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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*.

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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.

Part I

The Spirit and the Church

Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee

Introduction

The third articles of the Christian creedal tradition consistently pair "the Spirit" and "the church." We can trace such pairing back at least to the early third century. According to the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (c. 215), the third question asked of a candidate for baptism was "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh?"[1] This connection in the creedal tradition echoes the close ties between the Spirit and the church found throughout the New Testament: as the account of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost paradigmatically attests, the church was born out of the womb of the Spirit. From their beginnings and throughout their history, Christian dogmatic and theological traditions have acknowledged the Spirit as the generative force and life-giving environment – the "breathing room" – of the church.

The pervasive association between "Spirit" and "church" notwithstanding, theologians have reflected relatively little on precisely how the two are related. Take as an example Calvin, a theologian who on the whole cannot be faulted for neglect of the Spirit.[2] Though he stresses in the *Institutes* that the elect "are made truly one since they live together in one faith, hope, and love, and in the same Spirit of God" (4.1.2), he does not venture to explore how the Spirit of the triune God shapes the nature and mission of the church.[3] In Calvin, as often in the history of Western theology, the distinctive relation of the Spirit to the church is elusive.[4] Even in the Eastern churches, whose theologians have tended to ascribe a greater role to the Spirit,[5] the Spirit's work in the birth and life of the church remains vague. In commenting on

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recent Orthodox reactions to Catholic dogmatic formulations, John Zizioulas, an astute contemporary Orthodox theologian, remarks that while the Orthodox criticisms may be valid, "what the Orthodox would in fact like to see [Western theology] do with Pneumatology in its ecclesiology"[6] – has not yet been worked out.

By contrast, there has been abundant reflection on how the church is related to Christ e.g., as body (to head), as bride (to bridegroom), as servant (of the Lord), as redeemed (of the Crucified One). These christological modes of understanding the church not only draw from the NT's rich reservoir of metaphors to describe the church's relation to Christ but, more significantly, build on the core of the underlying NT narrative of the life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and continuing lordship of Christ. The logic of that narrative is straightforward, and its ecclesiological implications were expressed in the early tradition most succinctly by Ignatius of Antioch: *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia.*[7] But where does this leave the Spirit? Does the Spirit come only after the church has already and independently been "constructed with christological material alone,"[8] to play a secondary role as the life-infusing and invigorating "breath" of the ecclesial body?

Part of the reason that the tradition has not developed the pneumatological side of ecclesiology is a certain elusiveness of the Spirit. This is a well-known pneumatological theme, and we want to underscore only one of its aspects that relates directly to ecclesiology. Much of what Christian theology claims about the Spirit is filtered Christologically. We identify who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does by pointing to Christ. Except for being a source of life and power, the Spirit would then seem ecclesiologically redundant. We argue that the impression of redundancy is false. Though (above and beyond vivification of the church) the Spirit's ecclesiological function seems more formal than material, that function is nonetheless significant.

Why can the Spirit's work not be limited to vivification of the church? The identity and mission of Christ are not to be understood independently of the Spirit, and Christ portrayed solely as the giver rather than also as the receiver of the Spirit. Though our knowledge of the Spirit is filtered Christologically, the being and the activity of the Spirit are not unidirectionally determined by Christ. Indeed, recent research in the Gospels has persuaded many that the identity and mission of Christ were fundamentally shaped by

the Spirit. Even if one does not find an exclusive Spirit Christology persuasive, it seems clear that the NT writers clearly believed that Jesus was Christ because he was anointed by the Spirit. If we take this insight of biblical scholarship seriously, then we have a *triplicity* of relations: between the Spirit and the church, between Christ and the church, and between the Spirit and Christ in which Christ appears both as bearer and giver of the Spirit. No ecclesiology failing to aknowledge the particularities of all these relations can be adequate to the Biblical testimonies, to the tradition, or to experiences of the divine presence in the church.

How should the relations between Christ, the Spirit, and the church be theologically expressed? Some thirty years ago, Catholic theologian Heribert Mühlen proposed an ecclesiology whose foundation was neither Christ alone nor the Spirit alone, nor Christ simply as giver of the Spirit, but Christ as bearer and giver of the Spirit. Distancing himself from the influential Catholic tradition of viewing the church as an "ongoing incarnation" in which the Spirit seems superfluous, and rejecting any "spiritualistic" conceptions of the church which render Christ ecclesiologically inconsequential, Mühlen argued that the church should be seen as the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit – the anointing by virtue of which Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of God.[9] Though we will diverge from Mühlen significantly, we will explore in a more Protestant way the relation between the Spirit and the church by following his basic insight. We will first examine the relations between Christ, the Spirit, and the church, and then suggest how the Spirit is related to the nature and mission of the church. By doing so, we hope to sketch an ecclesiology giving full weight both to the Ignatian rule *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*, and to the Irenaean rule *ubi Spiritus Dei, illic ecclesia, et omnis gratia*.[10]

Christ, Spirit, Church

The relations between Christ, the Spirit, and the church suggested in the NT can be explored at two levels – that of the practice and self-consciousness of the "earthly" Jesus (reconstructible in terms of the "historical Jesus"), and of the biblical writers' theological reflection on the "earthly" Jesus (redescribable in terms of the "biblical Christ"). Although, for reasons we cannot expand on here,[11] we give preference in systematic constructive work to the theology of

the biblical writers, here we pay much of our attention to the level of the "historical Jesus," in order to underscore the congruence between Jesus' practice and self-consciousness on the one hand and the church's remembrance and reflection on the other, and to ground the emergence of the church in the mission of Jesus. We seek to address consecutively these questions: How did Jesus of Nazareth see himself in relation to the Spirit and to the community? How did the early church understand those relations?

The Spirit of Christ

Integral to Jesus of Nazareth's Messianic identity and mission was his consciousness of the power of God's Spirit at work in him.[12] Some "historical Jesus" scholarship has tended to see Jesus in less apocalyptic categories and more, for example, in terms of "peasant Jewish Cynicism,"[13] and has therefore hesitated to ascribe to him an awareness of his own endowment with the eschatological Spirit,[14] the gift promised in such texts as Isaiah 11, 42, and 61 in connection with the advent of God's definitive rule (or "reign" or "kingdom") – the unprecedented arrival of God to consummate God's authority and to reclaim God's people in the world. But the apocalyptic dimension of Jesus' life and proclamation is too well attested to doubt that Jesus saw his vocation of announcing and inaugurating the kingdom of God as guided and driven by the eschatological Spirit of the prophets.[15]

If we assume the crucial role of the Spirit in Jesus' mission, two key questions arise. First, what concrete content did the Spirit give to Jesus' proclamation and inauguration of God's reign? Second, how is "the church" related to this proclamation and inauguration? We will take the second question first and begin by asking more particularly: Was the founding of the church explicitly a part of Jesus' mission, as the tradition claimed for centuries? Contemporary scholarship seems agreed that "ecclesiological" passages in the Gospels, such as Matt. 16:18, do not go back to Jesus himself. Jesus did not "found" the church. Does it therefore follow, as some scholars have argued, that the emergence of the church has nothing or very little to do with the original mission of Jesus, or even that Jesus' eschatological self-understanding is incompatible with the idea of the church?[16] Gerhard Lohfink has suggested that behind the disjunction between the mission of Jesus and emergence of the

church lies a dichotomy between the reign of God and the people of God. The dichotomy is false, however, because the reign of God is in fact unthinkable without the people of God among whom it becomes a concrete reality.[17] In Jesus' ministry, the indissoluble bond between the reign of God and the people of God is most clearly manifest in the calling of the Twelve, who symbolized and enacted "the incipient gathering of Israel to be the eschatological people of twelve tribes."[18] Rather than being an alternative to the people of God, the reign of God entails the coming and final presence of God *with* God's people, the reconstitution of the people as unforsakably *God's*.[19]

Essential, then, to Jesus' announcement of the reign of God was the calling and gathering of the people of God. Though not yet "the church," the gathering of God's people around Jesus is nonetheless ecclesiologically significant. Consider the following four features that distinguish formally the communities gathered around Jesus from the larger Jewish community of the time, and that we synthesize from N. T. Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (1) The center of the gathering, the attractor to whom God's people were to be drawn and renewed in the very drawing, was Jesus himself, whose self-perception was as "the focal point of the people of YHWH, . . . [who] embodied what he had announced."[20] Over against traditional construals of symbols that constituted community, Jesus regarded himself as "the true interpreter of Torah; the true builder of the Temple; the true spokesperson for Wisdom."[21] (2) Although the gathering was aimed at the whole of Israel, it took concrete shape as formation of "a network of cells loyal to [Jesus] and his kingdom-vision"[22] who "believed themselves to be in some sense the true Israel."[23] (3) Although Jesus insisted that his own mission and that of his disciples during his lifetime was "restricted to ethnic Israel," he believed the reign of God that was arriving through his work would bring hope to the gentiles because "Israel would be the light of the world, so that nations, seeing it, would come in and glorify the god of Israel."[24] (4) Jesus' disciples whom he sent out during his lifetime as "agents of the kingdom"[25] were empowered, even as Jesus was, by the Spirit. In so far as Jesus authorized them to heal the sick, cast out demons, and announce the nearness of God's reign, he made them share in the Spirit with which he had been anointed for his mission.[26] Both Jesus' sending and the Spirit's presence were essential to their mission.

All of these features, appropriately transformed, can be seen in the theology and practice of the church of the mid- and late first century. The ways Jesus

gathered God's people for God's reign in the power of the Spirit helped give impetus to the later emergence of the church. But the church would not have emerged were it not for the specific character of the gathered communities, which stemmed from the concrete content of Jesus' proclamation and inauguration of God's reign.

Jesus announced and demonstrated the reign of God among the people of God in various modes: forgiveness offered to "sinners,"[27] fellowship welcoming the outcast,[28] and care for the physically needy.[29] Central to Jesus' kingdom work was the making of whole persons, relationships, and bodies. And as a comparison with his immediate predecessor John the Baptist, the preacher of judgment, shows, the most striking feature of Jesus' whole-making activity was its expression of *unconditional grace*, of God's free, noncoercive, unbrokered outreach to restore God's people to fullness of life.

The power of such grace, the power of restoration to wholeness, community, and life, must be the kind of power that gives, not restricts, freedom: power that opens up a *space* in which the unconditioned outreach of God can be extended, witnessed and experienced, and accepted – or rejected. The Spirit with whom Jesus was anointed and who thus empowered Jesus' mission constituted that freedom: in the relations established between Jesus and those whom he encountered,[30] as well as in his own joy in the works and words given to him by his Father,[31] room was made for the interplay of divine initiative and human response. The grace that both creates and fills this "space" of freedom is marked by at least two features.

First, unconditional grace is not cheap. Rightly understood, forgiveness, rather than ignoring evil, includes the naming of the wrong being forgiven. It affirms the assumptions and requirements of justice in the very movement of transcending them.[32] Similarly, fellowship that goes beyond mere proximity to include peace and well-being between people does not turn a blind eye to inequalities and injustices but depends on a dynamic of community where barriers of economic status,[33] gender identity,[34] and religious purity[35] are taken down and where hierarchies that replicate relations of power in the world are subverted.[36] Finally, care for the body presupposes a robust notion of bodily well-being, and means recognizing and setting oneself over against forms of physical entrapment – suffering, sickness, possession, death – that endanger and restrict creaturely life.[37] The unconditional grace mediated by

Jesus was not a vague tolerance associated with a principled commitment to "take in" rather than to "keep out,"[38] but rather went hand in hand with a vision of the good life, involving substantive values and determinate practices.

Second, the offer of grace is not directed toward isolated individuals, remaining free of social and political import. Since Jesus saw in his own proclamation and inauguration of God's reign the fulfillment of prophetic promises that God's Spirit-endowed servant would bring forth justice to the nations, preach good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and the year of the Lord's favor, and provide for those who mourn,[39] his mission was inescapably and deeply political. He was not engaged in politics in the usual sense, though. For one thing, by announcing the true and ultimate kingdom as now present in his person through the offer of grace, he subverted the defensive strategies of the established authority that enforced stability through subjugation. As well, by insisting on the noncoercive ethic of the renewed heart, he subverted nationalistic agendas that advocated victory through violence. Jesus not only knew that what he was saying and doing was profoundly incompatible with ruling and revolutionary programs alike; he saw the path of suffering and death marked out for him by such incompatibilities as bound up with his messianic task.

The way in which Jesus presented his claims and his message, both to individual persons and to larger social networks, involved a complex interplay between hiddenness and openness. His teaching and acts of power were certainly public in being accessible to and aimed at diverse groups. Yet Jesus did not try to implant a particular term or image representing his own identity – "Messiah," "healer," or other such title – in the public consciousness, where, torn loose from its moorings in the specificity of his mission, it would have been misrepresented and misunderstood.[40] The hiddenness *served* the openness, because it was meant to ensure that the message could be heard and accepted in its full integrity, as the eschatological presentation of God's grace. Moreover, Jesus surely saw the role granted him in the regathering of God's people as visibly central. Yet he pointed away from himself toward the Father, precisely in claiming to be the "way" to the Father.[41] This theme is reflected in the words of the Johannine Jesus: "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me."[42] In pointing away from himself to the Father he was making the most radical claims about himself.

The Church of the Spirit

Our brief exploration suggests the following picture: Because the reign of God is unthinkable without the people of God, the gathering of the communities was inseparable from Jesus' earthly mission that he carried out in the power of the Spirit. Moreover, participation in that mission was part of the identity of the communities formed in his name: called and gathered around Jesus and loyal to him and his vision, these messianic communities were also sent by him and endowed with the same Spirit that rested on him, so as to carry on the same mission – to proclaim God's reign as the power of unconditional grace to make persons, relationships, and bodies whole.

The basic structure of the relations between Jesus, the Spirit, and the community evident in the ministry of the historical Jesus is theologically reaffirmed and further developed by the Gospel writers, except that Jesus' identity is expanded to include the narrative of his resurrection and exaltation, and the community's identity is expanded to include the gentiles. It is impossible here to examine both of these expansions and the theological shifts they entailed; it suffices to note the structure of the relationships between Christ, the Spirit, and the church in the theologies of two evangelists. In Luke-Acts, the One whose baptism marked the start of his mission under the anointing of the Spirit[43] poured out on his disciples, after his resurrection and exaltation, the prophetic Spirit through whom, according to the prophecy of Joel, all God's people would be gathered and empowered to proclaim God's reign in word and deed.[44] Similarly in John, the One upon whom the Spirit descended and remained[45] and to whom the Spirit was given "without measure"[46] was the One who after his death, resurrection, and exaltation breathed the Spirit upon the disciples as he sent them into the world as he himself had been sent by the Father.[47] Clearly, Luke and John believed that the emergence of the church was bound up with Christ's sending of the Spirit, who anointed the disciples to continue the mission of Jesus.[48] This complex of theological affirmations builds on the remembered practice and self-consciousness of Jesus, and is well summarized by Raniero Cantalamessa's claim that "the last breath of Jesus [on the cross] is the first breath of the church."[49]

The relations between Christ, the Spirit, and the church sketched above are summed up appropriately in Mühlen's contention that the church is the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit. Below we will explore the

implications of this claim for the nature and the mission of the church. But first we must indicate what kind of relationship between Christ's identity and mission, and the identity and mission of the church, is entailed by an ecclesiology so conceived. The relationship comprises both *identicality* and *non-identicality*.

The identicality between Jesus Christ and the church is manifest in the goal toward which they are directed (the reign of God) and the power by which their mission is carried out (the Spirit of God). The church is called, under circumstances different from those surrounding Jesus, to participate in Christ's mission by announcing and demonstrating God's coming in grace. Even more fundamentally, the sameness of goal and power rest on the fact that Christ himself is present in the church through the Spirit. Just as the mission of the communities gathered around the earthly Jesus entailed the interplay of being gathered around and sent by Jesus on the one hand, and being empowered by the Spirit on the other, so the church lives and pursues its mission in virtue of Christ's coming to the church through the Spirit he has sent. Far from simply being engaged in a mission similar or parallel to Christ's, the church in the power of Christ's Spirit is engaged in Christ's *own* mission, on his behalf[50] and accompanied by him.[51]

Above and beyond its living under different circumstances, however, the relationship between Christ and the church is not identical in at least three respects. (1) Since the reign of God that Christ proclaimed is bound up with his own person, he is the very content of this reign, as in his person he embodies, demonstrates, and establishes God's gracious lordship; the church can be the content of this reign only to the extent that it is first a creation of the gracious coming of this reign into the world. (2) Since Christ is the content of God's reign, his identity coincides with his mission: *to be* Jesus Christ, with all that that entails, *is* what he is to do. Since the church was created as the sphere of God's reign by grace, its identity often diverges from what it is supposed to proclaim and practice before the world; the church is always ambiguous because it is made up of people prone to deny Christ even given their most ardent attempts at clinging to him.[52] (3) Whereas Jesus' mission is properly his own, the church does not have a mission of its own; its only mission is the very mission of Jesus.

