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For readers of Volf's *After our Likeness*[1] and for those who have read his paper on the Spirit and the Church, a short response is strikingly out of place. Nevertheless, it is perhaps better to go ahead in any event, as St. Jerome says in his commentary on Ezechiel: "I told you, Eustochium, that it was better to say nothing than too little; you answered me that it was better to say something than to say nothing at all."[2] Any discussion of Volf's work must begin with an offering of thanks for the ways he has reinvigorated classic theological formulations of the faith for the Free Churches and the manner in which he has directed Free Church theology into full or "open" ecumenical dialogue. He has offered fresh starts for the Free Churches as a whole (and for the Mennonite community within that grouping).

Many issues arising from the paper deserve extensive discussion. A number of these Volf notes himself, and not a few were energetically revisited following the presentation of his lecture in March 2000: the links between the historical Jesus and the post-Easter Church and Volf's choice of the former, although preferring the latter; his revisiting of the Ignatian and Irenaean adages — from *ubi Christus* to *ubi Spiritus*; the hiddenness of the life of Christ and the analogous mission of the church; the identicality and non-identicality of Jesus and the Church; diversity and unity in the community which gathers; the charismata and ministry; the fascinating reworking of Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching on love as the basis of freedom, as opening a place for freedom, and freedom as the source of human dignity; the Church as an intrinsic sign of the

kingdom; the multiplex dimensions binding persons, community, rebirth, reconciliation and mission; the Church as a sign of contradiction; and Volf's emphasis on the third person of the Trinity and the manifold perichoretic analogies shaping the church as an image of the Trinity.

I have a number of difficulties with Volf's ecclesiology, not so much because it begins with the Spirit but because it begins with the Trinity. I'm an irrepressible Trinitarian – primarily because the first theologians I studied in depth were Julian of Norwich and the Blessed Jan van Ruusbroec, both committed Trinitarians. But they differ in their approach: they come not to the church from the Trinity, but to the Trinity in, from, and through the Church, the Body of Christ. They begin with the Incarnation in a very practical, realistic way. The light of the Trinity streams out from the uplifted Eucharist, illuminating nave, transepts, and choir, revealing the mottled multitudes before it, their unworthiness, and the confessionals from which they have just emerged and to which they will soon return (another form of exclusion and embrace). For them, ecclesiology begins with the incarnated, present sacrificial death and life of Christ, aside from which there is no theological standing-place or fulcrum to move the world. No one has seen the Father except in the Son, and it is through the Son that we were promised the gift of the Spirit.

Now, the vitality of Volf's book and paper here published largely arises from this very dimension, but Volf's analysis at times tends to *suggest* another possibility – that it is possible on the basis of some biblical-theological study to establish insights regarding the doctrine of the Trinity and then apply them as norms for the developing ecclesial community, to begin from outside historically-given institutions, as it were, with some a-historical transcendent norm. At this point I become somewhat restive: but because of the way Volf's work tends to distance one from the reality of the fractured and divisive Christian persons and communities with whom, here in Waterloo, Ontario, I make my curmudgeonly way.

As a result, Volf's continuing focus on the local Church, "a local habitation and a place," is for me both a topic of great excitement and of some disappointment – and it is to that topic I wish to direct a few comments.

I begin with the first of his characteristics of the Trinity – into communion with which we as believers are led by the Spirit simultaneously with our entrance into an ecclesial communion. The Trinity is characterized first as "Catholic"

according to the traditional doctrine of *perichoresis* or *co-inherence*, the indwelling of each of the three persons in each of the others without any one of them ceasing to be a distinct person. "Catholic" is here understood according to its etymological meaning *kata* (in respect of, according to) the *holos* (the whole). By analogy, then, individual Christians are "catholic" in that as members of the church they are indwelt by all other members, and the local church is catholic because "it is related to other local churches in such a way that they shape its very identity and that it in turn shapes their identities." As Volf puts it in his book, summing up in a sense his ecumenical concern:

