Introduction

Miroslav Volf: One of the New Theologians

A. James Reimer

In late April 1990 I rented a tiny car in Dubrovnik, a picturesque city on the Adriatic coast of former Yugoslavia (now Croatia), and drove about eight hours north through Bosnia to a small rural Croatian town called Osijek, where I had an appointment with Peter Kusmic for the following day. Kusmic was the Director of the Evangelical Theological Institute [a Pentecostal training centre] in Osijek. Here I booked a room in the high-rise Hotel Dubrovnik, and then went out to visit Djurdja Cveticanin, her father, and her two children. On numerous occasions since 1977 I had attended conferences on the "Future of Religion" at an international University Centre in Dubrovnik, and there I had met Marinko Cveticanin, Djurda's husband. Upon hearing of my pending visit to his home town, he urged me to visit his family. Although elections were just then occurring throughout Croatia, there was no foreboding that a cruel war and terrible atrocities were imminent. I had no inkling that just two years later we would get an urgent phone call from the Cveticanin family, asking for help to emigrate to Canada, a request which my wife and I, after considerable phone calling, faxing, and letter writing, were able to accommodate.

Kusmic was wonderfully hospitable, and I heard for the first time about a young theologian from Osijek, Miroslav Volf, Kusmic's brother-in-law. Kusmic, who married Volf's older sister, was the formative influence in Volf's early intellectual and theological life, and was the first Protestant believer to graduate with a doctorate from a public university (Zagreb) in post-war Yugoslavia. Volf's Pentecostal upbringing within a Communistic social, cultural, and educational environment hostile to Christianity instilled in him strong "pacifist" convictions about what it means to love the enemy, a theme that is central to his most popular book, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

A. James Reimer is professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, and Toronto School of Theology, Toronto, Ontario.

The "New Theologians"

Volf is among a growing number of new theologians within the North American academic scene who are not afraid to retrieve classical, orthodox theological themes in new and creative ways. He is not easily classified as liberal, conservative, evangelical or radical. Nor does he fit neatly into what David Tracy in 1975 called the orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, radical, or revisionist types, or what George Lindbeck in 1984 identified as classical-propositional models, experiential-expressive models (nineteenth-century liberalism), or cultural-linguistic (Lindbeck himself, Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas). Volf is a new type. In a special issue of *Christianity Today* (February 8, 1999), devoted to these "New Theologians," (in particular Richard Hays [Duke], Miroslav Volf [Yale], Kevin Vanhoozer [Trinity Evangelical Divinity], N. T. Wright [Staffordshire], and Ellen Charry [Princeton]), Tim Stafford says the term "new" applies to these thinkers "because of their fresh approach to old issues and because they refuse to work within the paradigms inherited from their academic progenitors." The demise of the modern paradigm (in which the dominant assumptions of the liberal, scientific, rational Enlightenment reigned) means that old polarities no longer prevail and new voices, like that of Volf, can be heard. If the crowds coming out to hear theologians like John Milbank (an English theologian known for his "Radical Orthodoxy") and Miroslav Volf at recent meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature are any indication, Stafford's analysis is right. Volf is equally at home in the biblical, classical, modern, and postmodern literature, and he forges ahead, imaginatively thinking about what Christianity might mean today, not afraid to enter into critical conversation with both the tradition and contemporary culture.

Volf, a native of former Yugolsavia, has become a theological star on the international scene in the past few years. He is described by *Christianity Today* (November 11, 1996) as the "Croatian Theology Wonder," and "one of the most fertile and provocative Christian minds today." He was born in Osijek, where he continues to be a visiting professor at the Evangelical Theological Institute, was raised in Novi Sad (Serbia), is the son of a Pentecostal pastor, and received a Master's Degree from Fuller Theological Seminary and a Doctorate from Tübingen (under Jürgen Moltmann). He taught for a number of years at Fuller and then received offers from three schools: Heidelberg,

Duke, and Yale. In the end he chose Yale, where he is currently Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology.