Here we see the emerging contours of the Spirit's ecclesiological significance. The idea that the Spirit which rested on Jesus was sent by the exalted Christ after his resurrection to mediate his presence and thereby

constitute the church functions to secure the proper interplay between Christ's and the church's identity and mission. Were it not for the Spirit, the relation between Christ and the church would be either one of sheer non-identicality (the church as a society founded historically by Jesus and/or obedient to a transcendent Lord) or of sheer identicality (the church as the continuation of Christ's incarnation). Since the Spirit of Christ mediates the presence of the absent one, the church can, like a bride, stand over against Christ yet be most intimately united with him.

This interplay of identicality and non-identicality arises from the fact that it is the *same* Spirit at work both in Jesus' ministry and in the church, and from the *difference* of the Spirit's presence in both. The presence of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry was immediate: the Spirit had descended upon him and made him into the Messiah of God. The presence of the Spirit in the church is mediated through Jesus: the disciples received the Spirit because they were Jesus' disciples, and it was he who sent the Spirit upon the church after his resurrection. In biblical terminology, Jesus was given the Spirit "without measure";[53] in the church the Spirit operates "according to the measure of faith."[54] In the terminology of later tradition, Jesus was endowed with the Spirit "by nature"; the church is endowed with the Spirit "by grace." Here we will concentrate only on explicating the nature and the mission of the church so conceived.

The Nature of the Church[55]

Earlier we argued that God's reign as proclaimed and inaugurated by Christ in the power of the Spirit is unthinkable without God's people, and we suggested that God's people are directed toward God's reign. From this it follows that the nature and the mission of the church, though clearly distinct, are intimately related. When we speak about the the church's nature, we are looking at the church as a fruit of Christ's proclamation and inauguration of God's reign; when we speak of the church's mission, we are examining the participation of the church in that very mission of Christ of which it is a fruit. We will now examine the nature of the church, in particular how the Spirit who rested on the earthly Jesus and who was given by the risen Christ is related to the gathering and the internal life of the community, and how as a result of the Spirit's activity the church emerges as the image of the Trinity.

Gathered in Diversity

Any community must somehow be *gathered*. The gathering of a Christian church occurs as the Spirit moves people in varied and specific forms of social, cultural, and physical embodiment to acclaim – in a bountiful diversity of ways – the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as the "Yes" by whom God fulfills God's promises to God's people,[56] the source in whom true life is to be found,[57] the reality to whom all life is to be oriented.[58] Since the church sees itself as a potentially universal community, this confession must be made in the hearing and presence of others – *publicly*.[59] Though always a broken and gradually unfolding sign of the Spirit's work, the public confession of Jesus Christ is nonetheless a fundamental constitutive element of the church. A people gathered in the Spirit to worship the one God through common allegiance to and confession of Christ is a "communion of the Spirit," and thereby a concrete church.[60]

Two essential elements of this public profession are faith in Christ as Savior and commitment to Christ as Lord. The church is the communion of the faithful, whatever else it may be beyond this. Without faith in Christ as Savior, without the giving over of basic trust to God's mercy in Christ, there is no church. Similarly, if faith is not to degenerate into a false quasi-religious solace, it must be accompanied by the intention to follow Christ's way. Without commitment to Christ as Lord, without obedience to Christ's way of holiness, there is no church. Certainly, the church does not stand or fall with the faith and commitment of every individual member. It can exist even if an individual member does not trust or obey, but without at least someone trusting and obeying Christ, there can be no church.

Such an emphasis on faith and commitment might seem to make the church into a human "work." After all, it is individual people who believe and who commit themselves. Yet the NT sees these most basic human acts lyingat the foundation of the church as generated by the Spirit.[61] Thus, though no church can arise and live without the faith and commitment to Christ of its members, the real subject of the genesis of the church is not the people themselves, but the Spirit of Christ, acting through communal proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments.

That the community gathered in faith and commitment is a church – that the community's trust and obedience are in and to *Christ* – implies it must be

a *catholic* community. Since the Spirit who creates the community in continuation of Christ's anointing is the Spirit of the reign of God, and since the eschatological reign of God will mean the creation of a single people of God from every tribe and nation,[62] every local community must see itself both as part of that one people of God and as its microcosm. Hence, no church in a given culture may isolate itself from other churches in other cultures; every church must be open to all other churches. Even more, every local church is a catholic community because all other churches are part of that church; all of them shape its identity.

For a community to be truly catholic, it must be composed of catholic persons. In coming to persons, the Spirit of God breaks through the self-enclosed worlds they inhabit; the Spirit renews, re-creates them and sets them up as a site of God's eschatological reign. To be such a site is to be a catholic person, a person enriched by others, a person whose identity arises not simply from and of itself, but because multiple others are reflected in it in a particular way. By opening each person and community to all other persons and communities, and all of them to God's universal eschatological reign, the Spirit fashions the church into a site of reconciled and mutually enriching diversity.[63]

Gifted for Ministry

Over against notions claiming that faith either comes through the narrow portals of ordained ministry or is directly given by the Spirit to the souls of individuals, NT texts suggest that the Spirit of God creates faith through the multidimensional proclamation of the gospel, in which, in principle, all members of the community participate. This is evident especially in Pauline ecclesiology. In working to establish peace within the enthusiastic and chaotic Corinthian congregation, Paul does not seek to bolster hierarchical structures but instead reaffirms a model of ecclesial life whose structure is *polycentric* and participatory. Summing up his own instructions he writes: "When you come together, *each one* has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up the congregation."[64] Commensurate with their calling and endowment by God's Spirit, all members of a church are stewards of God's manifold grace through their deeds and words,[65] and all have something to contribute in worship and in the entire life of the church. The church arises and lives insofar as grace is mediated through mutual service with pluriform spiritual gifts.

The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of ministerial diversity, creating the one body in which all members have differing roles.[66] True, not everyone participates in the same way and with the same intensity. Ordained ministers play a particularly prominent and indispensable role. Yet the church's whole life is not ordered around them. Different persons and networks of persons become soteriologically "significant others" for other members and groups. Beyond this, the community as a whole and not just its officeholders creates "plausibility structures" in which the mediation of faith and faithful life become possible. Thus the Spirit does constitutes the church not exclusively through its officeholders but as members serve others with their gifts.

If all the ministries in the church are equally significant for its life, and if all members are equally gifted by the Spirit, there would seem to be no need for ordained ministry. Yet this is not so. Of course, since all ministries derive from the gifts of the Spirit, the necessity of ordained ministry cannot be derived from the givenness of the gifts themselves. Instead, it must be grounded in the particular features of those ministries performed by officeholders and of the gifts bestowed upon them for those ministries. The specific necessity attaching to the gifts of office is their reference to the entirety of the local church: officeholders are responsible not for a part of the congregation or a narrow aspect of its life but for the vital concerns of the congregation as a congregation. An officeholder acts in the name of the congregation before God, individual members, and the world, and also in the name of Christ by the power of the Spirit before the congregation as a whole.

United in Love

The gathering of a catholic community with a multiplicity of charismatic ministries aims at creating a people with distinctive communal practices.[67] In Acts 2 the Spirit establishes a community whose members are free from the compulsion of self-aggrandizement to give of their possessions to each other – free to love each other in concrete, specific ways. The Spirit who brings freedom[68] generates the fruit of love,[69] the greatest of the gifts.[70]

Love grows up in the space of freedom. Freedom for love transcends both an exclusive self-focus that nurtures radical independence and autonomy at the expense of the determinations of mutual presence, and from the dissolution of the self threatened by abusive relationships or bureaucratic

mentalities.[71] Indeed, love is enabled by freedom and enables it: personally oriented and communally practiced, it unites differently situated people without indiscriminately erasing differences and opens those who love and are loved to develop in individually specified yet mutually enriching and freeing ways. Love, in its many concrete manifestations – speaking the truth,[72] bearing others' burdens,[73] refusing to seek evil for evil,[74] showing hospitality to strangers,[75] even laying down one's life[76] – and freedom are thus intimately connected. Love gives rise to freedom; freedom is the precondition of love.

Both freedom and love, of course, can be sorely abused and counterfeits easily constructed. If the freedom that opens a space for true love is possible and available at all, it arises from the Spirit's gracious power and presence. If the love which gives genuine freedom is possible and available, it is because God's love is prior and paradigmatic,[77] indeed because God's love is the source, having been poured into believers' hearts by the Spirit.[78] The Spirit grants believers participation in the love given and received by the Son,[79] that is, in the perfect self-giving love that characterizes the triune divine life.

Imaging the Trinity

The sacrament of baptism has rightly been described as the gateway into the church. Through baptism "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the Spirit of God leads believers simultaneously into both the Trinitarian and ecclesial communions. Emerging from the baptismal waters, the members of the church enter the ecclesial space where the eschatological communion of the triune God and God's glorified people is lived out in a proleptic way.[80] From this vantage point, the gathering of catholic communities, the equality of their members, and the mutuality of their love all emerge as ways in which a church images in a broken but nonetheless real fashion the triune divine life.

We cannot argue here for an understanding of the Trinity that makes the identification of these correspondences between the Trinitarian and ecclesial communities possible. Neither can we argue for a construal of how the Trinitarian and ecclesial communities correspond and of the limits to such correspondences. We must simply assume all this,[81] and proceed to sketch three ways in which the Spirit of communion makes the church into an image of the Trinity.

First, *catholicity*. One notable characteristic of the divine persons is their personal interiority. Echoing John's Gospel,[82] John of Damascus writes in *De Fide* that the divine persons "have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling."[83] Every divine person is indwelled by other divine persons, and all interpenetrate each other without ceasing to be distinct; distinctions of the persons are rather a presupposition of their interpenetration. Analogously, a member of the church is a catholic person because other members of the church are part and parcel of his or her identity (although, unlike the divine persons, not of his or her personhood); a local church is a catholic community because it is related to other local churches – and together with them to the glorified people of God – such that they shape its very identity and it shapes theirs.

Second, *equality*. The divine persons are distinct yet equal. Since each shares all the attributes of divinity, there can be no place for non-reciprocal subordination in their mutual relations (except for the economic subordination of the *incarnate* Word to the One who sent him and in whose power he was sent). Distinctions of persons concern their identities and their roles; they are not a function of unalterable "places" on a hierarchical line of super- and subordination. Analogously, all members of the church are fundamentally equal in that they have all been baptized by the Spirit and received gifts of the Spirit. Their distinctions stem from their specific personal identities and their concrete and changing gifts for ministry. Though life in the community requires willful subordination and mutual service, no principled and unalterable hierarchical relations obtain between members. Similarly, all local churches are equal, and the universal church, whether viewed as the whole *communio sanctorum* or as the global church, is not superordinate to local churches.

Third, *love*. The equality and personal interiority of the divine persons are rooted in the perfect divine love – an interchange between self and other in which the giving of the self coalesces with the receiving of the other and in which, paradoxically, each gives first and at the same time gives because she has received. In its encounter with a deeply flawed world crying for transformation, the delight of the perfect divine love is transmuted into the *agony* of the same love that in freedom spilled over the boundaries of the divine community to create the world, a world now gone astray – the agony of opposition to non-love, the agony of suffering at the hand of non-love, and the

agony of sympathy with non-love's victims. The love exhibited in the community of the Spirit should be modeled on the love of the divine persons for one another and for the world, the love that enjoys the other and the love suffers for the other's sake. The love of the ecclesial community is the fruit of the labor of that very love it seeks to replicate.

The Mission of the Church

In the power of the Spirit that rested upon Jesus as he announced and inaugurated the reign of God and that the resurrected and exalted Christ poured out on his followers so that they can continue his mission, churches live as catholic communities of equal persons who give allegiance to Jesus Christ and seek to embody divine love. As such communities, churches image in a broken way the Trinitarian life of God. This way of defining the nature of the church suggests a close relationship between the church's identity and its mission. If the triune God whom the church should image is redemptively engaged with a world gone awry, then the church should do the same.

Mission and Identity

If the church is the image of the Trinity, then the church's very being is a form of mission. As an image of the Trinity, the church is a sign of the coming reign of the triune God.[84] A sign can be extrinsic to the reality to which it points (like road signs) or intrinsic to it (like love letters). The church is this latter kind of sign: it points to the reign of God by being its present realization under the conditions of history. Put differently, the church signifies by *sampling* – admittedly in an ambiguous, inadequate way. It follows that the identity of the church is its first mission, a mission not simply toward itself but toward the world. The frequently invoked tension between identity and mission is spurious, because that identity *is* mission; mission cannot acquire gain by identity's suffering loss.

If mission is compromised by a concern for identity, the problem is that identity has been wrongly conceived. The claim that the church's identity is its first mission is valid only if mission is seen from the start as part of that identity.[85] The church emerged as a result of the mission of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit to announce and inaugurate the reign of God. Since God's reign is unthinkable without God's people, the church is not simply a means

toward that reign; rather, the church is in some sense an end in itself. But only insofar as it is oriented toward and contributes to the emergence of something greater than itself – the reign of God. As a broken, ambiguous but real sampling of God's reign, the church is called to serve that reign by continuing the mission of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. As preached and presented by Jesus, God's reign is the inbreaking of God's favor and love, which eagerly seeks out those trapped in sin as one would seek a wandering sheep, a lost coin, or a wayward child, to return them to where they belong. In the power of the Spirit, the church must participate in this inbreaking of God's favor – or cease to be the church. As David Bosch puts it in *Transforming Mission*, "the Christian faith is . . . intrinsically missionary."[86]

All the essential elements of the church's mission are aspects of the inbreaking of God's favor manifest in the mission of Jesus under the anointing of the Spirit that the church is called to continue, albeit in a non-identical way. We will now sketch three key elements of the church's mission.

Rebirth of Persons

The church is called to proclaim that God "through the Holy Spirit" seeks to pour "God's love" into the hearts of those who are "weak," "sinners," and "enemies."[87] At the cross we see that the reach of God's love cannot be limited or confounded by ungodliness; as God lets the sun shine on good and evil, so God bestows grace on all. God's commitment to each human being is irrevocable and God's covenant with them indestructible. No deed is imaginable that could put a person outside the scope of God's love. Hence the universal offer of forgiveness. Forgiveness, of course, entails blame. Far from treating human sin as if it were not there, in the act of forgiveness God names deception as deception, injustice as injustice, violence as violence. The good news is not that human sin does not matter but that, the reality of the most heinous sin notwithstanding, the offer of embrace still holds. Hence the cross.

By naming sins in the context of God's immutable grace, the Spirit of truth frees us from self-deception rooted in conscious or unconscious efforts at self-justification. Facing God's arms outstretched toward us on the cross, we dare to look into the abyss of our own evil and recognize ourselves as who we are – "weak," "sinners," and "enemies," the "ungodly." Freedom from self-deception comes, however, not simply because we know that we will be

embraced, indeed that we have been embraced, but because of the certainty that God's embrace will liberate us from the enslavement to evil that has so profoundly shaped us. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"[88] The grace that forgives is the grace that makes new.[89]

"New creation" is, of course, an eschatological reality. This suggests that the good news of God's grace concerns not only our past and our present but also our future. Forgiven and transformed, we have been given "a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"[90] a hope "that does not disappoint."[91] In the words of Serene Jones, "the purity of grace that God has poured upon our imperfect, impure souls," through Christ who was put to death for our transgressions and raised for our justification,[92] gives us certainty that our end has been "folded into God's promise."[93]

Summing up these three aspects – forgiveness, transformation, hope – we can say that the church is called to proclaim the eschatological event of justification by grace through which God forgives, transforms, and promises to glorify sinful human beings, and thus take them up into God's own Trinitarian embrace.

