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I would like to thank Professor Volf for such a clear, systematic working through of a theology of the Spirit in relation to the church. I too have been surprised that some sustained work has been done on the nature of the Trinity, particularly on the nature of God and on Christology, but little work on the Holy Spirit.

We need the Trinity. We need to be reminded of God's transcendence and holiness (separateness): God who is beyond us and more than us and who in many ways relativizes all humans. We need God's communication of who God is in Christ. We need a transcendent God who draws near in Jesus Christ. We need God who is concretely embodied – a normative standpoint. And we need to know the reality of God in the present through the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit we know that God is a living reality and not just a God of history. As Christians we need a fuller understanding of the nature of this Spirit that moves in our church and in our world, that transforms, liberates, gifts, and empowers.

While I am a practical theologian and not a systematic one, I have appreciated the clarity of Volf's work and its practical implications for the

church. I am responding particularly as a Mennonite interested in the way theology is embodied in the life of the church.

My sense is that Anabaptists have generally had some ambivalence around their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Early Anabaptists were of course very concerned about how the Holy Spirit worked in the life of the believer and in the church. For the early Anabaptists the Spirit was creative, energizing, empowering, transforming, and life-giving, and free from the constraints created by the clericalism and sacramentalism of the Protestant and Catholic churches. Yet the Holy Spirit has never been allowed to have too much freedom in the Anabaptist movement. For Anabaptist-Mennonites, ecclesiology has come to contain and define pneumatology. “Spirit and Church” are intrinsically linked. While early Anabaptists acknowledged the Holy Spirit’s work in the individual believer, empowering the person through baptism to live a life of joyful obedience, generally the Holy Spirit’s work is expressed not so much in the life of the individual but in the life of the community. I suspect that the creative freedom of the Holy Spirit with its “unpredictableness” and its “uncontrollability” produced a kind of anxiety for the early Anabaptists who were then compelled toward a more structured pneumatology, framed within the bounds of the church – an understanding of the Holy Spirit where the individual was subsumed by the corporate. Yet, as can be anticipated, this intersection of the Spirit and the church has at times created problems for Mennonites. Let me touch on a couple of examples.

Tension between the individual and the corporate: “rebirthing Persons” as a Helpful Alternative.

Mennonite emphasis on the corporate community has sometimes come at a loss of individual identity. In worship, for example, our “gathering” emphasizes our oneness, unity, and sameness – an act that may appear contrary to the recognition of our “differentness” or the “gathered in diversity” described in Volf’s paper. Perhaps this emphasis on oneness is best reflected in our singing. When singing in a worship service in Emmanuel College (a United Church college), I join the others gathered together and we sing as loud and robustly as we can. Many different voices are heard, each voice at times competing with the other voices to be heard, though usually all singing one melody. Here the Spirit is experienced as diverse and energetic. You will

seldom hear this in a Mennonite worship setting: there the voices blend with one another in harmony. We sing in tune with one another. Our music expresses an interior harmony and beauty. No one dares to stick out too much. If you can't sing to blend, the pressure is to not sing at all.

Mennonite communities are particularly reluctant to acknowledge difference and variety. To focus on our differences as persons in our communities might be considered individualistic or, even worse, self-centered. Some of this comes from Mennonite resistance to an individualized, self-serving culture. Just as the early Anabaptists found out, an individualized understanding of the Spirit can be a great threat to the community. However, I am struck here by Volf's description of the Spirit as expressed in the "rebirth of persons." There is a crucial difference between being individuals and being *persons*. The "rugged individualist" is someone who stands alone – someone able to make decisions and judgments autonomously – the looking-out-for-number-one individual. A gathered community, even a community "gathered in diversity" could hardly worship if made up of a group of individuals.

But to see ourselves first as persons (rather than individuals) born of the Spirit, is to recognize the dignity within each one of us. It is to see that all human beings have access to the abundant gifts of the Spirit. This is consistent with our understanding of the gospel and with Volf's description of the church: that the marginalized, the poor, women and men, the many colors of persons, though different from each other, are first of all persons before God. Being persons in our communities can bring tension. Sometimes we feel we must choose in our churches and communities to take sides between personhood or community. As a woman called to ministry I struggled with finding my personal voice in my community and with speaking out against the oppression and injustice I was experiencing. Somehow to speak out for yourself is to be self-centered or individualistic. In retrospect I realize that I did not know myself as a person in my community – I only knew myself as an individual. I did not know the dignity and self-worth that comes in being considered a full person within community. Here I believe is the greatest contribution of personalism or the "rebirth of persons": it is in exploring what it means to be a human person, in discovering that to *be* as a person means to *be with*. Gathering together in Christian community does not deny our personhood, but it does confront our individualism. It acknowledges that through the Holy Spirit we are empowered to be persons together.

Mennonites, discipleship and the activity of the Holy Spirit

In the Mennonite tradition, theology and practice have been integrally related in many ways because of the emphasis on discipleship that has been the central framework for the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church. Concerns for social care and responsibility, ethical living, peacemaking, and non-resistance grow out of Mennonite's ecclesiology and desire to live "openly" (to use Volf's image) out of step with the surrounding culture. Mennonites have worked hard at peacemaking, at building communities of integrity, at discipleship. Unfortunately an over-emphasis on work (discipleship, ethics, peacemaking) risks an inadequate interpretation of faith, an emphasis on human activity not tempered with the activity of God. Mennonites need a spirituality rooted in an understanding of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit to undergird their discipleship. Peacemaking must in some way be rooted in the Spirit's gracious working in human lives. It is the response to what God is doing through this working that most centrally enables discipleship and peacemaking. Loving enemies is not a natural disposition: it must be rooted in personal and communal experiences of God's graciousness so that discipleship and peacemaking is lived as a free response to a gift, not as a duty imposed by a judgmental God or by the expectations of a critical community.

In general, we have undervalued and undernourished personal renewal through encounters with God. We have relied too much on external expectations, and too little on seeking encounters with God's transformative Spirit of grace that can create disciples from within.

Worship in the Spirit

Finally, I suggest that the most important way to develop a fuller understanding of the gracious Spirit that empowers our discipleship and our life in community is through strengthening our worship life. In worship we encounter God's presence through the Spirit and experience God's holiness. In worship we confess our sins and are renewed in God's forgiveness of them. We offer God our cares and our worries, and through doing so we confess that we are safe with God. In worship we recall the stories of God's people and integrate our stories with them. In worship we encounter one another and God's Spirit moves among us, transforming us. Worship reminds us that we act out of

faith. It is through the grace and love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that we are empowered to become obedient to Christ through discipleship. Worship serves to ground our ethics, our action, our life together in the church, in the creative and sustaining activity of the Spirit.