew verbs that convey movement so as to expand our understanding of the foundations of our faith.

Mayer Gruber<sup>59</sup> explores the meaning of ten various dance derived verbs in the context of the Hebrew Bible in “Ten Dance-Derived Expressions in the Hebrew Bible.” The ten dance-derived verbs Gruber researches and defines include: *hagag* (dance in a circle, celebrate, procession), *sabab* (encircle, turnabout, denotes various motions of different body parts), *raqad* (skip, dance, mourn), *qippes* and *dilleg* (jump, song and dance as synonymous), *kirker* (whirl, pirouette, dervish, act of divine worship), *pizzes* (skip), *pisseah* (limp), *sala*, *siheq*, *misped* (mourning) and *mahol* (joyous dancing).<sup>60</sup> Gruber, through comprehensive research of body postures and words stated in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew, and Biblical Aramaic, seeks

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<sup>59</sup> Mayer I. Gruber is the associate professor of biblical and Ancient Near Eastern studies at Ben-Gurion University.

<sup>60</sup> Mayer I. Gruber, “Ten Dance-Derived Expressions in The Hebrew Bible,” *Biblica* 62, no. 3 (1981): 1-15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42706966>.

to establish when each verb is used in a literal manner and when they're used to express an emotion or attitude.<sup>61</sup> Gruber states,

The most important criterion for determining when a particular verb or expression is employed literally to refer to a body movement is its being juxtaposed with other expressions denoting physical acts while the most important criterion for determining when a particular expression is employed symbolically is its being juxtaposed with other abstract expression.<sup>62</sup>

I share this particularity because previous studies of the various dance derived verbs in the Hebrew bible have only been studied at an etymologic level. The comprehensive research Gruber provides gives a more in-depth and expanded understanding of the importance of movement, dance, and emotion both literally and symbolically within scripture. The ancient peoples celebrated, mourned, and expressed their lives through movement beyond the sabbath and ritual; dance was a part of their daily lived experiences in God and provided a way of embodied understanding of the multiplicities of life.

Re-membering that African ritual dance awakens the divine within performer and observer, we witness the dancing leadership of Miriam and Judith in the biblical text as awakening their people to God's love and liberation through movement. Both Miriam and Judith, through their entire being following the inner promptings of Spirit and were leaders for their people in times of dire need. Angela Yarber in *Dance In Scripture: How Biblical Dancers Can Revolutionize Worship Today*, highlights seven dancing figures within the biblical text that can help Christians today understand and embody their faith even more. Yarber poignantly states that the stories of dancing women and women in leadership, while part of our canon, are most often lost in the cervices of the lectionary, in worship, and in leadership. Dance and liberation are inextricably relational within our tradition, but like the body, "is often neglected or ignored in

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 3.

Christian worship so too are the biblical texts that describe the importance of the body in worship.”<sup>63</sup> I would also add that dance and liberation are often neglected as being inextricably relational in theological discourse as well, for dance is a lived reality not a mere metaphor.

Judith’s dance is a dance of subversion. The book of Judith is about a woman who subverts all roles placed on her in order to save her people. Judith, a widowed woman, decides to perform and embody a new norm by becoming a leader that the religious men at the time were not willing to take on. Once Judith returns to her people with the severed head of her enemy, the women come out to greet and honor her with dancing, as they would have danced and celebrated their victorious men who came back from battle.<sup>64</sup> Judith takes the lead and all of the women and men follow her in song and dance. She followed the Spirit’s promptings and was willing to lean into the subversive acts that were needed to free her people without question.

Miriam’s dance is a dance of leadership and liberation. She is a reminder for all of us to take up song and dance amid oppression and darkness to reconnect with the movement of Spirit within. Yarber states while also quoting Mirkin in *The Women Who Danced*,

Miriam’s dance is her prophecy. “A prophet in the Jewish tradition is a messenger who brings God’s will to the people. Miriam’s message was coded in her timbrel. ‘Dance, sing!’ The music cries out, ‘Do what finds favor in God’s eyes. When there is a choice of life and death, choose life. At awe-inspiring moments, celebrate the moment, be grateful for it, find the blessing in it and recognize God in our celebration!’” At a moment when Miriam witnessed both freedom and oppression, liberation and bondage, joy and sorrow, death and life, she chose to dance. She chose to pause and create a ritual...proving that God’s joy cannot be contained.<sup>65</sup>

Miriam was called prophet before Moses and showed her people the way of celebration in the midst of oppression. She embodies the Spirit of courage and hope, while Judith embodies the

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<sup>63</sup> Angela Yarber, *Dance in Scripture: How Biblical Dancers Can Revolutionize Worship Today*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Angela Yarber, *Dance in Scripture: How Biblical Dancers Can Revolutionize Worship Today*, 78.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Spirit of resistance in her role reversals and standing for justice. Both lead their people to liberation through song, dance, and ritual.