Reconciliation of People

At the center of God's offer of grace, which remakes the sinner into a new creation, lies the cross of Christ as an act of God's self-giving. In baptism persons are identified with the death of Christ and are portrayed as those who live "by faith in the Son of God, who loved [them] and gave himself up for [them]."[94] In the Lord's supper Christians remember the One who gave his body "for them" so that not only their communion with him would be restored but that they would be shaped in his image.[95] Since the church's very being is grounded in God's self-giving and constituted by its being made present to those who believe by the Spirit, the church's life must be modeled on God's self-giving by which God has reconciled human beings to himself.[96] And since the church's mission is nothing but the face of its identity turned toward the world, the church must engage in the ministry of reconciliation, one that in early times was pursued in the power of the same Spirit of communion[97] seen at work in the communities themselves to reconcile members to one another.[98]

For the most part, the church has regarded its ministry of reconciliation to refer to the call for individual persons' reconciliation to God.[99] Reconciliation in this vision has a theological and personal meaning but not a social meaning. For the larger world of social relations, in recent decades the twin categories of liberation and justice have gained prominence. For many theological, socio-philosophical, and political reasons, we think this is dangerously one-sided.[100] The social mission of the church ought to be pursued out of the heart of its own identity. Hence we must retrieve and explicate the social meaning of divine self-giving in order to reconcile sinful humanity. Though Paul describes the ministry of reconciliation as entreating people to "be reconciled to God,"[101] that ministry for him has an inalienable social dimension because reconciliation between human beings is intrinsic to their reconciliation with God. At its center, not just at its periphery, reconciliation has a horizontal dimension as well. It contains a turn away from enmity toward people, not just toward God, and it contains a movement toward the other who was the target of enmity. Hence the Pauline vision of reconciliation between Jews and gentiles, between men and women, between slaves and free.[102] And hence the grand deutero-Pauline claim that "in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."[103] The ultimate goal both for the church and the whole of reality is a vision of the reconciliation of all things in the embrace of the triune God.

If we put reconciliation and grace at the center of the church's social mission, we must not conceive reconciliation in opposition to liberation and grace in contrast to justice. Instead, within the dialectical relation between reconciliation and liberation we need to give priority to reconciliation. We must underscore both the priority of reconciliation over liberation and the dialectical relationship between the two. Apart from the priority of reconciliation, the pursuit of liberation will never lead to peace and love between former enemies, partly because truth and justice are unavailable outside the prior commitment to reconciliation. But without a commitment to justice within the overarching framework of love, the pursuit of reconciliation will be perverted into perpetuating domination and oppression. Just as the proclamation of God's embrace is centered on grace that affirms

justice as part of its inner makeup, so also the understanding and practice of social reconciliation must include the struggle for liberation within the overarching framework of embrace.

Care of Bodies

As we have seen, central to Jesus' mission was the care of bodies. His programmatic sermon in Nazareth makes this plain: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[104] Attempts at spiritualizing Jesus' care for bodies abound. Martin Luther, for example, consistently translated accounts of Christ's healings of human bodies into reports on how Jesus liberates the conscience through forgiveness of sins.[105] But this will clearly not do as an adequate reading of the Gospels: Jesus forgave *and* he healed. The early church, at least ideally, continued with the same kind of care: it healed the sick and it supported the poor so that "there was not a needy person among them."[106] The apostle Paul, too, did not only proclaim reconciliation; he also helped the poor[107] and healed the sick.[108]

Behind the care of bodies lies the conviction that the rebirth of persons who live in this material world and who with this world make up God's good creation cannot be complete without the redemption of their bodies. The new birth of persons through the Spirit is the ambiguous, but nonetheless real beginning of the rebirth of the whole cosmos.[109] Similarly, the reconciliation of people who live embodied lives will be complete only when the reconciliation of all things takes place; there can be no eschatological bliss for God's people without eschatological *shalom* for God's world. Hence the care of bodies, broadly conceived, belongs properly to the church's mission.

If we understand the church's mission this way and in so doing address larger social and ecological issues, where does the Spirit come in? Often the Spirit's work has been limited to the church, to gathering people into communities, gifting them, uniting them, inspiring them to proclaim the gospel, which aims in turn at further gathering. Is such a centripetal view of the Spirit's work adequate? Are its implicit ecclesiological assumptions correct – namely, that the church is only a church when gathered but not when

"scattered," and that its work is therefore primarily liturgical and not "secular"? Properly understood, the church is not a "gathering" but a community that gathers, and ecclesial work is therefore done both when the community is gathered and when it is scattered in the world. Since to live as a Christian means to "walk in the Spirit,"[110] all Christian work is done in the power of the Spirit – whether it concerns the rebirth of persons, the reconciliation of people, or the care of bodies.[111]

As the community of faith reaches into the world to touch all dimensions of its life, it will find that the Spirit of Christ at work in the community is the Spirit of life at work in the whole creation. Anointed by the Spirit, the church is sent to go where the Spirit is always already to be found preparing the way for the coming of God's reign.

Hiddenness and Openness

At work in all these aspects of the church's mission is a complex interplay between "hiddenness" and "openness" analogous to that which characterized Jesus' ministry. The church does not seek to draw attention to itself. Instead, the church in its worship and service points to Christ as the way to God the Father, and by doing so points to the reign of God. This takes Jesus' own practice of hiddenness a step further still. Jesus refused to identify and to exalt himself in ways that would have reinforced popular expectations and assumptions, even as he acted and spoke from his belief in his own centrality to the mission for which he had been anointed and which was meant to go forward to all of God's people. The church, sent by Christ and anointed by his Spirit, similarly does "not wrangle or cry aloud" in self-interest, does not demand that "anyone hear [its] voice in the streets."[112] And the church must harbor no illusions about its own "centrality," for its anointing is with Christ's Spirit for Christ's mission, and the center around which its existence and work are organized is displaced from itself in Christ, for the sake of making known the grace of God's reign.

This radical de-centeredness is not an excuse for the church to avoid agency but entails the courage to remain "misfitted" as the church pursues its proper mission: the courage to be openly out of step with the surrounding culture's plausibility structures and social arrangements – dominant paradigms that might

otherwise dictate to the church what is publicly expected of and appropriate to it, independently of its proper mandate. To the extent that the church understands that its identity and mission are not its own but Christ's, it will resist having its boundaries and its place marked out for it by assumptions and pressures other than those arising from its union with Christ in the Spirit.

Thus the church's hiddenness is not equivalent to withdrawal or a sectarian privatization of religious life, a blissful, unsullied, somehow apolitical isolation in which the church can float above and beyond the concrete tapestry of human needs, wounds, enmities, and hopes. Rather, the church's hiddenness is a form of openness. De-centered from itself in Christ, it is publicly un-bent by forces that would shape it into merely another socio-cultural institution, and is thereby unleashed – pointing away from itself – to announce and demonstrate God's grace that changes the world. This interplay of hiddenness and openness coming out of the church's anointing by Christ's Spirit protects its identity and mission from facile distortions and oppressive demands, and thus frees the church to subvert, challenge, and transform both the public's visions of its own salutary future and its ways of creating such a future. To be public as the church is to offer an alternative vision, in which the image and reign of God are displayed to all and brought to bear on all aspects of life – to pursue the very mission at the core of the church's identity.[113]

Notes

[1] *Apostolic Tradition* 2.21.17.

[2] Cf. Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupecht, 1957).

[3] By that Spirit's work, believers "have entered into fellowship with Christ" and receive "gifts variously distributed" (4.1.3). Calvin devotes particular attention to the gift of pastoral ministry, but why it should be the Spirit who does these things, how the nature of the church is characterized by "en-Spirit-edness," is left unsaid.

[4] Cf. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 171.

[5] Cf., e.g., Nikos Nissiotis's critical comments on *Dei verbum*, quoted in Dmitri Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, tr. Robert Barringer (Crestwood: St. Vladmir's Seminary Press, 1980), 48ff. and Staniloae's own scoring of Protestant pneumatological individualism, 14 .

[6] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: Vladmir's Seminary Press, 1985), 123.

[7] *Ad Smyrnaeos* 8.2
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] Heribert Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona: Die Kirche als das Mysterium der heilsgeschichtlichen Identität des heiligen Geistes in Christus und den Christen: Eine Person in vielen Personen* 3rd ed. (Munich: Schöningh, 1968), 216–286.
[10] *Adversus Haereses* 3.24.1.
[11] Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996) and *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998).
[12] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 162; cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and The Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 67.
[13] As in John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).
[14] In his summaries of what can be said with reasonable certainty about the historical Jesus, Crossan (417–26) does not mention the Spirit at all, the summaries reflecting an almost total absence of this theme from the main body of the work as well.
[15] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 162; cf. Matthew 12:28 (although the substitution here of "Spirit" for Luke 11:20's "finger" is probably secondary relative to Q).
[16] Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, tr. John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 33.
[17] Gerhard Lohfink, "Jesus und die Kirche" in *Handbuch fur Fundamentaltheologie 3: Trakat Kirche*, ed. W. Kern, H.J. Pottmeyer, and M. Seckler (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 49–96; *Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt? Zu gesellschaftlichen Dimension des christlichen Glaubens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 38–41.
[18] Lohfink, "Jesus und Kirche," 76.
[19] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 615ff.
[20] *Ibid.*, 538
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*, 317
[23] *Ibid.*, 276
[24] *Ibid.*, 309–10
[25] *Ibid.*, 303
[26] Matt. 10:1–23 (esp. 20); cf. Mark 6:6–13, Luke 10:1–20. Also cf. W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol.2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 186. Max Turner, *Power From on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 333-41.
[27] E.g., Matt. 9:2 pars.
[28] E.g., Luke 15:2
[29] E.g., Mark 1:34
[30] Luke 1:17, John 6:63

[31] Luke 10:21, John 3:34
[32] Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation." *Interpretation* 54:2, 158-72.
[33] E.g., Luke 19:1–10
[34] E.g., Luke 8:1–3
[35] E.g., Mark 5:25–34; Luke 17:11–19
[36] Mark 10:42–44
[37] Cf. Michael Welker, *God and the Spirit*, tr. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 195–203.
[38] Alan Wolfe, "Democracy versus Sociology: Boundaries and Their Political Consequences," in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. M. Lamont and M. Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 309-25.
[39] Isaiah 42:1, 61:1–3
[40] Cf. Matt. 12:15ff., and cf. Welker, *God and the Spirit*, 203ff.
[41] Cf. John 14:6, Matt. 11:27
[42] John 7:16; cf. 14:24
[43] Acts 10:38.
[44] Acts 2:33
[45] John 1:32–33
[46] John 3:34
[47] John 20:19–23
[48] The language describing the Spirit's activity in relation to Jesus is varied, perhaps reflecting, as John Levison suggests, the freedom with which the evangelists drew from disparate sources and traditions. "Anointing" and "baptism," for example, are images with different histories and forces. Yet Luke makes it clear that the baptism of Jesus by John and the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit could be held by early Christians in the closest connection (Luke 3:21–22, 4:18; Acts 10:37–38).
[49] Raniero Cantalamessa, *Life in the Lordship of Christ* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 140. We owe this reference to Kilian McDonnell.
[50] 2 Cor. 5:20
[51] Matt. 28:20
[52] Cf. Matt. 26:33–35, 69–75
[53] John 3:34
[54] Rom. 12:3
[55] In this and the following main sections we build and expand on arguments presented in Volf, "The Church as a Prophetic Community and Sign of Hope," *European Journal of Theology* 2.1 (1993): 9-30; Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Volf, "'The Trinity is Our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14.3 (1998): 403-23
[56] 2 Cor. 1:20–21
[57] John 20:31

[58] 1 Cor. 12:3; cf. Rom. 10:9–10
[59] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 149
[60] 2 Cor. 13:13; cf. Phil. 2:1
[61] 1 Cor. 12:1–3
[62] Rev. 7:9
[63] Acts 2
[64] 1 Cor. 14:26; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5–10, 4:10
[65] Cf. 1 Peter 4:10–11
[66] Rom. 12:4–5
[67] Acts 2:41–47
[68] 2 Cor. 3:17
[69] Gal. 5:22
[70] 1 Cor. 13
[71] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation,* tr. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 251
[72] Ephesians 4:15
[73] Gal. 6:2
[74] Rom. 12:9–21
[75] Heb. 13:1–2; cf. Rom. 12:13
[76] 1 John 3:16
[77] 1 John 4:19
[78] Rom. 5:5
[79] Rom. 8:15–17; cf. John 17:24–25
[80] Cf. 1 John 1:3–4; Rev. 21–22
[81] Volf, *After Our Likeness,* 191-220; Volf, "'The Trinity is Our Social Program'"; Volf, "Trinity, Unity, Primacy: On the Trinitarian Nature of Ecclesial Unity and Its Implications for the Question of Primacy," *Petrine Mystery and the Unity of the Church*, ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 171-84
[82] E.g., 10:38
[83] *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.7.
[84] Volf, "The Church as Prophetic Community."
[85] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).
[86] *Ibid.*, 8
[87] Rom. 5:1–11
[88] 1 Cor. 5:17
[89] Cf. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 123ff., 144ff.
[90] 1 Pet. 1:3
[91] Rom. 5:5
[92] Rom. 4:25
[93] Personal communication.
[94] Gal. 2:20
[95] 1 Cor. 11:21,24

[96] Cf. Johnson, *Living Jesus*.
[97] Paul does not state explicitly that his ministry of reconciliation was carried out in the power of the Spirit. But it is clear that that ministry was central to his apostleship, which he did conceive as a gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20).
[98] Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor.13:13; cf. Eph. 4:3
[99] Gregory Baum and Harold Wells ed., *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches* (Geneva/Maryknoll: WCC/Orbis, 1997), 5.
[100] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*; Volf , "'The Trinity is Our Social Program'"; Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation."
[101] 2 Cor. 5:20.
[102] Cf. Gal. 3:28. For an argument for interpreting this verse in terms of reconciliation, rather than the erasure of differences, see Judith M.Gundry-Volf, "Christ and Gender: A Study of Difference and Equality in Gal. 3:28," in *Jesus Christus als die Mitte der Schrift: Studien zur Hermenutik des Evangeliums*, ed., C. Landmesser, H.- J. Eckstein, and H. Lichtenberger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 439-77.
[103] Col. 1:20.
[104] Luke 4:18–19.
[105] Volf, "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentacostal Theologies," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26.3 (1989): 449–54; Gustav Wingren, "Beruf II," in *Theologische Realenzyklopadie*, vol. 5, ed. G. Krause and G. Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 663.
[106] Acts 4:34
[107] 2 Cor. 8–9; cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–4, Gal. 2:10
[108] Gal. 3:5
[109] Cf. Matt. 19:28; 2 Cor. 5:17
[110] Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16ff.
[111] Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[112] Matt. 12:19.
[113] We thank Todd Billings, Jin Cho, Jill Carlson Colwell, and participants in the Marquette symposium for valuable comments on previous versions of this paper.

Responses to "The Spirit and the Church" by Miroslav Volf and Maurice Lee

Clark Pinnock

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Miroslav Volf's voice has become part of today's theological conversation, and we are all enriched. The theme of his paper is summarized in the sentence: "In the power of the Spirit which rested upon Jesus, as he announced and inaugurated the reign of God and which the resurrected and exalted Christ poured out on his followers so that they can continue his mission in the world, churches live as catholic communities of equal persons who give allegiance to Jesus Christ and seek to embody divine love. As such communities, churches image in a broken way, the Trinitarian life of God." Volf offers us here a thrilling vision for holistic mission in the power of God.

I too have appreciated Heribert Mühlen, a German Roman Catholic charismatic theologian whom Wolf mentions. He contends that the church is a continuation of the anointing of the Spirit, reminding us of John 20:21: "As the Father sent me, so send I you." Just as the Father sent him in the power of the Spirit, so Jesus sends us in the power of the Spirit. Hendrikus Berkhof also catches this truth when he says that the first act of the risen Lord was to pour the Spirit out. Jesus did not lead a seminar about how the church should be structured but he poured the Spirit out instead. He wanted his disciples to receive Spirit-baptism so that he could be present in a new way through them.[1]

I also appreciated the way Volf speaks about the Spirit outside of the church. "Anointed by the Spirit, the church is sent to go where the Spirit is always already to be found, preparing the way for the coming of the reign of God." I love the idea that the Spirit is already in the world, preparing the way for the word about Jesus to be brought through evangelization. This is a helpful way of handling issues of pluralism and exclusivity – it upholds the particularity of the Jesus event within the cosmic presence of the Spirit which is preparing the world to receive him. As Pope John Paul II has emphasized in many speeches and documents, we can respect the work of the Spirit of truth in the religions of non-Christians.[2]

Volf's paper prompts me to address the issue of practice. He gives us a wonderful picture of the church in the power of the Spirit, but alongside that we have the realities of our experience of being actual churches. How often we forget the vision, neglect the power, and deny Christ. The taunt in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* often applies to us: "You will have to sing better songs if I am to believe in your Redeemer." What a gap there often is between theology and experience. The apostles were uneducated and ordinary men, but they had the anointing that we desperately need. We must ask God for the Holy Spirit as Jesus invites us to: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13) How badly the church needs to ask for the Holy Spirit and his gifts: the care of bodies, ministries of healing, the hearing of prophecy and words of direction, and deliverances from the powers of darkness. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit in an unrestricted way. Volf challenges me actually to experience the Spirit which we have tasted and can taste again.