What makes Volf's theological imagination so compelling is his ability to think and communicate on both a highly sophisticated academic plane (e.g., *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*) and a popular level about every-day existential issues. An example of the latter is his poignant little essay on child adoption, "She who truly loves" in *Christian Century* (August 26-September 2, 1998). There he describes taking his three-month-old adopted son to visit his biological mother and ten-year-old sister. The experience of meeting a mother who had given up her loved one, not for selfish reasons but because "she loved him for his own sake, and therefore would rather suffer his absence if he flourished than enjoy his presence if he languished," moved him to repent of an earlier bias against such mothers. It inspired him to re-examine his own parental attitude toward his new son: "I ought to love him the way she loved him, for his own sake, not for mine. I must not pervert my love into possession. I can hold onto him only if I let go of him" (797).

I picked Volf up at Pearson Airport at 6 p.m.We rushed to the Toronto School of Theology, where he began his public lecture at 7 p.m.; two hours later we went out to eat, then we drove for just over an hour to his hotel in Waterloo, where I picked him up at 8:30 the next morning for a day of lectures at Conrad Grebel College. I'm talking about a 36-hour lecture blitz by Volf on March 16 and 17, 2000 at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre and Conrad Grebel College. He enjoyed it but thought of it, with some justification, as being "slave driven." In the course of this day-and-a-half I heard Volf lecture publicly, share autobiographically, and engage my class. I ate with him, discussed and argued with him in my car on the way from and to the airport.

This issue of *The Conrad Grebel Review* is devoted to this two-day encounter: a) the March 16 public lecture on "The Spirit and the Church," responded to by David Demson (Emmanuel College), Clark Pinnock (McMaster Divinity College), and Irma Fast Dueck (Toronto School of Theology doctoral candidate) and Peter C. Erb (Wifrid Laurier University); b) the March 17 morning discussion of *Exclusion & Embrace* with my Pastors Theology Seminar at Conrad Grebel; c) a noon-hour public Conrad Grebel College lecture on *Exclusion & Embrace*, responded to by Tom Yoder Neufeld; and

d) an evening public lecture on "The Spirit and the Church,"also at Conrad Grebel College, responded to by Peter Erb (Wilfrid Laurier University). To help place these lectures and discussions in a larger context, let me introduce Volf's thought, raising some critical questions along the way. Any critique on my part ought to be seen in light of the high regard I have for Volf's work and theological orientation.

A Theology of Work

For many years I have offered a Pastors Theology Seminar, designed to introduce pastors and graduate students to recent theological texts. In three subsequent years we devoted ourselves to the careful study of Volf's works: in 1997-98 to his *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford University Press, 1991), in 1998-99 to *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann* (Eerdmans, 1996) of which Volf is one of the editors, and in 1999-2000 to his *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press, 1996). *Work in the Spirit*, a reworked doctoral dissertation that Volf wrote for Moltmann in the 1980s, established him as a creative, original thinker. Two influences are particularly evident in this early work: 1) his being raised in a socialist environment, where a Marxist understanding of work was ingrained in members of society through the educational system from early childhood on, and which obviously informs his analysis both positively and negatively; and 2) his Pentecostal roots, seen in the pneumatological re-interpretation of labour as an alternative to mainline Protestant views of "vocation."

The first part of *Work in the Spirit* is an analysis of Adam Smith's liberal view of work that provides the theoretical foundation for modern capitalism, and Karl Marx's socialist view that underlies the twentieth-century communist experiment. Volf judges these economic systems on the basis of three normative criteria: whether the freedom and dignity of individuals is preserved, whether the basic needs of all people are satisfied, and whether nature is protected from irreparable damage (15). Capitalism and Communism each have their strengths and weaknesses when evaluated in the light of these principles. Capitalism gives greater freedom and dignity to the individual; Marxism wants to satisfy the basic needs of all people. Both exploit the natural world and praise the subjugation of nature, although countries that have had socialist

revolutions have a worse record in this regard than capitalist countries. Both consider work as central for individual and social life, but Smith sees it as a kind of necessary evil for the progress of civilization while Marx thinks it is intrinsically valuable (here Marx is superior to Smith). Volf prefers the western democratic model of work but incorporates some insight from socialism in his attempt to combine both free market and state planning in economic activity (21).