Beyond dances of celebrations and liberation, we also know the embodied experiences of lamenting, crying out, and rage. We witness embodied lament in the book of Job and Lamentations. We also experience embodied lament in the women weeping at the foot of the cross, and Jesus himself lamenting his forsakenness to his Father. The book of Job, Lamentations, and Jesus passion offers embodied testimonies of such agony and grief that are oftentimes challenging to express fully. During my dark night of the soul, Lamentations gave voice to the anger, rage, and betrayal I had felt from life and God. Both Lamentations and Job reminded me that I am human, that my emotions were and are valid, that it is okay to lament to God, and that at the end of the day, all I have in this life is my relationship with Trinity, nothing else. Dance gave me the sacred space to fully lament with my entire being, what I term as embodied lament. Embodied lament can be witnessed in Graham's *Lamentations* and in the dance "Fix Me Jesus" in Ailey's *Revelations*. My dance of embodied lament with the Holy Spirit moving in and through me gave rise to embodied joy and the deep knowing that God is always with me, not abstractly or metaphorically, rather God is in my lament transforming it to joy and peace—resurrecting me to new life. Lament and resurrection are a daily dance with the Trinity. We have profound moments of deep transformation, and yet, I have been encouraged and to give gratitude to the smaller, daily laments and resurrections as well.

We know the circular daily dance of lament and resurrection or revelation through the biblical text. The beauty in each biblical story is the movement of life itself. The biblical text is a continual movement of unfolding and revelation through time. We are to re-member the continuation of movement with Trinity, and the revelation that Christianity is a continual dance

of transformation and embodiment. Our scripture abounds in examples of embodied, transformative dance. Here are but a few examples: Eccl. 3:4, Jer. 31:4, Lam. 5:15, Psalm 30: 11-12, Psalm 149: 3-4, Jer. 31:12-13, Ex. 15:20-21, 2 Sam. 6: 14-17, Psalm 150:1-6, Jud. 11:34, 1 Sam. 18:6-7, Matt 11:17, Luke 7:32, Luke 15:25, and 1 Cor. 6:19-20 (NRSV). Scripture is movement. We must draw on New Testament hermeneutics for our theologies and apologetics, but it is also important to honor and incorporate wholly the Hebrew Bible, as it is our foundation and the foundation of Christ.

I am stating that the ten Hebrew dance derived words as embodied connotations, and the multiplicity of emotional expressions to Yahweh, offer a pneumatology of the body that orients our realities and experiences with the movement of Spirit. The Spirit is continually dancing through our embodied inspirited selves—flesh, bones, heart, and soul—bringing us into Trinitarian perichoresis. Our bodies are expressions of the divine and draw us into communion with Yahweh. Judith and Miriam are sources of dancing theology for they perform subversive and liberating acts that transcended societal and religious norms, as well as reminding us to take up our dancing in celebration with what the Trinity has done in our lives. Dance and theology, while wrestling with important questions, are also to remind us of the joy we can experience when dancing with the Trinity.

### **Final Act - Dance as Theology & Theology as Dance:**

The dancing Spirit as seen in the biblical text and as the Holy Bridge between body and soul, individual and community, awakens and enlivens us through creation and creative acts. Dance and theology are both creative acts seeking to perform and give expression to our multifaceted lives, questions, emotions, and longings, as well as our pursuit in the understanding

of God and our relationship with God. Dancing theology can be witnessed in the masterpieces *Lamentations*, *Revelations*, and *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land*. In various ways, each dance masterpiece evokes “revelatory wonder-making” and are embodied examples of a pneumatology of the body. Each piece can be experienced and found online.<sup>66</sup> As Robert Battle, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, fervently notes, “The power of *Revelations*, the power of dance to bring us together, the power of art is that it celebrates our common humanity.”<sup>67</sup> Dancing and witnessing dance have the power and capacity to remind us of our shared humanity, and in each of the following pieces, have the ability to bring us closer to the transcendent through our embodied experience together.