Jürgen Moltmann has this word about how the church can appropriate the power of the Spirit: "The essential impediment to the charismatic experience of our potentialities for living is to be found in our passive sins, not our active ones. For the hindrance is not our despairing attempt to be ourselves but our despairing attempt not to be ourselves, so that out of fear of life and fear of death we fall short of what our own lives could be. The charismata of the Spirit are present wherever faith in God drives out these fears of life and wherever the hope of resurrection overcomes the fear of death."[3] I believe that Volf in the sub-text of his paper challenges us to see this appropriation happen in our congregations. Come Creator Spirit.

Notes

[1] Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964), ch. 2.
[2] On papal teaching after Vatican II, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), ch 11.
[3] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 188.

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I appreciate the clarity of Volf's paper, its careful elucidation of biblical and historical themes, and its helpfulness in organizing my thinking about the relation of the Spirit and the church. I will list four questions the paper raised for me, only mentioning the first three and then, I will devote the rest of my response to comments on question four.

1. Does Volf really wish to follow a procedure that accepts the notion of a reconstructible historical Jesus and then reads the witness of the New Testament writers as a theological reflection upon such a reconsrtuction? Hasn't the work of Hans Frei, for example, demonstrated the questionableness of this procedure?

2. Does Volf really want to speak of "the church enacting the reign of God?" Aren't there good reasons to speak more modestly of the church as "confirming" or simply "witnessing to" the reign of God?

3. Does the way in which Volf emphasizes Jesus as bearer as well as giver of the Spirit encourage a disavowal of the *filioque* clause? [The filioque clause declares that the Spirit always comes from the Father *and the Son*.] If so, doesn't such a disavowal endanger our recognition of God not only as the One who *always* promises and commands, but also as the One who *always* obeys and fulfills?

4. Does Volf's use of the concept of equality in speaking both of persons of the trinity and of members of the church correspond to what Scripture attests?

I do not find in Scripture an explicit or implicit attestation of the concept of equality in these contexts. It is clear in Matt. 20:25-26 that Jesus rejects hierarchy in the church: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . it must not be so among you." That this is not an isolated command is borne out by the fact that the NT narrative instantiates the declaration that "the son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28).

Both terms, hierarchy and equality, are quantitative, legal. (The use of the concept of equality being legal is requisite in framing the laws of society.)

When I was growing up I was taught that equality is a concept requisite for legislation since it is a self-evident truth: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all [humans] are created equal. . ." (The United States Declaration of Independence). In the context of participation in the church, however, my reading of the NT prompts me to make equality analogous to "prostitutes and cheating tax collectors" and hierarchy analogous to the "scribes and Pharisees," *i.e.,* to the doctors of the law. Equality goes into the Kingdom of God before hierarchy but, even so like prostitution and cheating, it is not to be endorsed or promoted in a discussion either of the trinity or of the church. In Christ neither equality nor hierarchy occur. If notions of equality (or hierarchy) are introduced into our thinking about trinity or about our participation in the church, confusion rather than clarity prevails.

First, why will the concept of equality confuse us if used in the context of the doctrine of the trinity? At first glance this concept might seem helpful, since each person of the trinity is wholly God and, as the church declared in councils, none is more God nor less God than another. But the concept of equality will confuse us here, I believe, since equality in our time is equated with egalitarianism, a concept confronted by Scripture's description of the Father commanding and the Son obeying. This is evidently true and never reversed in what has been called the economic trinity (God's life as enacted with us and described in Scripture). And as Jesus is the revelation of *God*, then God's revelation *to us* corresponds to God's revelation to himself in his own life.

That God "obeys" is as true as that God "commands" is a point not always kept in mind by Christians. That God commands is applauded by hierarchs. That God obeys is less noticed by them and when it is, it is used by them to serve their own purposes. That God commands is often deplored by egalitarians; even more deplored by them is the declaration that God obeys. But in Scripture God both commands and obeys. Yet command is not the exercise of sheer power, nor is obedience submissiveness in the face of power. Jesus' obedience is his willing in accord with the Father's will. The command is the form of the Father's love for the Son; the Son's obedience is the form of the Son's love for the Father. In the West (cf. Pope Leo's Tome) both forms of love are forms of *exinanitio,* humble self-giving; in the East (cf. Basil the Great) both forms are indicated by *kenosis*, self-humbling.

This is less abstract if we think of command and obedience in a Christian community in the context of a violent world. My neighbor – being beaten by a gang and left near death in a ditch – is made by Jesus' parable the occasion of God's command to me. My action of lifting up the neighbor is my obedience. (Of course, the Father already commanded Jesus to lift up the felled neighbor and he has done so. In Jesus the neighbor is already lifted up to heaven and my action of lifting him simply confirms on earth what is already true of him in Christ.) Or, my being beaten and left on the ground is the occasion of God's command to my neighbor – probably some crummy Samaritan (at any rate not someone of my ethnic group) – to confirm Jesus' prior action by lifting me up on earth in correspondence to Christ's lifting me up and hiding me with him in heaven.

With Christ's telling of this parable we learn that command and obedience in heaven and on earth are not about hierarchy or equality, neither in the church on earth nor in the community of God in heaven. Rather they are forms of love, which are precisely specified in the parable. The Father always comes low in his command, and the Son always humbly accepts and receives being lifted up – and humbly accepts and receives the command to lift up his earthly neighbors. The Father in the Son always comes low to us, and lifting us up, commands us both to accept our lifting up from another and to confirm his lifting up of our neighbor by, here and now, lifting up our felled neighbor.

Something more is implied in the parable. The man felled is the occasion of the Father's command to me (as it was to the Son before me); my lifting up of the man is my obedience in confirmation of the Son's obedience enacted in relation to the man struck down. But why should I lift up this man? He does not belong to my group. Why should I obey the command? Why should the church obey the Father's command in the Son? Isn't it better, in terms of the concept of equality, to get rid of this talk of command and obedience? Command and obedience constitute the form of the "effective event" which God is as Spirit. To repeat in reverse: God as Spirit is the effective eventfulness of God's command and obedience. In the parable the Spirit is the effective eventfulness of God in a brutal occurrence.

The parable does not tell us everything about the nature and mission of the church. But it instantiates the understanding that the church occurs in the world where the command of the Father and the obedience of the Son effectively

eventuates by the Spirit. That is, the Spirit places the occasion of the Samaritan and the felled man, proleptically, here on earth and now, in the triune event of command and obedience which is God's life. This life is described in I John 4 as *agape*, by Pope Leo as *exinanitio*, by Basil as *kenosis*. It is utterly opposite to hierarchy and to equality. In sum, the concept of equality introduces in this context what may be likened to prostitution and devotion to mammon in relation to the Kingdom of God. While nearer to the Kingdom than Phariseeism (hierarchy), it is scarcely an anticipation of that Kingdom.

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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.

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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.

Miroslav Volf Replies

I'm very thankful that my respondents have taken the time and trouble to read so carefully and respond so graciously to what Maurice Lee and I have written. The challenges that have been thrown up here touch central issues and I will be able to respond to them only briefly.

I should say that I'm fully in agreement with Professor Fast Dueck's main points. In particular, I think that it is important to underscore the experience of grace in conjunction with liturgical celebration, as she rightly does. We need to find modes of liturgical celebration that not only portray the self-giving of Christ for our sins but underscore celebratively that the *imitatio Christi* is a deeply hopeful way of life, and help us live out our calling as a church. Although I've sometimes put things in rather technical language, a vision of spiritual life that needs to be liturgically celebrated and also prayed, fasted, and lived out communally is at the heart of what I am after. At the center of the Christian faith are, not our efforts to engage in Christian practices, but the gift of a new life that we have received through the Spirit of God.

Similarly, the best response I give in relation to Professor Pinnock's remarks is to utter a resounding "Amen" to the prayer at the very end of his response: "Come Creator Spirit." I take his whole response to be summarized in that prayer.

More extended comments are in order in relation to Professor Demson's and Professor Erb's responses. First, Professor Demson. I'm in basic agreement with the "critique" of the search for the historical Jesus that is associated with the "Yale School" (which my colleagues at Yale are not sure ever existed). I do not think that we should read the New Testament "as a theological reflection upon … a 'reconstructed historical Jesus'"; even less am I interested in using the "reconstructed historical Jesus" as a criterion of what we are allowed to think and believe about Jesus Christ. But I'm not persuaded that an interest in the historical Jesus is theologically misplaced. If we are not going to have a disembodied, ahistorical form of Christian faith, then we have to be interested in historical research at least to the extent that if it could be shown that the picture that the gospel writers present is incompatible with what can be plausibly construed as an account of the historical Jesus, then we'd have to scratch our head and think twice about whether we can really affirm that. There has to be

a certain kind of fit between the two. In the paper we have read the historical research from the perspective of the narrative of the gospel and suggested that this too is how one can construe it in historically plausible ways. The controlling thing for us is not the historical research but the Gospel narratives. I think if one inverts the primacy, as the historical Jesus research has always tended to do, one will inevitably mirror the reigning cultural plausibilities and, when all is said and done, end up with a rather boring and humanly uninteresting picture of Jesus. Although I tend not to be as negative about historical Jesus research as is Luke Timothy Johnson in *The Real Jesus*, when I read his second volume, *Living Jesus*, it struck me how much more *interesting* the Christ of the New Testament is than the so-called "historical Jesus."

"Enacting?" Maybe saying that the church "enacts" the Reign of God is too strong. "Anticipating" or "portraying" or "provisionally embodying," in a more than simply verbal or symbolic sense, might be better. I think a sense of anticipation, in a broken way instantiating that which is being spoken about, is what I would want to claim for the church. Anything less would not give sufficient weight to the presence of Christ by the Spirit in the church.

I don't think it is adequate to construe the relations of the economic Trinity simply in terms of the Spirit being sent by Christ. The Spirit has to be seen on the economic level as also constituting Christ. The gospel narratives bear witness to that. Now, the difficult question is what one concludes, from this observation concerning the life of the economic Trinity, about the way in which we understand the immanent Trinity. That brings me to a second issue. I think I would argue for a stronger distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity than I see in the greatest theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. As Yves Congar, among others, has pointed out, Rahner's dictum that the economic Trinity is the immanent and vice versa is too strong. One needs to distinguish between the two, while not separating them. If that is the case, one could suggest that to speak of the Father "commanding" and the Son "obeying" is quite appropriate for the life of the economic Trinity but, strictly speaking, not fully adequate for the life of the immanent Trinity. Not fully adequate because I don't know what "commanding" means applied to persons who are equally divine and who would therefore always already know what the command would be and would always already be willing to do precisely that. I don't know how to imagine the possibility of

such a relationship within the immanent Trinity. The language of equality *can* be idolatrous; *anything* can. We would be ill-advised to insist only on formal equality in social terms. An exclusive stress on formal equality ends up emptying relationships of their proper content. Rather, formal equality must be affirmed together with, for instance, the notions of grace, service, humility, and mutual deference, and alongside with perfect love, which implies equality in relation to persons standing on the same ontological footing. In contemporary Western culture, formal equality is immediately associated with the claim to particular rights, and so the basic mode in which people operate in relationship to one another is as claimants to rights. For very important reasons which would be too involved to go into here, the Christian tradition must both affirm the importance of and transcend rights talk. The Christian tradition goes much deeper when it emphasizes love. If this deeper side of things is rediscovered, the notions of self-giving and obedience can be retrieved. Love implies both self-giving and equality, both submission and the absence of a unidirectional, stable hierarchy.

Though I have to continue to disagree with him, I am very thankful that Professor Demson has raised the issues of submission and equality, both with respect to the Trinity and with respect to human relations. For these are extraordinarily important issues and neither flat talk about equality nor quick appeals to hierarchy will do.

Responding to Professor Erb's more extensive comments will be more difficult because he engages not only the text Maurice Lee and I wrote but also my books *After Our Likeness* and, to a lesser extent, *Exclusion and Embrace*. I'll respond on my own behalf only; and before I make a few brief substantive comments, let me note one misunderstanding. My claim is not that reconciliation in Christian vision has no social meaning. To the contrary; my claim is that certain understandings of reconciliation rob it of its proper social character.

I do engage ecclesiological questions from a particular tradition, the free church tradition in which I was raised. So my reflection is not undertaken "from outside historically-given institutions." I realize that that is not good enough for some of my friends, especially those from the Orthodox and Catholic traditions. But I would resist the suggestion that I am operating with some "a-historical transcendent norm," unless, of course, Scripture itself as read by these communities is seen as such.

My argument in *After Our Likeness* is not that free church ecclesiology is the best ecclesiology for all times and places; my argument is (1) that it is a legitimate ecclesiology such that a refusal to affirm the ecclesiality of the free churches (a persistent attitude of both the Orthodox and the Catholic hierarchies!) is unwarranted, and (2) that free church ecclesiology can be construed to be resonant with the very core of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the Trinity. This said, I can well imagine situations in which a hierarchical constitution of the church would be not only legitimate but preferable. As Professor Erb rightly suggests, however, when hierarchy is preferable, it is not on account of the virtues of hierarchy itself but on account of the "fallen creation" – more precisely, a particular form of the "fallen creation" – of which the church is also a part. And as I indicated above in my response to Professor Demson, "equality" does need to be redeemed, and I would fully agree that it must be "fully enclosed and reborn within the Sacred Heart (of Jesus)" were it not for all the historical baggage that that term carries with it. At the heart of the church's life is the Eucharist and at the heart of Eucharist is the self-giving of Christ.

Finally, a few words on the relationship between the Spirit and ecclesial institutions. I make a forceful argument in *After Our Likeness* that I consider the church to be an institution. Hence I connect very much the work of the Spirit with institutions. The central question is not whether the church is an institution but what *kind* of institution it is, and not whether the Spirit is related to the church as institution but *how* the Spirit is related. This is a complicated issue, and I'll have to leave it here at that.

Once again, let me thank the respondents for their hard work and generous comments.

Part II

Review: Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

Gerald Shenk

There are seasons in our shared history when together we sense that a corner is being turned, that we've reached a hinge-point beyond which everything must surely be different. We feel this with an uncanny certainty, even though we have not yet suspicioned just what the new direction will be.

At the close of the Cold War, that most extensive and prolonged of clashes in the century just behind us, many seers and would-be prophets leaned forward to peer into the future. They tried to suggest the things to come after the collapse of that strangely stable contest between superpowers relying on mutual assured destruction (MAD). With the great strategic struggle no longer matching chess pieces bit by bit around the globe, to what use might the abandoned figures put their newly undirected energy?

Communities advocating non-violence began to hope for a "peace dividend," in which the high costs of permanent hostilities could be converted into resources for more constructive purposes. But among political theorists and geo-policy planners, much more dire predictions took center stage. Francis Fukuyama proclaimed "the end of history," in a Hegelian footnote of culmination with the triumph of liberal democracies and global economic free market efficiencies (1992). Along with the economics of growing desires for consumption, he also warned of an accompanying "struggle for recognition." Less rational forces of culture, religion, and nationalism would lead people into demands that their self-worth be recognized by others. Samuel Huntington took the discussion of post-Cold War new realities a somber step further with his treatise on "the clash of civilizations" (1996). He portrayed a shift from "East versus West" to "the West and the rest," warned of a world "anarchical,

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rife with tribal and national conflicts," with the greatest dangers for stability arising "between states or groups from different civilizations." The 1990s saw an "eruption of a global identity crisis," with the politics of identity more and more entangled along the boundary lines of religions. Religion and culture map the battle lines of resurgent large-scale conflicts.