In the second part of *Work in the Spirit,* Volf develops what he considers to be "*a new–pneumatological–theology* of work" (76), more than simply an aspect of sanctification (as in Pentecostalism) and quite different from the statically conceived vocational nature of work in traditional mainline Protestantism. He blames theologians for not paying much attention to human work, given its importance for both socialist and liberal economic theory. Building on the insights of Moltmann's eschatological theology of hope, Volf proposes that Christians see work as participation in God's new creation, in which work is transformed "toward ever-greater correspondence with the coming new creation" (83). However, like the American social ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr, Volf rejects all linear, evolutionary, and progressivist views of the new creation, arguing that we need to seek a balance between the ethical minimum of justice and the ethical maximum of love. As we shall see in discussing *Exclusion & Embrace*, here in this work we notice certain Niebuhrian moves, as when he says of love and justice: "The ethical maximum may not be zealously transmuted from regulative ideal to sacrosanct criterion. As one uses the ethical maximum to optimize structures, one must take soberly into account what is practically realizable. Otherwise one is likely to distort what is meant to be a beneficial critical instance into a tyrannical ideology. At the same time it is crucial not to set love aside as useless in social ethics" (83).

Rather than an evolutionary view of social reality, Volf proposes a kaleidoscopic theory in which "social arrangements shift in various ways under various influences (divine, human, or demonic)," and God, human beings, and nature are seen to be different factors in a global theology (85). Against those who argue for an ultimate divinely appointed annihilation of the world, in which case human activity would have no intrinsic, lasting value, Volf proposes a "*theologically grounded belief in the intrinsic value and goodness of creation*," in which human work is significant in its own right (91). Instead

of apocalyptic destruction, Christians hope for the eschatological transformation of the world (a new heaven and a new earth). Recall that Luther made a key contribution to a new understanding of work. In the medieval period work was seen mostly as means to an end (*via activa* was subordinated to *via contemplativa*), and one's type of word depended on one's station in life. In short, active work was devalued as lower in the hierarchy of values, the highest being the monastic life. Luther overcame this hierarchical approach and held that all human activity (contemplative and active, religious and secular) is of equal value and that all Christians have a special calling ("vocation"). This view of vocation became standard for mainline Protestantism; however, it was a static view (one double vocation for each Christian: a religious one [to enter the Kingdom of God] and a secular one). This static view, while an advance over the ancient devaluing of work, is not adequate for a modern society in which most people have different forms of work at different times of life and frequently are engaged in a number of jobs at the same time. A more adequate theology of work needs to be developed to address these new realities (106-109).

A pneumatological theology of work, in which work is understood in the Pauline sense of *charismata* (gifts of the spirit) does the job. Individuals have a number of gifts (or talents) and these may change over time. All are given by God and intended to contribute to the overall transformation of the world into a new heaven and a new earth. In this model, one works not primarily out of a sense of duty but in the spirit of freedom, grace and creativity. Although individuals find fulfillment in work, they are not constituted by work (as in Marx), for work and leisure alternate rhythmically in the service of the global human community and in solidarity with all of nature in anticipation of future redemption (154).

This first major published work by Volf illustrates his creative way of restating biblical and classical theological themes in a form that remains faithful to the orthodox tradition yet takes into account new situations and insights from other fields of human experience. In the words of Greg Jones of Duke, Volf has "a remarkable gift for illuminating vexing issues in theologically fruitful ways" (*Christianity Today*, November 11, 1996). However, in his globally-oriented theology, where relevance and adequacy for the full range of human experience are of critical importance, Volf sometimes too liberally accommodates

the contemporary western culture of tolerance and inclusion. This is reflected in this early work, in his rather overly benign view of western democracy, the market economy, and technology. It is understandable that, having grown up in a socialist state (although Yugoslavia under Tito was not a typical communist state: it followed its own moderate socialist path of "self-managing" socialism), Volf would be positively disposed toward greater freedom in economic activity. But it comes as a surprise when he states his basic assumption as being "that humanized work as I envisage it is best compatible with full-fledged political democracy and fairly consistent (though by no means unbridled) market economy" (169). This Niebuhrian-like defence of western democracy, especially when placed in the context of a theological analysis of work, is not without its difficulties, such as the assumptions about human freedom, individualism, social contract, and rule by the majority that underlie the western democratic project. It is not self-evident that democracy is the best form of decision-making within the church, for instance.