Martha Graham, 1894-1991, is considered one of the founding mothers of modern dance in the United States. Prior to American modern dance, dance was either for escaping reality to the ethereal world of ballet or it was for pure fun and laughter as seen in vaudeville acts—both of which were important for the historical time period they were created in. However, Graham, the revolutionary she was, wanted to question and express the inner aspects of what it means to be human. Graham was a trailblazer for American modern dance. She danced barefoot on stage rather than wearing ballet shoes and her movements were her own. Graham's movement came from her emotions and embodied experiences, rather than from the balletic fairytales with specified, rigidly constructed movements of the time.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Martha Graham's “Lamentations” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-lcFwPJUXQ>  
Alvin Ailey's “Revelations,” - <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/revelations>  
Bill T. Jones' “Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land,” - <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/bill-t-jones-a-good-man-about-the-documentary-film/1863/>.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Battle. <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances-tickets/ailey-all-access>.

<sup>68</sup> For a more expansive understanding of the importance and significance of dance history in the United States see Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

In 1930, as Graham crafted and honed her movement vocabulary, she choreographed a piece that was to be the embodiment of grief as a way of expressing the feelings of the people during the Great Depression. *Lamentation* soon became a masterpiece and stood in stark contrast to the ethereal qualities that ballets so often portrayed. Graham wrapped herself in a long tube of fabric that represented grief itself with her movements being sharp and angular. The entire piece was performed sitting on a bench in the middle of the stage. Upon seeing Graham's original performance of *Lamentation* one woman remarked, "*Lamentation* enabled her to grieve, as she realized that grief was a dignified and valid emotion and that she could yield to it without shame."<sup>69</sup> What a revelatory gift and grace for this woman to experience her grief as dignified and valid through embodied witnessing of dance. Through Graham's dance and testimony of grief as a "dignified and valid emotion" several other variations on *Lamentation* have been choreographed to support people in times of unprecedented grief, fear, and trauma. *Lamentation Variation* was a collective dance work done after the tragedies of September 11 to give voice to feelings, experiences, and the chaos felt nationwide. As I am writing, we are in the thick of the COVID19 global outbreak, and I wonder what variations of *Lamentation* will be created to make sense of the mess, chaos, and devastation we all feel in this time of considerable uncertainty. Dance with the Spirit, in a pneumatology of the body, has the power to heal and bring us together in our shared humanity for healing and transformation.

Another dance masterpiece that highlights our common humanity by using African spirituals is Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. *Revelations* is a masterpiece that "remains a powerful ode to the resilience of the human spirit."<sup>70</sup> Alvin Ailey, a Baptist, social activist, and dancer from

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<sup>69</sup> Martha Graham Dance Company, *Lamentation* portfolio, <https://marthagraham.org/portfolio-items/lamentation-1930/>.

<sup>70</sup> Jen Peters, "The Magic of Revelations," *Dance Magazine*, December 2017.

1929-1989 created *Revelations* amidst the Civil Rights era. The piece was first performed in 1960. Judith Jamison, former artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, shares, “Alvin was making a statement about African American cultural experience...It was a brave action. Civil rights were roaring, and our protest was our performance.”<sup>71</sup> Ailey loved the African spirituals he heard at church every Sunday and was inspired to create *Revelations* out of his inspired embodied experience for the betterment of his community and people.