Within this complex scene of rapidly shifting paradigm proposals, Miroslav Volf emerges with a theological agenda for reflecting on the same dramas of identity and recognition. His account is both personal and cultural; at once intensely individual yet global. Responding to the "new tribalism" breaking out around the world, Volf cannot be content with either the vagaries of a free-floating universalism or a mushy sentimentalism that downplays the significance of real differences. Rather, the answer must be a deep, anguished acknowledgement of how alien the "other" truly is yet deserving of something far more vigorous than toothless tolerance.

Volf's opus is passionately engaged in the struggle toward understanding these terrifying forces from within the maelstrom of contemporary life. His observations are rooted in a homeland familiarity, born in the midst of the complex ambiguities known as Yugoslavia. Volf is intimately acquainted with the scenes and actors clashing across Serb, Croat, and Bosnian lines, which is also to say Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Muslim cultures. Product of a Pentecostal religious minority within an ethnic Croat (plus Czech and German) minority, his vision evokes all the detail of particularity that knows its own place and view point.

Volf is also a protégé of theologian Jürgen Moltmann, and a graduate of Tübingen and of Fuller Theological Seminary. Moving confidently in ecumenical circles, he engages in dialogue with Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites. His theology may be seen in the broadest Reformation tradition while also influenced by Marxist philosophical thought, which he studied in Belgrade. Now the Henry B.Wright Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School, Volf has also taught at Fuller Theological Seminary. A few years ago *Christianity Today* rated him one of the "40 leading evangelicals under 40."

Two aspects of Volf's work make him a dialogue partner of special interest to readers of *The Conrad Grebel Review*. First, Volf is uniquely qualified to address themes that are close to the heart of a sectarian heritage. Anyone who is prone to think in terms of "us" and "them" will readily recognize the cultural

patterns of ethnicity, tensions over identity, and pressures toward assimilation. My own acquaintance with Balkan life over more than two decades has persuaded me that North American religious communities have far more in common with those persistent Balkan patterns than most of us could comfortably acknowledge. And if even a small part of Huntington's thesis comes to fruition in the decades ahead, we face a major task in learning how to deal more constructively with otherness — with the humanity of the skeptic, the alien, the blasphemer, or any other who appears to revile what we hold sacred. Indeed, our very identity is formed within a specific relationship to that "other."

At a deeper level, readers should be alert to the thread that ties Volf's work to Anabaptist concerns. Volf cites John Howard Yoder at the outset for his insistence on the centrality of Jesus as example for Christians today. A key claim: "All *sufferers* can find comfort in the solidarity of the Crucified; but only those who struggle against evil by following the example of the Crucified will discover him at their side" (24). Self-giving love, in radical obedience to God, is the way of Christ. It is also a scandal, certain pain, an agony of abandonment and frequent failure.

One of the chief costs of such discipleship, according to Volf, is the Christian's obligation to forgive an enemy. Despite the ambiguities of "non-innocence," when perpetrator, victim, and bystanding third party alike are not free from complicity and measures of responsibility for monstrous evil, I must forgive. Even when I have no strength to do it, I must forgive. Even though the true release from such a burden of sin comes only from God's forgiveness, I must forgive. Forgiveness marks the sacred ground between exclusion and embrace.

For most contemporary heirs of an Anabaptist vision, however, Volf's concluding observations will be troubling. There he argues that a proper biblical understanding of our ethical obligation not to retaliate against evildoers must be set in the larger framework of God's justice. Chaotic powers that refuse to accept God's redemption in the cross of Christ will come to the end of God's patience. The God who saves Christ's faithful suffering followers will make an end to violence, deception, and injustice. Volf asserts that this confidence underlies the bold witness of the Anabaptist traditions for peace. Citing the Anabaptists' use of passages in I Peter 2 and Romans 12, he claims to be more in line with our own heritage than many of us who might shy away from the implications of God's wrath and judgment. It is a disturbing note, directed

against the quiet and comfort of suburbia. Amid the clamor of our current disputes over denominational bureaucratic arrangements, we should not ignore his prophetic warning.

Conversations with Miroslav Volf

On his book
Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation (1996)

Part 1

Miroslav Volf

Exclusion and Embrace grew out of a predicament, out of an attempt at making sense of the war that was raging in the former Yugoslavia. But to me it soon became a larger issue of trying to address the question concerning various sorts of conflicts around the problem of identity. We take note of conflicts mainly when they emerge on the front pages of the newspapers. But I am also interested in addressing the kind of low-grade conflicts that are the stuff of which life is made and that do not make it into the headlines. The more I think about the book, the more I think about it in terms of these low-grade, everyday, non-flared-up conflicts than in terms of the emergency situations, with outbursts of incredible violence, in which we occasionally find ourselves.

As I was writing the book I tried to work through my theological upbringing. This was partly in the evangelical tradition, but also a tradition shaped by liberation theology. When I was studying at Fuller Theological Seminary, I took a course in liberation with an evangelical liberation theologian, Orlando Costas, and continued to study it afterwards. That is also why I went to do doctoral work with Jürgen Moltmann, who in a sense was a granddaddy of liberation theologians. I tease him sometimes about that. And though he is not sure that the title is appropriate, I think Moltmann is key together with Johann Baptist Metz in being a major impetus to what has become, in a particular context, liberation theology.

As you know, liberation theology operates with a basic polarity between liberation and oppression. Liberation is conceived of as the goal, and oppression

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is the major impediment. I tried to apply that schema to the world of conflicts in the hope that participants could apply it in order to better engage in the struggle for justice. Soon I realized that this would not work, because each side saw itself as oppressed and as involved in the struggle for liberation; and each side had at least internally plausible reasons for perceiving itself in this way. In a sense, this approach was simply playing into one common criticism of the Christian faith: that far from being a help for resolving conflicts, Christianity is in fact one of the major causes of violence around the world. In the more general cultural milieu, people think that religion, especially the Christian faith, is not a solution to the problem of violence but among its causes. I was startled by that realization about how the basic categories of liberation theology functioned, and so sought to explore alternative ways of thinking about the relationship of the Christian faith to the world of conflict. That's how the idea of embrace came to my mind.

I wanted to make sure that something like exclusion and oppression is still part and parcel of my concern, because that is obviously what's happening. The naming of that evil seemed extraordinarily significant to me and any lessening of the evil being perpetrated struck me as a denial of the experiences of many people. But it was also clear that liberation could not be conceived of as the ultimate goal of the struggle against oppression and exclusion; that goal must be something that binds conflicting parties together rather than pulling them apart from each other. So I embarked on the journey of reflecting on reconciliation and did so by trying to relate it to the question of identity. These are two themes that unify the book – how identity is constructed and how reconciliation ought to be pursued.

Let me briefly address these two issues. The issue of identity is very significant. Many conflicts revolve around the issue of identity. Economic issues are always significant, as well as issues of political power, but certainly identity issues are very important. That applies not only to ethnic conflicts but also very much to our personal conflicts. Identity is significant on our battlefields, where cultural and national identities are often at stake, and it is significant in our living rooms, where gender and personal identities are often being negotiated. So it seemed essential to address the question of identity and connect it with the topic of reconciliation. My first question was: How does one conceive of identity? Here one has to make two kinds of claims. One was

that identities must be distinct – if you don't have distinct identities, you don't have identities at all. And if you don't have boundaries, you don't have identities. It's a very good thing that boundaries exist. Level all the boundaries and what you get is really not a world we can inhabit, but a dense pond of sheer indistinguishables. But boundaries also create a problem. So we must try to find ways in which to think about boundaries that are not the simple negation of otherness. My identity is not simply what the other is not; rather, it encompasses both what is distinct from me and what binds me to another person. A more dynamic way to make the same point is to say that boundaries should be porous, allowing traffic to go back and forth between the self and multiple others, also including the institutions in which one finds oneself. The result is a discrete but nonetheless fluid sense of identity. Only such a fluid sense of identity could account for who human beings are in their interchanges.

Two years ago I become a father, and I am clearly not the same person that I was before this wonderful little creature named Nathanael thrust himself into my life. I've changed in profound ways. He has come to inhabit who I am. I see the world in different ways through his eyes and so forth. All the significant relationships that we as persons and cultures have are such that the other person is not simply external to us but has in profound ways become intrinsic to who we are.

During the war in the former Yugoslavia I would occasionally tease my fellow Croatians: "You can complain about it, but part and parcel of what it means to be a Croatian is to have Serbs as neighbors. That is what has shaped you as who you are." You cannot pretend that the other is not included within your own identity; and hence your own sense of identity cannot be whole unless your relationship with the other is wholesome. That emphasis on the presence of the other in the self, and therefore, within the conflict, an inability to be at home in my own house without resolving my relationship with the other, led me to the second theme – that of reconciliation in a particular light.

One of the central claims of my book concerns the will to embrace. I argue that the will to embrace the other, even the evil other, must be indiscriminate. It applies to every possible human being and no deed is imaginable that would take a person outside of my will to embrace that person. That claim is predicated on a particular reading of the work of Christ on the cross: God in God's infinite love decided to be God for us who are God's enemies;

nobody is outside the sphere of the divine love, and therefore nobody ought to be outside the sphere of our human will to embrace.

Just after my book came out, I was lecturing to an audience of rather conservative Presbyterians on this universal and indiscriminate will to embrace. I saw looks on the faces of my audience, looks that questioned and resisted me, and I knew something was wrong. I was so deeply immersed in my own thinking on this question that it never occurred to me that there were Calvinist Christians for whom the divine will of salvation is *not* universal. For them, there is such a thing as election and there is such a thing as reprobation, so there are also reprobate people – you don't know who they are, but you can *suspect*. Christ's death does not apply to all people, but only to those who God has elected to be saved. Why would God do any more work than is necessary? I don't believe any of this, and so I was startled when the first person to stand up after my lecture said: "But the divine will to embrace is *not* universal. Why then should our will to embrace be indiscriminate?" The great majority of Christian traditions believe that the divine love *is* absolutely universal and indiscriminate, and that nothing can possibly undermine it. So our own will to embrace the other must be the same. That's the first part of reconciliation.

The second part of reconciliation is the distinction between the will to embrace and the embrace itself. Though the will to embrace is, in my account, indiscriminate and applies to absolutely everyone, the embrace itself must discriminate. That is, full reconciliation is predicated on truth being told and justice being attended to. As a consequence, properly speaking, the will to embrace the other entails also the will to pursue justice. Justice is not extraneous to the will to embrace but rather is part and parcel of the will to embrace itself. And I try to argue also in my book that, especially in situations of conflict, agreement on what transpired between the people and groups involved and agreement on questions of justice are unlikely unless there is something like the will to embrace the other – the will to live together.

I was in Zagreb while the Croatian translation of my book was being launched and was asked to say a few words. And there, too, I was talking about the will to embrace. A person in the audience was looking at me restlessly and I knew there was going to be a question from him. During the question and answer period, he didn't speak, but immediately afterward, when the crowd had dispersed, he came charging toward me. He was a journalist and

wanted to know one thing, but he was so impatient that he couldn't even formulate his sentence completely: "Where does it come from?" "Where does what come from?" I said. "Where does the will to embrace come from?" Then he went down the list of possibilities very quickly. Is it inborn in us? A genetic predisposition? Or, he asked, are you writing only for Christians who have been informed and formed by Christian faith, whose wills have therefore been shaped by the divine will? The journalist was not alone in asking such questions, and my response is always: "It's strange how often Christians don't do what they know they ought to be doing, and how often non-Christians are so much better at it." Which is to say that the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of the crucified Christ and therefore the Spirit of embrace, also works outside the sphere of the Christian faith. The same Spirit of God which rested on Christ, which led Christ to do the deed which he did for us, also is at work outside the walls of the church.

Response

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I'm very honored to have been asked to respond, and grateful that you have been able to be with us. *Exclusion and Embrace* is one of the most important books I have read in many years. If I were to identify two books that have most resonated with my study of the Scriptures and my own thinking about what the call to peacemaking means to the followers of Jesus, it would be John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* and your *Exclusion and Embrace*. Many times I found it very challenging; at other times I cheered; yet at other times I pondered long and hard, and will no doubt continue to do so. I therefore want my comments to be heard as coming from a deep well of gratitude.

Jim Reimer introduced your book as dealing with ethnic conflict, and you spoke to that briefly. I can easily understand that it has all kinds of connections to the particular social and political contexts of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. But as you yourself point out, it has implications for other situations,

such as how we relate to each other as men and women. I heartily concur. Indeed, your book constitutes a rather full-orbed theology of peace and peacemaking. I am personally deeply challenged by the way you allow grace, identity, truth, and justice to intersect with each other. Too often those are rather discrete agendas.

In this book you help us as Mennonites to think deeply about what love for enemies might mean. In our faith community that has become a rather well-worn concept, and because it is so much at the center of what we all believe we don't have to think about it a whole lot. The freshness with which you explore it around issues of exclusion and embrace are profound and challenging.

There are three things I want to point out briefly. First, your book contains an important discussion around what you call "solidarity in sin" (82). You speak of the way in which victims are often perceived to be innocent. And you suggest that sin needs to be the common ground for even entering the process of peacemaking. I worry, though, about making that an axiom. Are there not many situations in which people are profoundly injured where they have not been "at fault"– whether we speak of the abuse of children or the rape of women, for example? Does such "solidarity" not play into the culturally pervasive suspicion that they are in some sense at fault? I worry about such double victimization in relation to that otherwise challenging and profound insight.

Second, Mennonite churches, among many, are being shredded by the issue of homosexuality within the church. A very important term in this controversy is "inclusion." You make a big distinction between, on the one hand, "inclusion" which is non-discriminant and thus ultimately says nothing (nor does it reinforce identity) and, on the other, "embrace," which both recognizes the identity of the other and at the same time, however much reshaped, reaffirms the embracer's identity. Have you made any connections between your very important insight and that vexing discussion? I suspect that part of the resistance to homosexuality within many church communities – Mennonite or no t– emerges out of a sense that identity is being threatened, that boundaries are being eroded and removed.

Finally, in your last chapter, you speak of what you call the "violence" of God. In some respects it represents in your thinking the premise for the courage

to make peace. That is, ultimately it is God who is the guarantor of justice, a guarantee which emerges, to be sure, from the fathomless love of God, as you rightly point out. I think you are correct in this view. This notion is woven into the biblical narrative from beginning to end. Divine judgment is never eliminated from the biblical narrative, even as it serves ultimately to usher in a "nonviolent embrace without end" (300).

In the history of the church two rather different inferences have been drawn from the notion of a "violent" God. One is that God's patience runs out, and so does ours. This has served in the majority of church traditions to undergird a resort to violence when patience could no longer be sustained. You seem to reject that as not preserving the "fundamental difference between God and non-God," and state that "the biblical tradition insists that there are things which only God may do. One of the them is to use violence" (301). Here you are reflecting a historic Anabaptist/Mennonite conviction. You are correct in identifying that Mennonites and Anabaptists have historically believed that God was the guarantor of justice. One can perform one's non-resistant righteousness because one knows that God will ultimately vindicate the righteous. That is the Easter conviction. Anabaptists, or at least those Anabaptists who got it right, believed it was that which allowed them to be the church, and they therefore did not have to fix the world, or even see that they received justice, that is, to resort to the "sword." On your very last page, you speak very clearly: "Assured of God's justice and undergirded by God's presence, [followers of Jesus] are to break the cycle of violence by refusing to be caught in the automatism of revenge" (306). You go on to say: "[O]ften enough, the costly acts of nonretaliation become a seed from which the fragile fruit of Pentecostal peace grows – a peace between people from different cultural spaces gathered in one place who understand each others' languages and share in each others' goods" (ibid.).

This is where I get confused. The very next sentence reads: "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 madmen stopped from sowing desolation" (ibid.). You then mention Dietrich Bonhoeffer. "It may be that in a world suffused with violence the issue is not simply 'violence versus peace' but rather [here you quote Suchocki] what forms of violence could be tolerated to overcome a social 'peace' that coercively

maintained itself through the condoned violence of injustice." I return now to your own words: "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)" (ibid.).

Could you clarify your view as to whether to call oneself a follower of Jesus means that one does not put on the soldier's garb but rather takes up the cross, or whether followers of Jesus occasionally have to take on the soldier's gear, but shouldn't call it "Christian" ? If so, does that not put us back into the mainstream of Christian "realism?" I cannot put this together with the gist of your argument regarding cross and the divine prerogative regarding "violence."