The other part of Volf's analysis that gives one pause is his view of technology. Technology, he maintains, has a Janus-like quality–it bears within it the possibility for either humanization or dehumanization. The Bible, he says, does not condemn technology, for in Genesis 4:17ff farmers, architects, artists, and metal workers are concrete extensions of the general blessing of work that we have in Gen. 1-3. One might ask of Volf, Isn't technology more value laden, especially in the modern period, than he assumes? Can one so easily consider ancient technologies essentially, or formally, the same as modern technologies? The late French sociologist and theologian Jacques Ellul and Canadian philosopher George Grant would argue that modern technology is a new way of thinking about the world quite distinct from ancient views, and that this modern way of thinking, of which the computer is the example *par excellance,* is not value neutral but has built into it certain questionable values (efficiency, instrumental rationality, homogeneity). Volf, on the other hand, encourages technological invention and progress to safeguard freedom and inspire creativity (184ff). The whole book might be read as a justification for modern economies with the proviso that personal freedom, development, the common good, and the natural environment be preserved.

A Theology of Embrace

The book that brought Volf to international attention was *Exclusion & Embrace*, dedicated to "Peter Kuzmic–brother-in-law and friend–who kindled my passion for theology, guided my first theological steps, and opened some doors whose handles I was too small to reach." For style alone the book is well worth reading. It is surely one of the most significant works on peace theology in recent years, and as such it is of special interest to Mennonites. My Pastors Theology Seminar, made up of about 20 pastors and graduate students, worked through it during 1999-2000, culminating on March 17 with a two-and-a-half hour intensive discussion with Volf, in which participants pushed him on questions and issues accumulated over the year. This discussion is printed below. In his introductory comments Volf gives the context out of which the substance of the book arose. This is not armchair theology. While pacifist in sentiment (although in the end he wavers), it is not a comfortable pacifism, and definitely not one written within a middle-class comfort zone. It is the product of deep intellectual struggle and severe, spiritual agony by someone whose homeland is being ravaged by an enemy. What does Jesus' call to "love the enemy" mean in the midst of pillage, burning, rape, concentration camps, and slaughter? This is the book's topic. Volf, raised in a Pentecostal "pacifist" home, tries to answer this question honestly, not sentimentally, and taking seriously both the "demand to bring about justice for the victims and the call to embrace the perpetrator" (9).

At one point in his thinking about the tribal, ethnic, racial, and cultural violence erupting all over the world, particularly in his home country Volf realized that this violence is part of the larger issue of "identity and otherness," and that what is demanded of us is "*to place identity and otherness at the center of theological reflection*" (17). The problem of identity and otherness ought to take its place along concerns for rights, justice, and ecological well-being as theologically important. The whole of *Exclusion & Embrace* is devoted to exploring this problem in modern and postmodern society. Critical for human well-being is identity, which has to do with one's rootedness in land, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. Yet we are called out from our own country (as was Abraham) to a distant land to be the progenitor of a new people. The Apostle Paul represents a more radical view of identity than does Abraham: he

envisions the transition from "the particularity of 'peoplehood' to the universality of multi-culturality, from the locality of a land to the globality of the world" (43). In the crucified and resurrected Christ (the scandal of particularity), the walls of partition between different peoples (enmity) is overcome. This is not a rejection of difference, the creation of a third race, or a geographic departure from one's own space, but a relativizing of one's own ethnic and cultural identities for the sake of a higher allegiance while remaining within one's own culture. Essential are both distance and belonging. Without distance, belonging destroys; without belonging, distance isolates. How to understand this dialectic between identity and otherness, distance and belonging, exclusion and embrace (a Christian version of the age-old philosophical question of particularity and universality) is the subject of the rest of the volume.