> The minimal requirement for catholicity with regard for relations between churches is the openness of each church to all other churches. A church that closes itself off from other churches of God past or present, or a church that has no desire to turn to these churches in some fashion, is denying its own catholicity. (*Likeness*, 275)

The characteristic "catholic" as a result, co-inheres in the characteristics "equality" and "love." If all are in one another, all are equal, an equality marked after the image of "the perfect divine love: an interchange between the self and the other, in which the giving of the self coalesces with the receiving of the other." Thus Volf's paper has described the nature of the church according to these three characteristics: as catholic the church gathers; as composed of equals, its structure is polycentric, participatory, functionally diverse; as love it is united. And likewise the church's mission reflects the characteristics: as catholic it proclaims rebirth by which sinners are forgiven, transformed, and opened to future glory; as equals they are now reconciled with the divine and with one another, and as loving they now attend and are attended to in healing care.

Herein are fitted four traditional notes of the Church: unity, sanctity, catholicity, apostolicity. But there is a fifth one: visibility – and it is when one begins to consider the visible nature of any church, the manifestation of the *incarnate* Word in relationship to the Trinity, that concerns inevitably arise. Volf counsels readers to reflect on the local church as "a community that gathers." I take him to refer to the church as an entity which sociologists might study, an institution with a particular social grouping or groupings and

operating according to particular consciously- or habitually-observed social patterns. When he states his preference for the definition "a community that gathers," however, he seems to wish to emphasize by such a tautology the Spirit-structured nature of the community, the church as a new-creation community (albeit partial), as prior to any old-creation social forms.But all communities or gatherings have structures and are framed as institutions, and it is on the Spirit's relationship to the structures of the church, to the church as institution where perhaps some fuller clarification is needed.

Let me focus the point more closely by referring to the discussion of the charisma of the ordained office-holder, raised in the paper and developed at some length in Volf's book. The ordained minister is elected. "Ordination obviously presupposes election" (*Likeness*, 252). Why obviously? A few pages later Volf points to the serious problems with universalizing contemporary forms of Western liberal democracy and of transferring them baldly into ecclesiastical settings (*Likeness*, 254). In light of this and his own pneumatological focus, would not the use of the lot be a more consistent means of selection?[3] But the problem goes deeper. Even using the lot, a process must be established: what is the Spirit's role in that process, or indeed in the decision to choose democratic electoral principles over its use? And if the charismata of ordination are not necessarily given for all time, what is the process in the local community by which our ordinand is to be told that her time in office is now at an end, and what is to protect her from the unending cantankerousness of most religious communities this side of the eschaton?

Formal patterns or laws of communal behavior are established somehow out of something. Cannot the Spirit be active in the formulation of such laws, and cannot then the Spirit be a continuing guide in their use now and in the future? And must not this be the case in light of the hypothetical pastoral leadership dilemma raised above? I pose these questions over against Volf's argument on the value of canon law as a divine gift toward peace opposed to the inevitable disorder faced without it. What is the relationship between the Spirit and *the system of order* underlying and directing the activities of the various charismatically-gifted persons in Romans 14? The question inevitably raises a similar one about the relationship of the Spirit's action on the Old Creation and the inauguration of the New. Is not the old law *fulfilled* by the Spirit, and if so, even partially, might there not be some remembered wisdom

from past generations and earlier works of faithful Spirit-gifted witnesses that offer us Spirit-filled guidance today? And if so, must we not give fuller attendance to the operation of the Spirit in its directives over the whole of Christian history in the development of Christian doctrine?