Volf: Thank you, Tom, for your kind words about my book. You put it right: the book was intended as a "full-orbed theology of peace and peacemaking." I agree with your first comment in terms of the solidarity of sin and its possible misuse. I think there is a possibility of misuse of which you do not speak. My own project is predicated on a relatively ambiguous relationship between victim and perpetrator. It's predicated on the impossibility of writing a very clear moral narrative that portrays one party in black and the other party in white. Now there *are* situations in which such ambiguity is rather minimal, and you have named some of them. But what I'm resisting in the book is making these into paradigmatic situations. When one looks at the world as a whole, these are more or less exceptional cases that claim our attention precisely on account of their exceptionality. Much more widespread is the low-intensity violence and strife that permeate society, that form part of how we as families, as siblings, as churches, as ethnic groups and nations, operate. And it is for this kind of world that I'm writing.

I don't address the question of homosexuality in my book except in the sense that whatever one's particular stance on the issue may be, what I'm hoping to offer is a kind of procedure and attitude that may guide the way in which we go about negotiating our differences – and unconditional will to embrace the other. The book is predicated on the fact that moral judgements will be made. Making judgements about what belongs in and what belong out – that is part and parcel of the salutary effort to preserve the integrity of

identities, and all groups whether they are pro-gay or anti-gay engage in making such judgments. But it is extraordinarily important *how* one does that – at least for the followers of the Crucified it ought to be.

You rightly point to the end of my book. Mennonites catch it; Reformed people tend to miss it. Some of my Reformed friends see me as a champion of nonviolence who is blind to the fact that the alternative to violence need not be non-violence but just war. Because they are fixated on just war, which I reject, they never quite get the thrust of the last pages of the book. Some Mennonites, on the other hand, seem to think that I am taking back at the end of the book what I have argued for throughout it. What I'm concerned about is the religious legitimation of violence. I do think there are situations in which violence must be deployed by Christians, but it is never religiously sanctioned or justified violence. It is the lesser of two evils – an evil that does not become good on account of its necessity. One could sketch scenarios where I very clearly wouldn't think that it would be morally responsible not to deploy violence. Nonetheless, repentance for violence would be in order even in those situations; in my view there is no *innocent* use of violence.

Conversation with the audience

Question 1: I haven't read your book, but now I'm inspired to do so. I'm trying to compare what you are saying with what I've heard from thinkers like Gustavo Gutiérrez. If you replace a theology of liberation with reconciliation, it seems to me that the danger might be that the new theology of reconciliation would become ideological. For Gutiérrez, the theology of liberation happened at a historical moment; it came onto the world stage and therefore will leave the world stage. What is more important is the preferential option for the poor, since after the liberation and revolution, there will be new victims. I am wondering if Gutiérrez would worry that after the reconciliation, there will be new victims, and so you will have to go back to liberation theology and not reconciliation theology.

Volf: For me, liberation is a moment in reconciliation. I think Gutiérrez is not the right person to target here, because for him liberation *is* perceived as a moment in something larger. If justice is part and parcel of the will to embrace, that means the struggle for justice is part and parcel of the struggle for the embrace. But I'm concerned only that as we design our theologies, from the

start we sketch out something larger than liberation. After liberation, each side can simply go their own way and replicate modern liberal democracies in various forms, where each side doesn't interfere with the other, but neither does one have a reconciled society or community. I'm not opposed to the pursuit of liberation. But if you don't insert the pursuit of liberation into the larger framework of reconciliation, then you will have exactly what you describe: the liberation of one set of victims will create new victims, who will seek liberation again, and so on. This can be observed very clearly in history. Reconciliation ends the spiral because it aims from the start at communion between victims and perpetrators. So, no: reconciliation does not "need" liberation, because the search for justice is integral to it. But liberation needs reconciliation.

Question 2: Coming from the Reformed tradition, I want to say that I thoroughly enjoyed and have highly recommended your book. And I did catch the last page. I wonder whether your indiscriminate will to embrace has universalist overtones – that hell is not the end, but we will all finally be in the embrace of God.

Volf: Notice, however, that the will to embrace is indiscriminate but the embrace itself is not claimed to be indiscriminate. That may have some bearing on your question too. To answer it directly: I'm praying for hell to be empty. It is very hard for me to imagine any human being consigned to hell. I'm deeply disturbed by it. On the other hand, I'm not completely certain. There are the classic Scriptural passages, of course, and the weight of tradition on this issue is immense.

Question 3: I would argue that reconciliation will come but only at the end of time. I'm thinking of the kind of political theology of Christian Ducoque in France, who talks about the permanent revolution, because all human societies are never final, never perfect. Every liberation will have its own victim, so after the reconciliation you need a new liberation. So there will be a final reconciliation, but only after the trumpet sounds.

Volf: But you may need repeated reconciliations, or rather a continued engagement in the process of reconciliation, within which again liberations are moments. I understand reconciliation here as very much a provisional thing, always on the way to the final reconciliation. Such reconciliations are a way to live in a world that is always and inescapably marked by struggle and non-

reconciliation. The problem, again, is that liberation creates victims by attending to victims, but has no way of dealing with the victims it creates.

Question 4: I'm wondering whether you see war as a natural tendency, or in Hobbesian terms, that man naturally exists in a state of war.

Volf: The term "natural" is a difficult one. Is "natural" a descriptive term or is it normative? Traditionally theologians have spoken of the inescapable sinfulness of human beings. That also qualifies their mutual relations. It is easy to see that this is the case – unless one does not know how to look. It is part and parcel even of our best relations. Call it "natural" or not, low-grade violences, deceptions, and injustices that are part of *all* of our relations. Can human beings be imagined without such a "state of war"? Absolutely. This is what we Christians hope for the world to come.

Question 5: Could you as a Christian theologian work without a sense of finality, without worrying about hell or positing the idea of human immortality? Could you do theology without that?

Volf: People do do theology without that. If I *had* to I could do it too, but why should I? I don't think the belief in life after death is dead, though there are serious challenges and we need to be honest about that. If that belief is not over, then it's helpful theologically to reflect on the interconnection between reconciliation in the present and the final reconciliation. I'm also very much concerned that the demise of the belief in life after death in the present culture seems to go hand in hand with the demise of any kind of utopian ideas. We are living in a world in which we have first cut ourselves off from any normative idea of the past, then more recently in postmodern culture – not just postmodern thought, but late industrial capitalist society, which as a form of social exchange embodies certain postmodern ideas – we have cut ourselves off from any normative future. I was recently at a prominent gathering with a number of Nobel prize winners who were talking about the future. Every single comment was about extrapolation from the trends today. Not a single comment was *normative*. It's scandalous, and absolutely unacceptable from a moral human standpoint, to think of the future only in terms of extrapolation. For me as a Christian theologian, a way to think about life after death is also a way to think about a normative future for our world and for our situation, and a

normative future that is promised to us by God. And so something like a *final* reconciliation is very much part of my hope for the future.[1]

Question 6: You stated that in the end there is a responsibility for Christians to use violence in the pursuit of justice, as the lesser of two evils, but not to invoke Christian justification for it. Does that lead you in the direction of a Niebuhrian realism about the world or in the direction of traditional just war thinking? Just war theory tends to move in the direction of a moral and theological sanction for war which the so-called "realist" tradition does not do. It simply says that this is the way the world works and one is thrown into that but does not invoke divine justification.

Volf: I'm very much afraid of just war theory and the coupling of that theory with religious legitimation. But I also think that one ought to be careful how one makes the claim "this is just the way the world is" and I suspect that it would be a matter of judgement and a matter of wisdom in a particular situation. But it is important not only not to invoke divine justification for violence but also to stress the inescapable guilt that is incurred in every deployment of violence. Not only may I not seek divine legitimation for violence; much more, I must repent before God for engaging in it.

Question 7: The problem with Niebuhr is then he also decouples any sense of moral limit from that use of violence. Once one enters into that world, one doesn't invoke the limits that just war theory provides, one says that when you go into war you descend into hell. That is just the way the world is. And the Christian is involved in that dynamic as well. Is it possible to invoke moral limits that are not then theologically justified?

Volf: Now, since I am calling for repentance after any deployment of violence, it is clear that I am operating with a normative moral vision. I don't see why I cannot stipulate that necessary violence should be only as much as is – well, *necessary*, and why I cannot stipulate that some forms of violence are unacceptable, and do so in a way that is not too far from some of the moves made by just war theory.

Notes

[1] See my article "The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition," *Modern Theology* 16 (2000): 91–113.

Conversations with Miroslav Volf

Part 2

Miroslav Volf: Most of the autobiographical information that is pertinent to the book *Exclusion and Embrace* is already in it. I came to it, in part, because I was faced with the war in the former Yugoslavia and was trying to make theological sense of it. Then I received an invitation from Germany to try to do so publicly. I tried to write my paper for that conference way in advance. Two weeks before I was going to go, the paper was still not going anywhere, though not for lack of trying. It wasn't working because I was trying to address the issue more or less in terms of the categories of liberation theology – in terms of oppression and liberation. I tried to put that grid onto the conflict and it clearly did not work. Or, as I've said in the book, it worked all too well. It would have been very readily embraced by both sides and they would have felt inspired to continue fighting by that kind of theological grid placed on their interchange, for each side felt itself oppressed by the other and each considered itself involved in the struggle for liberation. That struck me as deeply problematic, and so I searched for an alternative. At the last moment, I had this "revelation" connected to the story in the Gospel of Luke about the Prodigal Son, which ended up forming a central piece of the book. If one wants to think adequately in a theological way about conflicts, one has to do so out of the heart of the gospel. One has to think out of the heart of the nature of salvation, in particular out of the heart of the work of Christ. And there one finds not so much liberation as reconciliation. Or, if one has to use the term, it is liberation as restoration of community. That realization set me on the journey that resulted in the book.

The book as a whole ended up being not simply about ethnic conflict, which gave it its original impetus, but about a way of engaging social realities as an alternative to the categories that did and still do dominate the theological landscape – those of liberation theology. I thought that I could keep some of the best insights of that tradition but also incorporate them into something

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larger. That incorporation into something larger is important to me, so I'll say a few words about that.

The book has two significant and interrelated aspects to it. One aspect concerns the question of grace and reconciliation, the other the question of identity. It is bringing together these two questions that is central my project. Let me briefly address each one.

I'll start with the question of reconciliation and grace. Fundamental to the project is a certain dialectical relationship between grace and justice. One simple way to offer an alternative to liberation theology, which has built itself around the category of justice, would have been simply to replace it with that of unconditional hospitality, acceptance, love. That, I think, would have been a misguided way of proceeding. I wanted to make sure the concerns for justice for the past victims of violence are not outside the scope of what I'm pursuing because that would not be faithful to either the biblical or the theological traditions, nor to human realities. When one looks very carefully at the inner logic of what in biblical texts is called grace, and applies it to situations of conflict, then one sees immediately both an emphasis on justice and an emphasis on its transcendence.

One can see that also from the soteriological vocabulary of justification. Justification is not simply justice, but it is clearly related to justice. It is making an unjust into a just person (or counting an unjust person as just, depending on your theological persuasion). You can make the same point using the notion of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not simply an act that negates justice; rather, it affirms justice in the very act of transcending justice. If I said to you right now, "I forgive you," you would be upset with me and tell me, "There's nothing to forgive, because I've never seen you in my life, and therefore could not have done you any wrong." Clearly I would have blamed you by forgiving you, and it is this sense of blame made against the backdrop of affirmed justice which forgiveness needs in order to be forgiveness. By transcending justice, forgiveness affirms it, rather than leaving it behind. To see justice as a constitutive element of grace is essential to my project, but unfortunately *Exclusion and Embrace* is not always read in that light. Sometimes "embrace" is understood as "sheer gift" without any sense of justice being affirmed.

One way to emphasize this would be to underscore the difference between "embrace" and what we like to call "inclusion." Modern societies are characterized

by the consistent drive towards inclusion. Groups that have been historically marginalized are now being included. It is a movement of "taking in" and including larger and larger portions of people on the same kind of footing. I have nothing against that social development; it has been for the good. But I want to underscore the fact that embrace, or the logic of grace, does not operate in quite the same way. Inclusion makes no moral judgements. Inclusion does not discriminate – it does not say "yes" *and* "no." It simply opens the door and lets in. Everybody is included except those who don't include. Everybody is tolerated except those who are intolerant. The logic of grace is similar, yet radically different. It condemns; it makes moral evaluations and judgements – but it does so by enveloping a "no" into a larger and more dominant "yes." The logic of grace does not simply say "yes" but it also says "no."

You can find that also in the biblical traditions. If you look at the life of Jesus, of course there is a drive towards inclusion. There are outcasts being brought in, the gift of hospitality and so forth. But there is also a clear sense that Jesus not only heals bodies and includes people into the larger community, but also makes very discriminating kinds of judgements. Sins are forgiven, which is to say they are condemned and then people are released from them. You have this sense of affirmed justice that is then transcended in a host of stories. Matthew 18, the ungrateful servant. Zaccheus, Luke 19. Luke 15. That is one major part of my project – the logic of grace in which love is unconditioned but justice is at the same time affirmed. This is the background for the *fundamental thesis* of the book, found on page 29 towards the end of the first paragraph: "The will to give ourselves to others and to 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgement about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity."

It is important to note the distinction between the will to embrace and the embrace as such. I say here that the "will to embrace" is absolutely indiscriminate. The embrace itself is not, for in full embrace one has to attend to matters of truth and justice. Later, I go on to say that the way in which one attends to the questions of truth and justice is precisely also by pursuing the will to embrace. You have this dual emphasis on the indiscriminate nature of the will to embrace and the conditional nature of the full embrace itself. There too, you have this notion of grace on the one hand as a gift, and on the other hand entailing concern for justice. The structure of grace is seen in this distinction between the will to embrace and the embrace itself.

The other major theme concerns the question of identity. It seemed significant to me to connect the question of identity with the question of reconciliation. It is often around identities, discrete identities – of cultural groups or of individuals – that conflicts rage. It is very interesting that although the book is primarily about culturally situated conflicts, many people who have written to me have mentioned the impact of the book on their personal struggles. Just recently I was reading the book with a group of students, one of whom had just gotten married. He told me, "This applies so terribly well. I am going through these struggles of adjusting, getting used to being married. We're negotiating our differences and the book is proving to be helpful on that very personal level." I have nothing against this more personal appeal of the book. Cultural and gender differences are always embodied within particular selves and given shape by being situated in particular persons.

Just a small comment about the impact of the book on me. Sometimes you write books because you have an interesting idea. So you write the book, and, if you are successful, it *is* interesting, it has solved a small problem, and you are a bit proud of it – or embarrassed about this or that mistake you have made. But that's it. *Exclusion and Embrace* was not such a book; it had a retroactive impact on me. I often find myself in situations in which the book will speak to me and I hear myself saying "But you wrote.... You argued in your book...." It makes a claim on my own life and behaviour. I have to either suppress the voice or conscience speaking to me or readjust my behaviour in light of it.

But back to the question of identity. Central to the book is a notion of the kind of identity that is both bounded and not self-enclosed. You can find the most succinct account on pages 65ff., which is the same kind of thing you can find repeated in a different voice in the chapter on "Gender Identity." The idea is that on the one hand, I'm not simply myself. The other is always part and parcel of who I am, and that other is always in fact multiple others in shifting and changing situations. So I'm always open to others, and yet I'm not simply a flux. I have boundaries, and I monitor those boundaries, though the incursion of the other into my identity can happen even without my knowing it, so that I find myself retroactively asking the question, "But is this really part of who I am?" In an important sense I have a say in what comes in and what stays out as I encounter other people. The best example that I can give is

what happens when we go on a trip to a different country. Generally, we like to bring home some kind of artifact that reminds us of where we have been. I like to get a piece of art from a local artist, and hang it in my house. And so I have a symbol of the encounter that I've had with a particular culture in my own proper space, which is my home. Occasionally I look at the piece and say "What on earth was I thinking when I bought this?" and so it goes into the garage and a new piece comes in. The home is constantly being rearranged. It's definitely my home – it has boundaries. Not everything can happen in it, not all arrangements are permissible. There is a certain propriety to what is inside. But the door is constantly opening and closing – things are being brought in, brought out, rearranged. My home's identity is shifting and changing all the time, while at the same time its boundaries are being maintained. To me, it's very important to emphasize both of these things. Often, what gets to come in and what has to stay out is not a matter of right or wrong; sometimes it's how much novelty I can stand and how much tolerance I have for sameness.