Volf unmasks the myth of the west that barbaric "ethnic cleansing" (the exlusion of the other in society, which on the most primal level is the exclusion of the other from the self [57]) is a non-western and non-European phenomenon. The shadow side of modernity is conquest, colonization, enslavement, segregation, holocaust, and apartheid– the western, European parallel to ethnic cleansing. There can be exclusion by elimination, assimilation, inferiorization, domination, or abandonment (75). One of the book's subplots is Volf's ongoing debate with postmodernists Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault on whom he relies for his analysis of the dark side of western democracy and the so-called progress of civilization. In the end, he has harsh words for these neo-Nietzscheans and their radical indeterminancy and rejection of all boundaries: "Without boundaries we will be able to know only what we are fighting against but not what we are fighting for . . . . The absence of boundaries creates nonorder, and nonorder is not the end of exclusion but the end of life" (63). Boundaries are necessary for life and are not to be equated with exclusion. Exclusion is to be named as an evil and differentiation as a good (67). Recall here Karl Barth's imaginative interpretation of the Genesis account of creation: what constitutes God's creation of the world is precisely the creating of boundaries/order out of the waters of chaos and darkness. One of Volf's most provocative claims is that no one is innocent, there is no pure space – both "the victim and violator are bound in the tragic and self-perpetuating solidarity of sin"(87). While differentiations must be made between degrees of guilt, all are involved in the net of non-innocence

("original sin") and in need of undeserved grace. Every human being is potentially both Cain and Abel. Even the victim needs to repent, if s/he is to avoid becoming a perpetrator tomorrow. Repentance by the victims frees them from captivity to the values of the oppressors (116-17). The only truly innocent victim is the crucified Messiah (84).

In the light of this analysis Volf now develops his theology of embrace, grounded in an understanding of the Trinity as divine self-giving love (i.e., embrace of the other, even the oppressor). Although he has high regard for liberation theologies and desires to incorporate their concerns for justice into his project, he resists making the categories of "oppressed/oppressor" and "oppression/liberation" primary. Reconciling love (not liberation or freedom) is primary. While Gustavo Gutierrez and Jürgen Moltmann (whom he calls the "grandfather of all liberation") want to give priority to love over freedom in their vision of the Kingdom of God, they do not follow this idea through. To make love primary over freedom is "to insert the project of liberation into a larger framework of . . . 'a theology of embrace'" (105). The only way out of the "predicament of partiality"– the "spiral of vengeance" which perpetuates violence and injustice – is forgiveness. The capacity to forgive is a gift of God and takes priority over repentance, the "boundary between exclusion and embrace" (125). This is the meaning of God's self-giving love on the cross. Volf offers a profound analysis of the phenomenology of embrace in which both the identity of the other and that of the self are respected, and in which the hierarchy of relationships cannot simply be levelled but must be reversed (master becomes slave), recalling John Howard Yoder's notion of "revolutionary subordination." The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is what first gave Volf the idea of a "theology of embrace," he tells us. In his creative exegesis and theological interpretation of the story – an example of Volf's methodology, in which the Bible plays a central role in theological thinking [he calls himself a biblical theologian] – relational categories (love) take precedence over legal and moral categories (fixed rules), without denying the need for rules to maintain civil order (156-65).

It must be obvious that I consider this book a *tour de force* that is of special interest to those in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Many of its themes have for us a *déjà vu* aspect. Haven't we been saying these things for 500 years? Yet Volf pushes us to penetrate deeper in our theological and

ethical reflection. Here I want to raise questions about Volf's grounding of his theology of embrace in the doctrine of the Trinity and the Niebuhrian-like political realism that lurks in the background of his analysis and that surfaces most dramatically at the end of the book.

1) *Trinitarian foundations*. I have been arguing for many years – cf. my *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Pandora Press, 2000) – that Christian social ethics as understood by Mennonites must be grounded in classical Trinitarian theology. The question is, how is this to be done, and is Volf doing it adequately? Volf spells out his vision of Trinitarian foundations in Chapter IV, under the title of "Gender Identity." He develops his argument over against Feuerbach's theory of religion as projection. "Though we do keep projecting our interests and ideals onto God, God is not just our projection," (169) says Volf. He then proceeds to concentrate on how the nature of God (the God beyond our projections) informs social and gender relations.