These questions arise not against Volf's exposition but out of it, and they raise the problem of the relationship between the Spirit and the on-going institutional structures of Christian community if terms like hierarchy always carry a negative meaning, if institutions seem inevitably linked to petrification, and if egalitarianism is accepted as purely positive and seems to be given free reign over against a Trinitarian directive otherwise. Consider the comment in the paper on there being no place for subordination in the Trinity "*except* for the economic subordination of the *incarnate* Word to the One who sent him and in whose power he was sent." The danger here is that the emphasis on the Spirit in the church (even accepting the perichoretic indwelling of the Son), *tends* to neglect the very real linkages between the church and the *incarnate* Word, living, breathing, participating in divine life in and through fallen creation. The danger is compounded by the then necessary "requirement," according to the argument a few lines later, of near-Pelagian "willful subordination" on the part of the members. Surely a "principled [not necessarily unalterable] hierarchical relation" obtaining between members would be more fitting in a community of love, opening a space for freedom and allowing for a grace-induced and directed growth in holiness, rather than the implicitly-demanded moral perfection with its accompanying culture of guilt, upheld in so many Free Church bodies.

Thus it is difficult to accept fully the statement that "reconciliation in [the Christian] vision has a theological and personal meaning but not a social meaning," even if one fully accepts that the "categories of liberation and justice" are not simply transferrable into the "social mission of the church [which] *ought to be pursued out of the heart of its own identity*" (my emphasis), out of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, if one might be so bold to say. Only if "egalitarian" and "equalitarian" language is fully enclosed and reborn within that Sacred Heart will such terms be open to full Christian usage: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* have little in common with the ideals of freedom, equality, and community *in Christ*. Outside of Christ they are Trojan horses in the City of God, coming into our contemporary dominant discourse as Enlightenment terms, that arose

in the shadow of the Anti-Christ out of a movement that placed the Goddess of Reason on the altar of Notre Dame, before which a harlot danced as high-priestess and whose direction was inevitably toward the separation of the body from the head. Modernity well knows the danger of a *whole* Christ, *caput et membra*, and thus arises its support of consensus and participatory ideals of democratic life in the limited locality, while it pursues globalized total power.[4]

And herein lies the problem of those Free Church theologies that establish final pre-eminence for the local church. Divided from the whole, local entities continue as members, vitalized only by the life which inheres in the blood systems remaining to them. Without question, if one is arguing on the basis of the Incarnation, the church must be local, particular, "fully human" (in a sense analogous to the Chalcedonian formula). But a word has its meaning only as it lives in a sentence, a sentence only as it speaks in a context. The word "pipe" in and for itself is meaningless; a plumber's pipe is not a smoker's. Volf is well aware of the problem and therefore concludes his argument by insisting on the catholicity of the local church. "What is it to be a *local* church?" he asks. It is to be catholic, and the minimum for its catholicity is "its openness to all other churches of God." But is not such a minimum already the maximum on the basis of the perichoretic analogy? If so, how is this openness to be incarnated, to be manifested visibly (even partially) in the face of on-going suspicions and ingrained mutual anathemas as anything other than mere well-meaning intentions? Indeed, among those Free churches that have so arrogantly appropriated the modifier "Believers," how is the designation "catholic" to be retained, in the practice still too often followed of rebaptizing and thereby rejecting the baptism of the great majority of Christians who acknowledge *one* baptism for the remission of sins?

My question regarding the local catholicity of a church returns again to the problem of the institution, to the local church's practice of openness *in* the *whole* incarnated tradition of the Faith and the Spirit's role in that tradition, binding each local body as the Church militant with the Church triumphant, and leading every body into all truth together as one. It may be useful here to return to Volf's reflections on the creedal formulations in Hippolytus. In the third question posed for the baptisand, the Spirit is indeed linked to Holy Church, but so too is "the resurrection of the flesh." What is given emphasis is the concrete nature of the church as the body of Christ, the reality of the resurrection in which the believer now and here participates.