*Revelations* takes one from struggle and surrender to revelation. Seven dances collectively make up the piece: ‘I Been Buked,’ ‘Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,’ ‘Fix Me, Jesus,’ ‘Wade in the Water,’ ‘I Wanna Be Ready,’ ‘Sinner Man,’ and ‘Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham.’ While acknowledging and honoring the context of Ailey’s masterpiece in 1960, we can still see, even today, that the dance is a story of the human condition. Battle states that, “Alvin Ailey was able to create a work about faith in God, yet it transcends religion...*Revelations* has a way of breaking through spiritual and language barriers.”<sup>72</sup>

*Revelations* has also become a powerful tool for teaching in the arts, social studies, and math, along with a way of creating a connection to history, personal experience, and to the greater community.<sup>73</sup> Ailey believed that, “Dance is a natural outpouring of what you are as a person, your culture, background, your family, your heritage,”<sup>74</sup> and I would add your spirit. *Revelations* continues to speak to minds, hearts, bodies, and souls today. The Ailey company has started a dancing movement for those to express their feelings surrounding COVID19 by posting dances online using the #MyRevelations. We surely are finding more and more ways to dance in

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<sup>71</sup> Jen Peters, “The Magic of Revelations,” *Dance Magazine*, December 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Jen Peters, “The Magic of Revelations,” *Dance Magazine*, December 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Jen Peters, “The Magic of Revelations,” *Dance Magazine*, December 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Lorna Sanders, “Alvin Ailey’s Revelations,” *Dancing Times*, October 2009.



Trinitarian perichoresis through tragedy and devastation that leads us to God's self-manifestation by sharing our grief and our joy in the community of dance, a dancing theology.

Bill T. Jones, the third master choreographer in this work, is an American dancer, author, and founder/director of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. He has created over 100 works of art and is an advocate for education and the performing arts as the artistic director of New York Live Arts. Jones's masterpiece, *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land*, was first seen on stage in 1991. One reviewer states, "The work does not take on the race/gender/class issue in a formulaic way, but instead presents it as a large tapestry of spectacular movement and outspoken individual expressions, showing the greater interrelatedness of seemingly separate struggles."<sup>75</sup> Another reviewer writes, "Jones' dance is a work of intelligence and commitment whose radical aesthetics confront the audience. Jones' "Promised Land" is the body, freed from the prejudices that sometimes seem society's currency."<sup>76</sup> Jones' piece is the brilliant weaving together of sexuality, gender, class, history, experience, and individual and cultural stories. The dance deconstructs societal and religious norms by asking questions about freedom and liberation. Jones asks questions regarding the nature of faith, slavery, freedom, what it means to belong, what we make of loss and chaos in our lives, and finally, what the body reveals about each.

The dance also confronts Jones' Christian upbringing as it was used in the justification of slavery and the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. Jones explored his own crisis of faith when his partner Arnie Zane died of AIDS, along with discussing and celebrating the freedom of

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<sup>75</sup> Terry Brennan, "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land," *Chicago Reader*, March 19, 1992. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/last-supper-at-uncle-toms-cabinthe-promised-land/Content?oid=879366>

<sup>76</sup> For a more in-depth analyses of Jones work see the journal article by Jon Erickson, "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin by Bill T. Jones; The Promised Land by Arnie Zane and Company," *Theatre Journal* 43 (1991): 379-381. Accessed April 26, 2019. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207592?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207592?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

sexual choice in the face of homophobic atmospheres. Another issue Jones addresses, and celebrates, is the role of women in the struggle for freedom and liberation. Dance is the only medium to hold the number of facets and intersections Jones is working with for such a work of art. *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land, Revelations, and Lamentation* are not texts to be read, nor are they artwork to view hanging on a wall, for dance as embodied art is to be experienced, to wrestle with, to engage in, and so too is theology.

Theology is lived experience for each of us to engage in and wrestle with as part of being in relationship with one another and the Trinity. Dance as theology in Graham's *Lamentation* is an embodied testimony that provided sacred space—with Spirit as Holy Bridge—for the witness to feel her grief, her common humanity, and feel her trauma as dignified and valid. In her incarnate vulnerability, Spirit met her where she was at to provide healing and transformation. As theology seeks to express in words experiences of struggle, surrender, revelation, and a people's story, *Lamentation, Revelations, and The Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin* are artworks speaking of Spirit through dance. Dance provides sacred space, a space without the privileging of words. Dancing theology can be a profoundly felt experience, individually and collectively, bringing one in closer union with the Trinity.

The dance masterpieces offer examples and ways of doing theology that can deconstruct, question, and then weave seemingly separate struggles into one beautiful tapestry that neither appropriates, conflates, or diminishes difference but instead honors and embraces multiplicity. A dancing theology and theology of dance can embrace us as we are in our incarnate vulnerability, without pretense and shame, coming to the "Promised Land" to dance in perichoresis together. Dancing theology is a pneumatology of the body.