But does Volf himself avoid projectionism when he develops his Trinitarian-based understanding of human gender relations, of social relations in general, or of the church? He begins his treatment of "gender identity and difference" by arguing strongly against those feminist theologians who use God language to construct gender identity. Says Volf, "If God is completely beyond sexual distinction but our language of God is necessarily gendered [because we believe God is personal], then all *specifically masculine or feminine* content of the language about God stems *exclusively from the creaturely realm*. The nature of God tells us nothing about what it means to live as male in distinction to female or as female in distinction to male" (170-71). Humans share their sexuality (biologically speaking) with animals. In their humanness they image God. Volf agrees with Karl Barth that in order to avoid Feuerbachian projectionism we should proceed "by analogy from God" not "by analogy from below." But Barth did not remain faithful to his own method: he "projected a patriarchial construction of masculinity onto God and tacitly declared it was there already from the beginning" (171). Does Volf avoid the dilemma? In fact, is it ever possible to avoid some form of projection if one tries to argue from the nature of God (the inner trinitarian relations of God) to human relations, whether biological or social? Rejecting the notion of sexual differentiation in God, and any attempt to read off gender-specific male or female identity or

responsibility from the nature of God, Volf proceeds to read off social responsibility generally from the nature of God. That is, although we cannot learn from who God is what it means to act as a father or mother, male or female, yet we can by analogy learn from how God relates within God's self to how we ought to relate as humans to each other. Is this *methodologically,* if not *materially*, any different from Barth or the feminists Volf criticizes?

How does the Trinity help us understand human relations? Although appreciative of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's notion of dialogue within the Godhead, a dialogue premised on "'*complete*' self-giving love" and the "'*complete*' presence of the other," Volf says Ratzinger squanders his insight through a "dissolution of the self" and the "logic of the same," in which the Son (second person) has no genuine independent self (178-79). Here Volf finds that Moltmann makes an advance over Ratzinger, in stressing *Perichoresis* (mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity) where there is "self-giving without dissolution [of the self]" and "indwelling without colonization [of the self]" (181). Volf uses this vision of the inner Trinitarian relations to endorse the "irreducible duality, and dynamic construction of gender identities" without wanting to slip into inequality between the genders (185-187). Volf's astute discussion of gender identity contributes powerfully to his overall vision of what a Christian theology of exclusion and embrace might look like.However, it is doubtful whether Volf manages to escape his critique of those who project onto God their own visions of what it means to be human and then reapply it to the human situation. In the end, he seems to know too much about the inner workings of God. The only way one can, in my view, guard against crass projectionism is to clearly distinguish between the Immanent Trinity (God in God's inner trinitarian relations) and the Economic Trinity (God as God has revealed God's self to us). All we can know about God is what God chooses to reveal to us about Godself in the economic (creaturely) sphere. I do not think Volf adequately distinquishes between these two.

2) *Ethical imperatives.* I suggested earlier that there were certain Niebuhrian elements in Volf's analysis of work. Now I want to show how, in his otherwise profoundly challenging call to a theology of embrace (a call which would lead us to think of Volf as being in the Yoder stream of pacifism), he ultimately acquiesces to a form of Niebuhrian political realism. In a moment of inspiration Volf tells us that because "the human ability to agree on justice will never catch

up with the human propensity to do injustice" (217), we will need to act justly (embrace the other) before agreeing on what is just (215-17). Since there is no morally pure struggle, because all who are fighting for justice are tainted by injustice, we need to have "double vision" – looking through the eyes of the other at the same time that we are looking through our own eyes. Nevertheless, and here Volf relies on Niebuhr, since we live in a fallen world of evil we cannot dispense with imperfect justice to protect violent incursion into people's proper spaces:

> [I]s wrath against injustice appropriate? Yes! Must the perpetrator be restrained? By all means! Is punishment for the violation necessary? Probably. But all these indispensable actions against injustice must be situated in the framework of the will to embrace the unjust. For only in our mutual embrace within the embrace of the triune God can we find redemption and experience perfect justice (224-25).