Now, these two things – the question of identity, and the question of grace – have to be connected. We have conflicts partly because we don't want our boundaries or ourselves to be changed, and the reason why we aren't reconciled is partly because we don't want to make this journey of changing our identity to accommodate the person with whom we are in conflict. The example that I give of these two dynamics at work is the story of the Prodigal Son. The father, when he is left behind by the prodigal, is no longer the same father. He now has to think of himself as the father of the prodigal. That's a different sort of identity, and one way to deal with that identity is simply to disavow the son and then keep one's identity intact or at least not quite as damaged. In the story, however, being the father of the prodigal means "traveling" into the far country with the son, changing one's own identity, and then altering it again when the son returns. This will to embrace the prodigal is at the same time the father's will to shift his own identity and his own journey along with his son, because he won't simply let his son go. The other belongs to me, and I to that other.

Question 1: Since you began with an autobiographical issue, I'd like to raise one as well. I found it very early on in your presentation. We as a class observed that in your writing, you are aware of Serbian oppressive activities and the need of Muslims to forgive Serbian atrocities. What we didn't find

was stories of Croat abuse. We wondered if you didn't have stories or just what the absence of that material indicated.

Volf: I have very few stories in the book – maybe two or three, and I do speak of Croatian atrocities from the previous war in the chapter "Deception and Truth." I believe that in this particular war Croatians have been victims – there is not a single building in Serbia that has been destroyed (until now) but there are whole cities and villages that have been leveled in Croatia. Not a single person has been driven from their home in Serbia. I think one of the most important insights for me was how difficult as victims we Croatians were. By that I mean we did not at all behave in ways that would in any sense suggest anything close to innocence. Sure, atrocities have been committed. Especially when one adds to that atrocities that have been committed in previous wars, including the Second World War. The numbers are certainly contested – estimates range from 30,000 to 700,000 – but even if it is as low as 30,000, what does "only" mean? It's an incredible number. I've been very critical of the Croatian government that has contributed to the problem in significant ways; it could have handled it much better (though I don't think that any of its actions short of abdicating sovereignty would have prevented Serbian aggression). I don't think I want to try to exonerate and portray Croatia as innocent.

What you don't find in the book is what one often thinks one ought to find in books of this nature, namely, a sense of parity. I don't think there was parity, and it's a mistake to create parity just in order to create balances of blame. That's what the Communist government did. Whenever you clipped one party's wings, you had to clip the other's, in order to create a certain kind of moral and political balance – and thus control the situation. I don't think the situation ought to be controlled in this way, and I think that part of the reason why we had the war was because of this kind of control through establishing equality of blame. Everybody's wings were clipped, and thus everybody felt cheated, and nobody felt they could speak the truth as they saw it.

Let me say a little about the reception of the book in Croatia. My Croatian compatriots did not think that the book advocated our cause with sufficient force – they felt betrayed. Why? Because we were not portrayed in it as innocent, and what was demanded of us was not simply to stand up and defend but to negotiate, indeed to seek to "embrace" the enemy. The book is

not really about the war in the former Yugoslavia. I don't offer an analysis of the war – its causes and its progress. There are other people, historians and political philosophers, who are much more capable of doing this than I am. That's why you don't have historical narrative or political analysis in the book but a theological argument. Would my thesis have to be changed if I had to revise the apportioning of blame? It would have to change if I thought there was a parity of blame or if one side were purely innocent and the other wholly guilty. But both of these options are implausible. We need differentiated ways of reading situations and action within the context of the perceived and accepted non-innocence of all. One of the very crippling things that one finds in situations of conflict is a presumption that one can act only if a clear moral narrative can be construed about the nature of the conflict. You have to have good guys and bad guys in order to support the good guys against the bad guys. Then you can get involved. But if you don't find that kind of a clear moral narrative, then you withdraw and say, "Well, they're all barbarians. Let them bleed a little bit and when they get tired things will fall into place." That's precisely how the world reacted to the situation in Bosnia – no clear moral narrative could be construed, in which one side is innocent and the other is guilty. And therefore there was paralysis. But the next worst thing to doing nothing on account of moral ambiguity is to artificially create clarity in moral situations in order to justify action. We see that happening in many places. Democracies have to justify interventions with an appeal to the larger public, and so need to construe a moral narrative. To construe a moral narrative you need to engage in propaganda (such as happened during the war with Iraq). Politicians may have to do that, but I think theologians would betray their calling if they were to construct their political engagements and political theologies along the simple polarities or parities with which democratic politics is forced to operate.

Question 2: I've seen something similar happen in a church when it's responding to a marriage break-up. There are two ways this thing can go – either both parties are to be blamed equally and there is parity, or one is totally bad and the other a saint. You can create a script according to either of these two stories, and it's easier for people to work with.

Volf: We all know that it helps people resolve the sense of ambiguity, but it does not help that couple at all. They know that things are much more com-

plex than that, in most cases. There are exceptions. We often take very clear-cut cases and make them paradigms for all action. But clear-cut cases are exceptions. A person is walking on the street and is shot – there is clearly a blameworthy perpetrator and an utterly innocent victim. But most situations of conflict are not as clear and yet often, in the theological literature, you would almost assume that's how the world looks: when conflict takes place, it's like an innocent person walking down the street and getting shot.

Question 3: You talked about the perceived non-innocence of all, and in the action of grace you talked about condemnation and blame. In the construction of pastoral therapies, "blame" is a word we chaff at regularly. We don't want to blame others, in fact we help people not to practice blaming behaviors so that I might confess my own non-innocence. But it leaves the non-innocence of others to their own confession. How do we experience grace when this is ambiguous?

Volf: One of the things that we need to retrieve is a robust theology of grace. In America, the popular psychology practiced over the last decades says that you have to feel good about yourself. In order to feel good about yourself, you need to say nice things about yourself and other people need to say nice things about you. So feeling good about oneself demands that we abstain from blaming. The result was that – all the evil in the world notwithstanding – nobody is to blame. But that is no way to come to psychological health; it is to practice ideology, to bury one's head in the sand. Rather, we need to re-learn how to love others despite their transgression. That is grace. It's not whitewashing, but rather knowing that precisely with all the sins I have committed, I am loved. We need to re-learn this for our own good. And it is really not the case that blaming can be avoided. We can shy away from it, and one sees good reasons to shy away from certain forms of blame. But our relations are inescapably governed by a sense of what is right and what is not, and hence blaming wrong actions cannot be avoided. The question is how one does this. I embrace the theological tradition in which one's own sense of transgression and ability to repent is predicated not so much on an act of blaming but on the offer of grace. It's predicated on the giving of the space – grace – where one can admit blameworthiness and nonetheless feel accepted. That's why the gospel precedes the law. Gospel is not outside law, but precedes it by providing space in which confession is possible.

As a side remark, it's an extraordinary thing that repentance is more difficult than forgiveness. One would think that forgiveness is the more difficult thing to do; after all, victims are those who practice it. Yet, repeatedly in concrete situations, we see that this is not the case. You will repent only when your back is against the wall and you can't do anything but repent and then when you start repenting you're going to do it halfheartedly and offer zillions of excuses for the deed that you have committed. We see that in public life; we see it in personal lives. In contrast to that, you have extraordinary stories of victims who you think could never forgive. But they do. Why is that? Because forgiveness is an act of power. Repentance is an act of relinquishing power. That's why it is relatively easy to forgive but terribly difficult to repent. And that is why confession of sins must take place in the context of grace – the grace that God offers, but also the grace that victims offer to offenders.

One of the things people always ask me is whether I'm not asking too much of victims in my book. I have a twofold response. First, I'm not asking. The will to embrace ought *not* to be commanded. What I'm doing is portraying a social vision, and asking: Does that resonate with who you are? Forgiveness and the will to embrace must come from the depths of a person's own heart and willingness; and in that sense, even the will to embrace the other results from an act of prior grace. What I don't do sufficiently in the book is to show how fundamental to this social vision is a certain ontology, a certain understanding of who we are created, redeemed, and communally crafted to be. In a sense, the call to embrace is simply mirroring back to one's neighbor what has profoundly shaped one's own being in relationship to God. The will to embrace should not be seen as an extrinsic command but as something inserted into our very being by God's grace in the context of communities of grace. Before we are commanded, we are freed to want to obey the command.

Secondly, I say: Look at the New Testament texts. Arguably most of the people to whom the message is addressed could be construed as the underclass, the marginalized, those who are weak, of whom we ought not demand very much. But in the texts, they themselves have found liberation precisely in that action toward the other. There is also an insulting character to the question of whether I am not asking too much of victims – as though a victim is not morally capable of deeply human actions. As if only the perpetrator had the power to act morally. To forgive, to will to embrace – these are all acts of

power. They do not take away power. They presume power, and if acted upon, they enact a certain kind of very important power. Now, even when all this is said, one still has to become pastoral and say that there are situations in which it is extraordinarily difficult for a victim to act in that way. There are situations of shattered selves, of terrible violence and abuse. In those kinds of situations, persons ought to find time and space to retreat, to re-constitute themselves. But that is not a final stage. Retreat is a moment in something larger. It's a moment in the drama of grace rather than exclusion.

Question 4: You refer to God as "nothing but" pure love and perfect love. What you mean by the "nothing but"? I always struggle with limiting God and defining God from the bottom.

Volf: "Nothing but" may be too strong, depending on how it is understood. Rhetorically, it is staking out a position against the dialectical understanding of the relationship between God's love and God's justice, God's holiness, that makes these two quite distinct things, related only by simple opposition: Holiness is that which punishes and love is that which redeems. In contrast, I'm interested in emphasizing that love is an overarching category of which justice, holiness, etc., are particular instantiations. God is a just God, but justice is part and parcel of the divine love, rather than an independent addition to God's love. That's what is behind the "nothing but" language. The phrase would be quite wrong if it were taken as implying a "mushy" kind of love in God, unrelated to justice.

Question 5: I find it interesting that you refer to the world of God before the creation of the world.

Volf: Did I use that phrase? Of course, the only usage possible is a metaphorical one. We have to speak of God as other than and apart from creation; otherwise you would have to say that creation is integral to the very being of God. So the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity, which is a different way to express what I was after, is an absolutely crucial one in the Christian tradition. One has to distinguish between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity – and within the economic Trinity, one has to distinguish between the Trinity engaged in struggle against the world of sin and the Trinity in relation to us in the consummation, where sin will be overcome. And I think it is important to distinguish between two forms of divine love in conjunction with

the two forms of the economic Trinity. The love of God in the world of sin is love that suffers, love that struggles for justice, love that says no to the world of sin. The divine love in the world to come is not such a struggling, suffering love; it is love as sheer delight, love which dances and celebrates. That latter love – which is actually the same love in a changed context – corresponds more to the love of the immanent Trinity.

Question 6: I was surprised by your last chapter. It suddenly became very apocalyptic, and it struck me that everything you had written seemed kind of dependent on sharing that apocalyptic view of the end. You made a statement: "Without such judgement, that is, the violent judgement of God, there can be no world of peace, of truth and of justice." You made another statement: "Every day of patience in the world of violence means more violence." This is very strong talk, so that if someone didn't buy into your view of last things, it's almost as if the rest of the book doesn't work, unless we know that in the end God is going to get vengeance for us. I think this is a very old Anabaptist idea too. I'm not sure I like it, though.

Volf: I know it's an old Anabaptist idea, and I think the old Anabaptists are more right than the new Anabaptists on this score. But I'm not sure that the whole argument is predicated on it. A new Anabaptist might well read the whole book without the last chapter and still be persuaded. In other words, I could construe human nature and the relationship between human beings and God *differently* than the end of the book suggests and still have the whole book work. But I would then have to have a much more optimistic view of human nature and I would have to affirm that the lure of divine love will in the end be successful. Why don't I affirm that? First, if you read what I wrote carefully, you'll see that I actually neither affirm nor deny this. I speak of the "deeply tragic *possibility*" (p. 297) of the final exclusion. Secondly, I don't affirm the success of divine love without qualification, because that affirmation doesn't strike me as right from the perspective of the biblical or theological traditions, on the one hand, and from the experiences of people, on the other.

I have a theory as to why a shift took place in Anabaptist theology. To me that shift in Anabaptist theology is a most significant one because Anabaptists are historically the most consistent of the peace churches. Here's my suggestion: They've been shaped by the cultural sensibilities of advanced industrial societies

and have become suburban. They talk about non-violence without ever *really* facing violence. They've inherited a venerable tradition of non-violence from their forebears and applied it to the low-grade violence of their living rooms, streets and so forth; but they are protected by the police and modern bureaucratized nation-states – forces which effectively control and subdue violence in the modern world. And so they don't need God to resist the evildoers.

Question 7: In your chapter on "Gender and Identity," you say what God is, and then you reappropriate that for yourself in terms of how we should relate to one another as males and females. You take an idea of the Trinity, you project onto God, and then you reappropriate that for us.

Volf: That's a serious charge! If the doctrine of the Trinity were simply a human construct, rather than an attempt to give an account of the divine being quite independent of who human beings are and what they think of God, then I would indeed be projecting. But I believe that the doctrine of the Trinity states what is in some sense true of God. Hence I don't believe that I am just projecting. But I am certainly giving my own, human account of who God is. Let me just add that the idea of the complex identity of the divine persons is not predicated on the distinction between the economic and the immanent Trinity or on any specific account of the doctrine of the Trinity. If you take the Gospel of John simply at the narrative level – read it as literature – and analyze the identity of divine actors, I think you will come up with something like the notion of identity that I'm trying to advocate. You'll come up with a notion of identity that is not self-enclosed – the Spirit rests on Jesus and prods Jesus, Jesus does the work of the Father, the Father glorifies Jesus, etc. The actions are multidirectional and the actors interpenetrate one another. Thus you could arrive at the nature of identity as I am describing it very easily, without much of the Trinitarian speculation, but simply on the basis of a literary analysis of the Gospels. So let me suggest: Sure, I'm constructing, but that's what theology – and sermons – are always about; they are human speech about God. But am I *only* constructing? I hope not. I hope that I'm getting at something that is true of God, and that therefore in an analogous sense ought to be true of us.

Question 8: You talk about using the narrative in John. I would probably have an easier time with your point in that chapter if you did something like that rather than using the Trinity. You go to great lengths to explain that God is beyond gender, both/and, neither, or whatever, yet you use something like the Trinity, which even in your use of it is hopelessly rooted in gender identity and language. Jesus is the Son. At one point you say, "just as the Son is completely from the Father." Well, what happened to the Mother?

Volf: I hear what you are saying. The very Trinitarian language I use may be construed as going against the thesis of the chapter. I use masculine language about God very specifically in relation to the Trinity, and yet I say that gender distinctions do not apply to God. I think God is beyond gender. But we do have difficulty speaking adequately and appropriately about God and about God's triune nature. I'm not very happy, for theological reasons, about any of the substitutes that have been suggested – for instance, "Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer." I think these are false, theologically wrong, as designations of the individual Trinitarian persons. Because then you sever creative activity from the Spirit, and you sever creative activity from Christ. I think you make divisions where no divisions are possible. I could have referred to the "first," "second," and "third" persons; that would have gotten rid of the gender problem, but would have underscored a notion of hierarchy in God. On the whole, if properly understood – and the job of the theologian is to try to help this happen – I think the traditional designations for the persons of the Trinity are still by far the best.

Question 9: Can you comment on the pope's recent mass of repentance for sins committed in the name of the church?

Volf: On the whole I think it's a good thing. One can of course debate its character. One can question why particular things were not mentioned, but then the response of one bishop seems appropriate: There are so many sins that if we mentioned them all, we would go for days and days. Which ones do you include and which ones do you exclude? I think that the whole idea of purification of memory is very significant. And it's significant that the pope brought it up in the setting not of bilateral negotiations and dialogue, but of liturgy. That has its limitations, but also its strengths. Within the context of particular kinds of negotiations, apologies can be seen as moves in the political

game, and that is how they are sometimes pursued. Whereas once you place them in the liturgical setting, they gain a different kind of quality. Reflection still needs to go on about how best to apologize.

