It would perhaps be appropriate to begin with a brief description of the perspectives from which I will be evaluating this important work by Moltmann. First, I will be looking primarily at the implications Moltmann’s pneumatology has for Pentecostal faith and experience. The Pentecostal experience entails a certain perception of the working of the Spirit. It could be described, using a traditional theological category, as a kind of direct spiritual operation which has the character of a miracle in contradistinction to the working of divine providence. Phenomenologically, it could be best understood in the context of personal relationships. Just as human relationships admit of different degrees of intimacy, the Pentecostal experience is decidedly of the more intimate kind. This does not necessarily imply that Pentecostals are more mature believers; it simply means that they have a more focused and distinct awareness of divine presence, even to the point of familiarity (compare the familiarity of a child with its parents).

Secondly, I will be approaching the work from the perspective of an Asian Christian whose context is both similar and dissimilar to Moltmann’s. The similarity can be seen in the varying degrees to which many countries of Asia (especially the so-called Newly Industrializing Economies [NIEs]) are today experiencing the levelling effect of modern culture. But below the veneer of modernity and secularity, the basic Asian mindset remains very dissimilar to that of the West. The animistic consciousness runs deep; it shapes the every
day life of millions in many and decisive ways. To give an example, hard-driving Asian business people may freely use the technology from the West, adopt the latest management techniques and so on. But when it comes to decisions of any consequence, for instance in constructing a multi-storey office block, they will still consult a geomancer to determine where best to locate the main doors! Unlike in the West, the religious issue in a context where there are 'gods many and lords many' is not 'is there a God?' but 'who is the true God?' These perspectives are in a way self-imposed limitations. But precisely because they relate to a specific social and religious context, they have the advantage of testing the validity of Moltmann's 'universal affirmation'.

The greatest strength of Moltmann's pneumatology lies in its grounding in trinitarian theology, in particular the trinitarian understanding that grew out of the Eastern tradition. Avoiding the implication of the filioque clause, Moltmann argues for a formulation that preserves the reciprocal relationship between the Son and the Spirit as 'a fundamental principle of Christian theology' (chapter 3). Only when 'christology and pneumatology are seen in the framework of a trinitarian structure that embraces both' can the twin dangers of 'christomonism' and 'pneumatomania' be avoided (p. 72). The history of both modern evangelicalism and the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has shown that Moltmann is right. Moltmann works out the implications of his trinitarian pneumatology throughout his book and especially in chapter 11 (one of the best chapters). Here he distinguishes most helpfully the trinitarian fellowship of the Spirit from the unitarian concept. The trinitarian concept leads properly to a fellowship characterized by love and freedom, unity and diversity; it underscores the centrality of social experience. One could only wish for these programmatic ideas to be more fully developed and widely disseminated; they would provide a much needed corrective to the widespread 'pneumatomania' that still prevails in charismatic circles.

A positive consequence of Moltmann's trinitarian understanding is that the Spirit is closely linked to the entire ordo salutis, unlike traditional approaches which tend to split up and distribute the work of salvation to the different persons of the 'economic' trinity. Here Moltmann has offered a promising lead for the development of a more coherent spiritual theology, which will have special significance for Protestants whose approach to spirituality had hitherto been