It is not clear what the high sounding rhetoric of embracing the other really means in concrete terms, when punishment of the violation and the violator are necessary after all. A fundamental tension (even possibly incoherence) seems to exist between the unconditional call to embrace the other as other and the need to use violent coercion to enforce justice or punish injustice. This is the dilemma faced by all firm believers in Jesus' teaching of loving the enemy. What is needed, and what is missing in Volf's book, is a more careful analysis of what positive role civil institutions have in restraining evil and promoting the good that is consistent with an overall theology of embrace. In a flourish Volf writes, "And if we, the comunal selves, are called into eternal communion with the triune God; then *true justice will always be on the way to embrace* – to a place where we will belong together with our personal and cultural identities both preserved and transformed, but certainly enriched by the other" (225). What do we do in the meantime? How do we act day by day within civil society on the way to that distant eschatological future of perfect embrace? At the end of the book, after a wonderful few pages on how violence is to be transcended by giving vengeance away to God – there are things, like the use of violence, that only God has the right to – Volf appears to undercut his whole book with these words:

> It may be that consistent nonretaliation and nonviolence will be impossible in the world of violence. Tyrants may need to be taken down from their thrones and the madmen stopped from sowing desolation. . . . It may also be that measures which involve preparation for the use of violent means will have to be taken to prevent tyrants and madmen from ascending to power in the first place or to keep the plethora of ordinary kinds of perpetrators that walk our streets from doing their violent work. . . . But if one decides to put on soldier's gear instead of carrying one's cross, one should not seek legitimation in the religion that worships the crucified Messiah. For there, the blessing is given not to the violent but to the meek (Matthew 5:5). (306)

In short, violence may be necessary in this world of evil, but don't justify it theologically! This is not a satisfying conclusion to a book devoted to the call for Christians to live nonviolently, embracing the other, in a violent world.

A Theology of the Church

Volf's third book, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity,* is the most complex of his works. In it he develops his own Free Church version of the church as an alternative to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox ecclesiologies. He takes Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as representative of Catholic ecclesiology, and Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas as spokesman for Orthodox ecclesiology. As representative of Free Church ecclesiology he takes John Smyth (1554-1612), an early English separatist who for Volf is the originator of the Free Church. His choice of Smyth as the Free Church representative, with no reference to Continental Anabaptism and its quite different view of the Church, is a problem, but this choice serves him well in building a theology of the church without some of Smyth's weaknesses. Volf's great contribution is his treatment of Ratzinger and Zizioulas, and his apology for a congregational theology and polity that takes Ratzinger's criticism into account.

Volf takes seriously Ratzinger's stinging criticism of the individualism of Free Church ecclesiology but he rejects Ratzinger's hierarchical alternative and develops a version based on an egalitarian, nonhierarchical, communal Trinitarianism. He wants to redeem the voluntarism and egalitarianism of the

Free Church from its tendency toward "self-enclosed individualism" (3). Seemingly unaware of sixteenth-century continental Anabaptist ecclesiology, which had a non-individualistic, communal understanding of the church, in some cases quite explicitly grounded in an egalitarian, communal doctrine of the Trinity, Volf develops what he considers to be a novel view of Believers Church ecclesiology. Let me summarize Volf's underlying argument, beginning with his portrayal of Ratzinger's and Zizioulas's theology of the church.

For Ratzinger, Christ (the new Adam) is a corporate reality, not an individual. The Church as the Body of Christ is a single subject as a whole (33). The corporate reality of the church always takes precedence over the individual. The consequence, according to Volf, is that in Ratzinger's thought, the subjectivity and the rights of the individual remain obscure, if not nonexistent (38, 72). As far as church polity is concerned, the local congregation receives its being from the universal church. Ratzinger's ecclesiological "wholism" is based on a view of divine Trinitarian personhood as pure relationality. Standing firmly in the Western tradition, Ratzinger stresses the unity (the dominance of the one divine substance) of the Trinity over the plurality. Differentiation between persons is nothing more than relational. Since Christ is the prototype of all human personhood, and since the goal of Christ is to integrate all individual persons into the divine Trinitarian life of God, the subjectivity and rights of the individual and the local congregation are overwhelmed by a concern with totality, the whole.