It is the same in the case of the crux text "ubi Christus, ibi eccelsia" to which Volf refers at the opening of his paper. The passage occurs in the context of a discussion of the institutional structuring of the church and the Eucharist at its centre. "The Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ" and is "the gift of God" (7:1). Divisions, manifested here as abstentions from the Eucharistic services, are to be avoided "as the beginning of evils" (7:2). The Eucharist and the Gospel are here linked, the latter firmly bound to the former in that it is defined as that "in which the Passion has been revealed to us and the Resurrection has been accomplished." Having admonished his readers to flee divisions, Ignatius then calls on them to submit to the bishop within the hierarchical institutional order of the Church as understood over history and at the present moment. The jurisdictional authority of the bishop aside, Ignatius turns his attention immediately to the bishop's liturgical role; it is the Eucharist that is central here: "A valid Eucharist is one celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he appoints." Then follows the crux text: "wherever the bishop [i.e., the celebrant] is present, there let the whole congregation be present, just as wherever Jesus Christ [is present, i.e., in the Eucharist], there is the Church Catholic [i.e., the universal Church or the Church in its totality]."

Volf reads Ignatius' conclusion in the same way, namely that in the context of the local congregation, the presence of Jesus Christ and the catholic Church are co-extensive. But there is a difference. Volf supports his reading by playing down the Eucharistic *and* liturgically hierarchical element in the argument, and he finds justification for doing so by reading the Ignatian adage in light of a similar passage in Irenaeas of Lyons' *Against the Heretics* 3:24.1, composed later in the second century: "Wherever the Church is, there also is the Spirit of God, and wherever the Spirit is, there also is the Church and all grace." The difficulty is that in Irenaeas the Spirit is, as in Ignatius, closely linked with the visible institution of the church. The section where it appears closes Irenaeas' third book, the one most directly devoted to the function of tradition, the physical handing on of the Faith. The section preceding the adage is concerned with divisions in the community. The preaching of the church, however, Irenaeas insists, is "everywhere consistent" both geographically and historically, "through the entire dispensation of God, and that well-grounded system which tends to human salvation, namely our faith." A "gift of God," that preaching is received by the Church and is preserved and transmitted by the Spirit of

God. And then Irenaeas continues, clearly identifying the Spirit's activity with the visible hierarchical structure of the Church:

> 'For in the Church,' it is said, 'God has set apostles, prophets, teachers,' [1 Cor. 12:28] and all the other *means* through which the Spirit works. (My emphasis)

Immediately after this passage follows the well-known adage to which Volf alludes, and following it, Irenaeas indeed continues with explicit reference to the Spirit but in language clearly intended to enunciate Ignatius' earlier Eucharistic interpretation, thus emphasizing the perichoresis of the Spirit and the Son, and by doing so, emphasizing the presence of the whole Trinity in the incarnated Son, on this earth and among the historically-given Christian institutions.

> Those therefore who do not partake of Him are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ.

Notes

[1]All references to *After our Likeness: the Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) are indicated *Likeness* and page number. All other quotations are taken directly from Volf's paper as presented to the forum on March 16 and 17 and published above.
[2]J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion,* trans. by R. C. De Peaux (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 321.
[3] For those aware of my own Amish background, I hasten to add that I mean the question quite seriously, thinking of it first of all in terms of the theology and practice of the Renewed Moravians in the early eighteenth century, and not in any way in the context of some contemporary methods of "laying down a fleece," whereby a stumbling student decides whether or not to drop a course on the basis of the colour of the next traffic light.
[4] Christians committed to 'Anabaptist' principles are particularly vulnerable in this regard, above all because of their implicit supposition that they *continue* a historical sectarian counter-cultural tradition. The difficulty is, however, that while the gate is being guarded, a thief often enters over the back wall. Fortunately, the wall has not remained unguarded. Note the strikingly 'Mennonite' insights of traditional Roman Catholic writers: David L. Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "Theo-Drama and Political Theology [with responses]," *Communio*, 25 (1998): 532-67; Paul J. Griffiths, "The Gift and the Lie: Augustine on Lying," *Communio*, 26 (1999): 3-30.