## **Conclusion - A Pneumatology of the Body Through Dancing Theology:**

In conclusion, dance embodies and provides a framework for a pneumatology of the body. Body and soul move together as a unified whole with Spirit as Holy Bridge between our individual body and soul moving with other unique body and souls, while also dancing in and with the Trinity. Dance, similarly to Spirit, can be prophetic, performative, particular, processual, paradoxical, primordial, and is an art medium whose instrument is the body and soul. Dance is multivalent in that each person will express, experience, and interpret dance from their own embodiment. Dance is prophetic in that it can be transformative and provide a space of healing and renewal. As the Spirit acts and enacts, so too does dance. Dance is purely performative with individual bodies performing to create one unified piece. Dance is particular to the choreographer, to the dancers, and as its own entity. The Spirit meets each of us in our particularity as dance does. Dance is breath, energy, fluidity, and flow. Scripture describes Spirit in analogous ways and reminds us that Spirit is always drawing us from potentiality to actuality. Choreography is the process of creative movement of potentiality to actuality. As Spirit is paradoxical, dance embodies that paradox in reality. Dance wrestles with boundaries, convergence, time, space, people, individual experience, and cultural experience. It is the spiraling dance of paradoxes and complexities of life coming to harmony with the Holy Spirit at the center, the energy bringing the paradoxes together. There is an understanding of multiplicity and integration that occurs within dance that mimics life itself. Dance as primordial is that first dancing energy of God, the Spirit, that creates goodness from chaos. Dance and the choreographic process as an art medium can provide us with a tangible expression of what it means to participate in perichoresis and sheds light on a pneumatology of the body.

Our theology of body and soul, body and Holy Spirit, is a holistic theology embracing all of who we are in and with the Trinity. A pneumatology of the body must be the study of the Holy Spirit interlaced into the very cells of our human bodies and fabric of our everyday lives. Pneumatology of the body grounds the Spirit and our beings into incarnational—skin and bones—reality that include us in Trinitarian perichoresis. By healing our body distortions and beliefs through the grace of the Spirit and by naming our brokenness (sinfulness), our wounding and how we have wounded others, we claim the body as dignified and sacred with the soul, and we remember how loved we are. Then, with our whole being as sacred dwelling space, we move into the world to express the fullness that is the Trinitarian love.

When we learn to accept our bodies as the catalyst for spiritual growth and development, when we attune our bodies with our spirits as temples, we attune our lives to deeper relationship in and with the Trinity, with all that it means to be human—our memories, wounding, senses, deepest desires, historicity, and embodied experience. However, it does not stop there. God calls us out beyond ourselves to participate in the divine dance of relationship. When we accept our own bodies as Trinitarian vessels for love—wounds, markings, and all—we are then able to more fully embrace and honor others as holy bodies of Trinitarian love. In essence, love is the Spirit embodied in our being human that “enhances our capacity for joy and knowledge...that steadies us as we reach out to other bodies in reverence...and it empowers and affirms life.”<sup>77</sup> Pneumatology of the body is dancing with the Holy Spirit so as to retrieve the dignity of our embodied inspirited selves as *imago Dei*.

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<sup>77</sup> Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 65. For more on redefining Eros as embodied spirituality and how Copeland integrates this with gender performance, sex and sexuality, and post-colonialism see Shawn M. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* 61-81.

Dancing theology is significant because it provides a framework and a space for all the expressions, paradoxes, and mysteries of life to arise together. Dancing theology reminds us that we are unified in body and soul, and that our being human is intimately relational with Spirit. A dancing theology as a framework for a pneumatology of the body reminds us that Spirit is our Holy Bridge between body, senses, feelings, wounds, and joys, between my body soul temple and your body soul temple, and between individual and communal. By dancing with us in our daily lives, the Holy Spirit draws us ever deeper across loving bridges into communion with Trinitarian perichoresis. The Trinity is the Dance of Life in which the Spirit performs the role of empowering the never-ending communion and relational vitality that is God in Godself,<sup>78</sup> and with all of God's creation.

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<sup>78</sup> Mark I. Wallace, "Spirit," in *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*, eds. Paul Lakeland and Serene Jones (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 251.

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