Like Ratzinger, Zizioulas models the Church after the Trinity. Nevertheless, his ecclesiology is grounded in a different understanding of the Trinity. In traditional Eastern fashion, the individual "person" is emphasized more strongly than in Ratzinger's thought. Instead of differentiation within the Trinity consisting of "pure relationality," divinity is understood in terms of personhood, in which "the person represents the ultimate ontological reality" (77). The very concept of personhood rests on the divine communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. This does not, however, translate into egalitarianism either on the divine or the human level. Divine and consequently also human communion "is always *constituted and internally structured by an asymmetrical—reciprocal relationship between the one and the many*" (78). In Eastern liturgy the church is incorporated into the divine life itself, and in this process human social relationships take on the characteristics of the communion of the persons within the Godhead. While for Ratzinger, analogous to inner Trinitarian relations,

the universal church antecedes the local church and gives it its being, for Zizioulas the local church takes precedence over the universal church. In this regard, there is an interesting congruence between Eastern and Free Church ecclesiology. However, while there are important differences between the Catholic and Orthodox doctrines of the church, and between Ratzinger and Zizioulas, in both cases the subjectivity and rights of the individual and the local church get lost in a hierarchically-structured church polity. This is where Free Church ecclesiology is different.

In order to avoid the individualism of Free Church ecclesiology, Volf models his view on the Trinity itself. Despite the difference between Eastern and Western theology, the inner Trinitarian life of God for both Ratzinger and Zizioulas remains asymmetrical, monocentric, and monarchical, with unity preceding and overcoming plurality (236). In contrast, Volf argues that unity and multiplicity are equiprimal in God (193). The Trinitarian persons must be understood not as a single subject (God) but as three personal subjects (Father, Son, and Spirit), just as individual members of the church must be understood as equal subjects (205-206). Despite his caveat that ultimately the Trinity remains a mystery (192), one is left wondering whether Volf does not fall prey to the same criticism he makes of Ratzinger and Zizioulas: namely, that they project their own understanding of the nature of the church on the Trinity and then use that as an analogy to justify their view of the church. When Volf says "the more a church is characterized by symmetrical and decentralized distribution of power and freely affirmed interaction [integration], the more will it correspond to the Trinitarian communion" (236), is he not doing the same, this time from a Free Church perspective? This statement presumes to know too much about the inner workings of God and it draws much too tight an analogy between the divine life and human relationships. This is why I prefer to remain within the realm of the economic Trinity, although not denying the reality of the immanent Trinity and its ultimate antecedent grounding of any assertions in the realm of "salvation history."

As mentioned, Volf takes as his starting point for discussing Free Church ecclesiology and polity the *Works* of English dissenter and "first Baptist" John Smyth, someone within "the Reformed tradition, from which "the Free Churches derive" (270). Volf criticizes the ecclesiology and soteriology of Smyth for being too individualistic and generally not Trinitarian enough (172-77).

However, he does accept the basic principle of Smyth's Free Church polity: "the fundamental *theological* conviction that *Christ's dominion is realized through the entire congregation*" (132). Christ is present in an unmediated way to the entire local church and to every individual believer in that congregation (152). Like the Anabaptists many years before, although he does not acknowledge that, Volf takes Matthew 18:20 as foundational for defining what the church is and where it is manifested: "*Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well . . .* " (136). Where Volf believes he is making a contribution to a Free Church ecclesiology that goes beyond Smyth is in applying Ratzinger's and Zizioulas's notion of the sociality or ecclesiality of salvation to that ecclesiology. No one is saved alone. It is only in the context of the church that salvation occurs. But in contrast to the soteriology of Ratzinger and Zizioulas, salvation does not occur *by* the church but *through* the church. This is the crucial distinction. Christ is the only subject of salvific activity, and a direct personal acceptance is required (164), but the nature of this salvation is intrinsically communal (162).

What Volf does not seem to realize or acknowledge is that early Anabaptists for the most part saw salvation corporately as well, as Robert Friedmann argued in the early 1970s in *The Theology of Anabaptism*. There is barely a mention of our tradition and the thought of John Howard Yoder in Volf's work, even though Yoder was devoted to elucidating an Anabaptist concept of the church that is so similar to Volf's own. When I raised this issue with Volf, he acknowledged that Yoder was one of the most significant theological and ethical thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century. The challenge of Volf to Mennonites, and to Yoder, is to more consciously ground our ethics and our ecclesiology theologically, in the classical Christian doctrine of the triune God.