The whole question of memories has not been adequately addressed, and one of the areas in which I intend to work is the question of memories. I say some very controversial things in my book on this. And there are other, less controversial things that I've said between the lines that need to be developed. One is the question of how we go about pursuing historical memories. I don't think sufficient attention has been paid to the politics and the ethics of memory. There is definitely a politics of memory – the way history is written and what is done with that history. Regarding just about any conflict you can imagine, the retrieval of historical memories has played a crucial role in shaping and forming that conflict – for instance, how the memories of the Holocaust are playing themselves out in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. We have come to think that remembering is good and forgetting is bad and therefore we just ought to remember – and so we haven't framed ways of remembering within the ethical context. Often an appeal is made – by such people as Elie Wiesel – to the Old Testament command to "remember." He picks up on the "remember" part – "remember that you were slaves" – but he stops there. The text goes on to say: "so that you may not treat an alien in the way in which you were treated in Egypt." In other words, the ethics of memory is situated within a whole way of life, and serves that way of life rather than being a kind of free-floating thing that any politician or person can snatch and use for their own particular purposes. I think similar arguments can be made from a New Testament perspective, and so I'd like to write a book that would critique the dominant mode of dealing with memories, also in theological circles.

Question 10: I understand that any one of my individual actions has an effect in God's moral universe. If I choose not to take revenge, that can be of ultimate significance, for myself in terms of my personal salvation. But even Jesus' death on the cross does not have any apparent, immediate effect on the political and social structures of Rome. Is your book about personal salvation or world peace? And is there a distinction between those? Will embrace have any immediate social impact?

Volf: I'm not averse to talking about personal salvation; to the contrary. I'm also interested in talking about personal integrity – living in "sync," to put it in

those terms, with who we are created to be, whether it's future or present. But I don't think that the "personal" stands in mere opposition to the "social." Such an opposition is a fruit of the modern construction of persons as self-enclosed individuals. But human beings like that don't exist. The "personal," for me, is always already "social." And the "social" is also always the "personal." So I'm interested in persons and I'm also interested in alternative communities, and in shaping cultures and institutions. World peace, however, is a very far-reaching goal. I dream about it occasionally, but then I give it very much over to the eschatological future. So, to me embrace is not a recipe for world peace, though if one were to follow the vision of the book, one might get there. But it's not very likely to happen. I'm suggesting that embrace is a way to live in the world of non-redemption – a way to live that creates sustainable communities in the midst of non-redemption.

Question 11: What about God's own actions and the centrality of the cross, when the cross has become not just scandal but offense beyond scandal to people? How is that cross able to sustain the center as God's own action, when it seems that between the cross and the final victory there is a radical rupture (in the Holocaust or the crusades, for instance)? They are an offense to those with whom we would like to be reconciled.

Volf: Yes, it's a question of owning history and what we do with the symbols of our tradition. One way to go is to give up on those symbols and seek alternative ones. I sense that these new symbols would be muddied very quickly and I'm not sure whether that would be the appropriate thing to do in the first place. I don't think the cross can be given up. Giving up the cross would mean giving up the Christian faith. The cross lies at its heart. The only way to retrieve the message of the cross and the power of the cross in social realities is to embody its message. In discussion with Muslims or Jews, one can certainly appeal to aspects of their traditions which are in "sync" with aspects of Christianity other than the cross. And certainly one would not want to force the cross down their throats. Nonetheless, for us as Christians, what remains is a retrieval and protection of the very heart of our faith rather than its abandonment or radical reinterpretation. Indeed I think it is radical reinterpretation that has gotten us into trouble: for instance, severing the cross from the narrative of divine action recorded in the Gospels and Epistles and using it simply as a cultural symbol. You see that happening all over the place with the symbols of

any religion. Just think of the war in the former Yugoslavia: Serbian fighters often lifted three fingers high in a gesture similar to the victory sign. The reason they used this sign is that it suggested the way the Orthodox cross themselves – the three outstretched fingers representing the Trinity and the two bent fingers the two natures of Christ. Thus the three-finger sign meant that you were Orthodox. But it had absolutely nothing to do with what the Orthodox faith really means. Here, Orthodoxy has been reduced to a cultural symbol, to a marker for a particular kind of difference. Since that happens all the time with religious symbols, if one is not to give up on religion altogether, the only way to guard against such corruption is not to allow the needs of the moment to keep reconfiguring what we believe, but rather to draw the contents of our beliefs and symbols from their sources in the biblical traditions.

Question 12: I wouldn't mind if you would just speculate a bit on where you would go on the question of "Yes, but what do we do in the meantime?" For example, on page 225: "True justice will always be on the way to embrace." There's an eschatological thing. In relation to your time question – how far in the future is that goal. It does seem to me that at some points, you do in fact suggest a Niebuhrian option. You don't actually spell it out but do say "in the meantime, how does one restrain evil and preserve the good, in situations of violence?" You never quite go there, but on page 224 you say: "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 within the framework of the will to embrace the unjust." I'm just wondering what you mean? What techniques, what mechanism? Where does violence play, in the Niebuhrian sense, a temporary role in the preserving of good and the restraining of violence in the minimalist sense of this way to embrace?

Volf: In John Howard Yoder, if I understand him rightly, there's this interesting and strange notion that the powers are good but that they have been corrupted. But all of the discussion is then about the corruption of the powers and none of it is about any potential goodness in them. Why is that the case? Then this aspect of the positive development of institutions is lacking. The way I come at it is to make relatively strong statements to the effect that the struggle for justice is part and parcel of the will to embrace. That is connected with the idea that grace is not outside of justice, but affirms justice in the act of

transcending it. So the question becomes one of the acceptable *forms* of struggle for justice. At the very end of the last chapter, which some of you find problematic, I allow for the possibility of the use of violence. I argue, however, that violence ought never be religiously sanctioned. It is the religious sanction of violence that I'm profoundly against. But there is the Bonhoefferian solution – you sometimes find yourself in situations of two evils and therefore you have to act in a particular way although you know that by acting you are also transgressing and doing wrong. You're doing both the right and the wrong at the same time.

Question 13: How does your Pentecostal background drive your project?

Volf: I grew up in a Pentecostalism that is rather different from TV-evangelism Pentecostalism on this continent. I've come to differentiate between what I call "machine-gun Pentecostalism," which relates the Spirit primarily to mission and the overcoming of the powers of darkness, and "holiness Pentecostalism," which relates the Spirit primarily to a sanctified way of life. The Pentecostal tradition from which I come was very much rooted in the holiness tradition. For instance, there is little place in Pentecostalism, as I observe it in this country, for being quiet before God, for waiting upon God, for yielding to God. That was absolutely fundamental to the Pentecostalism in which I grew up. In addition to being in the holiness tradition, the Pentecostalism in which I grew up was a peace church. The Pentecostalism that one observes now in North America is an astonishingly militarized ecclesial tradition – which was not the case with Pentecostalism originally in this country. I grew up in a Pentecostalism where one of the main apologetic challenges for us, under the Communist regime in the former Yugoslavia, was: "What would happen in the case of war? You can't fight? How will you prove your patriotism? How can you simply let people be slaughtered by the enemy?" True, for us pacifism was not as much of a carefully nurtured distinguishing mark, as it is in Anabaptist traditions, but nonetheless it was one the pillars of our identity. That is also what informs *Exclusion and Embrace*. We were about following Christ, emulating the life of Christ, with an emphasis on grace and reconciliation. Loving one's enemies was the milk on which we were raised. The Communists were there to crush us, but we were not supposed to respond in kind. You are supposed to love those who persecute you.

In addition to my Pentecostal parents, an important person in my life was my nanny, who took care of me from my birth to the time I was five years old. She was an absolute saint – at least in my memory – a wonderful woman, who was 56 when she came to us. She was Serbian, and because her husband was killed in the war, she lived with our family. She had lost everything in the war, and so she lived with us and helped raise us. Interestingly, she kept saying that she was ready to go and be with the Lord every day, but ended up living to 93! She was filled with serenity and joy – extraordinary for any person, let alone one who had suffered so much. I don't recall her ever scolding me. The way she disciplined me was by being sad if I did something bad. Well, that can be guilt-inducing, but I didn't feel it that way. I loved this wonderfully saintly woman, and I knew that when I did something wrong it pained her. She figures prominently in my picture of God in *Exclusion and Embrace*, even if she is not mentioned. Superimposed upon the picture of the father in the story of the Prodigal Son is an image of my nanny. That's how I view God. God somehow has her shape. Now, I know that is a bit simplistic. She could be the good nanny because my parents took over some of the harsher aspects of my discipline; she may have been a saint, but I was not.

Question 14: Something that you do that was very refreshing for someone who has grown up with John Howard Yoder and Anabaptist history and theology is that you talk very much about the spiritual Christ. We often talk about the exemplary Christ. Maybe that is also a difference between you and Yoder. I found it really refreshing because the Anabaptists have a very hard road towards salvation and moral behavior, whereas this other view focuses on love. An active love on the part of Christ, in that he would have died for our sins. That sort of notion, at least among the Mennonites that I've grown up with, hasn't been talked about as much as Christ as a model of behavior.

Volf: It's interesting that you pick up on that, because one of the criticisms I occasionally receive from, say, representatives of the Reformed tradition is that my book is moralizing to no end. And you point out a completely different side, one that underpins the whole vision as you rightly point out. The book is predicated on and motivated by the notion that the love of Christ, who died for the ungodly, has been poured into our hearts, indeed that by the Spirit Christ himself is present in our lives. Romans 5:1-10 and Galatians 2:20 are central texts for me here.

Question 15: How do you work with the tension between the church living as the faithful church in dialogue and tension with a society that is not, at least explicitly, Spirit-empowered?

Volf: Sometimes I'm asked the question, "Well, is embrace for non-Christians?" My response is, "You know what I'm amazed at – how many non-Christians actually do it, and how often we as the church radically fail." Now, especially in the light of what I just said, that observation then needs a theological backing. Basically it is this: I don't see the Spirit of Christ as limited to the church. I see the Spirit of Christ as much broader than that. Christ is not simply the giver of the Spirit, so that the Spirit only comes from him, but Christ is also the bearer of the Spirit, so that Christ himself is constituted by the Spirit. It is as the bearer of the Spirit that he is the giver of the Spirit, which is to say that the Spirit is given precisely to create Christ-like behaviour. This happens in some significant measure even where Christ is not explicitly recognized. There is a notion of common grace here, grace that is not substantially different than the grace that calls and empowers us to live in Christ-like ways.

So I don't operate with a sharp distinction between the church and the world. That's partly also the reason why I don't place a great emphasis on the church as alternative community. Not that I find the notion of the church unimportant. To the contrary. But I'm also very much aware of the fragility of the church, the failure of the church. Having been a preacher's kid for a while, and looking at myself in the mirror every morning, I know the stuff of which the church and its people are made. So I can't quite see in the church the solution to all the world's problems, as some of my good friends do. I'm aware of how much the church is dependent on grace, how much it is *not* an alternative society, and yet also how much it is at the same time a place where this vision of embrace is being celebrated and nurtured in profound ways. I've come to see that just as there can be no church without reference to the reign of God – because the reign of God is much larger than the church and the church serves something larger than itself – so also the vision of God's reign is dependent on communities of faith to nurture and sustain it.

Question 16: The idea of the Spirit nudging people from all over the world, not just Christians – how does that come out in the afterlife? Are you a universalist?

Volf: Well, I say I am not, but God may be. I'm desperately hoping for hell to be empty. But I'm not a principled universalist, in the sense of taking universalism as a given. The last chapter could not be written if that were the case. But on the other hand, I'm very clear that I do hope for universal non-refusal of the divine offer of grace. Anything less than that kind of hope would not be adequate to the view of how God has revealed Godself to be in the cross of Christ.

Book Reviews

Allen R. Guenther. *Hosea, Amos*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA/Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1998.

In the Believers Church Bible Commentary series, discussions about composition and other technical matters are kept to a minimum in favor of providing the kind of commentary on the actual text that will benefit lay readers. Two samples, one from Amos and one from Hosea, illustrate the insightful commentary offered in this volume by Guenther, professor of Old Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California.

> Do horses run on rocks?
> Does one plow the sea with oxen?
> But you have turned justice into poison
> and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood– (Amos 6:12)

In one sentence Guenther explains this difficult verse: "Such perversions on Israel's part should be as improbable and contrary to nature as having *horses gallop on rocks* or *oxen plow the sea*" (319). Guenther's extensive knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern life, religion, and customs frequently helps elucidate otherwise confusing passages, such as the description of Hosea's marriage to a prostitute and a text like the following:

> Ephraim was a trained heifer
> that loved to thresh,
> and I spared her fair neck;
> but I will make Ephraim break the ground;
> Judah must plow;
> Jacob must harrow for himself. (Hosea 10:11)

Guenther points out that Ephraim (Northern Israel) is compared to a heifer frisky and light enough to beat the grain off the stalks without damaging the kernels. However, as Israel matures, God expects more of her and will train her to pull the plow and harrow. The next verse describes this more mature

labor in terms of sowing righteousness, reaping steadfast love, and seeking God.

While Guenther's exegesis is generally helpful, some of his underlying assumptions can be challenged. Although he recognizes that the books of Hosea and Amos have been compiled by editors, he still asserts that virtually every word in them originates from these two prophets. Many scholars would argue for a far more complex history of composition, involving various attempts by editors to make the prophetic message relevant to later generations of the faithful community.

One of the strengths of this commentary series is its attention to theological concerns, particularly the contemporary relevance of the biblical text today, as well as the relationship of individual passages to the witness offered by other parts of scripture. Guenther offers some gems of theological wisdom. For example, Hosea's use of female God imagery becomes an occasion to reflect on the contemporary value of such imagery. Amos's blistering attack on social injustice leads to insightful comments about injustice and extravagant consumption in our time. Reflecting on the prophetic message of judgment, Guenther suggests that sometimes the church today also needs to hear harsh words because we tend to underestimate the seriousness of our sin. A message of judgment can function like a diagnosis of cancer, and encourage a seemingly healthy person (here, the religious community) to get the surgery necessary for long-term survival.

But sometimes good theology seems forced onto texts that deal with other matters. The message of judgment in Amos 3 becomes a springboard for reflection on the Great Commission, Christian mission, and evangelism (278-79). Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife, which symbolizes Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh, is treated as a call to avoid divorce and renew struggling marriages (72, 82). At other times one wishes that Guenther would say a little more. The Canaanite fertility cult condemned by Hosea attracted the Israelites because it promised them agricultural abundance, stability, and economic security. It would be helpful to ask what modern "religions" (i.e., values, rituals, and pursuits) tempt Christians with a similar promise. As well, Guenther's theologizing is sometimes simplistic. To say "Forgiveness is a divine gift by which God removes from us the consequences of our sin" (217) obscures the fact that in spite of divine forgiveness our sin often has severe,

long-lasting consequences. One need only think of someone whom God has forgiven for marital infidelity but whose marriage is forever affected.

My biggest disappointment is this commentary's uncritical acceptance of the prophetic view of history. The prophets and many other Old Testament writers were convinced that life operated on the principle that faithfulness leads to divine blessing and well-being, while unfaithfulness leads to judgment and disaster. Guenther frequently makes statements such as, "the sweep of superior Assyrian forces moving through Ephraim's cities results from her obstinate disobedience" (181); "Israel's well-being has always depended on their [sic] faithfulness to God's commands" (99) "Good and evil will always bear their fruit in the form of curses or blessings" (p. 332). Such a simplistic view of history may have helped Israel understand its defeat at the hands of the Assyrians, but we must recognize that the rise and fall of empires, and the well-being of nations and individuals, are matters of considerably more complexity.

In the Believers Church Commentary series, each volume includes a section entitled "The Text in Biblical Context." Here would be an excellent opportunity to compare the prophetic view of history with the testimony of other biblical texts. The book of Job directly challenges that view, as do Isaiah's passages about a suffering servant who suffers innocently. That the servant is clearly identified as Israel (Isa. 49:3). Perhaps most important, Jesus asserts that faithfulness to God, far from leading to earthly well-being, leads to persecution and the way of the cross.

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Terry Brensinger, *Judges*. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottdale, PA / Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1999.

With this commentary on the book of Judges, Terry Brensinger, professor of Bible at Messiah College, adds a valuable volume to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. This series uses a standard format to make each volume "illuminate the Scriptures" and make "the rough places plain." The exploration of each passage begins with a Preview (groups of passages forming a larger section receive an Overview), followed by an Outline and Explanatory Notes (normally the longest segment). The "application" then is divided into two pieces, The Text in Biblical Context, and The Text in the Life of the Church. Critical issues tend to be avoided within the commentary itself but are treated in brief essays at the end of each volume.

Brensinger's eight-page "Approaching Judges" is an excellent introduction to the book of Judges and his approach to it. Here he identifies Judges as part of the Deuteronomistic history, that series of Old Testament books that assesses the traditions of Israel on the basis of the principle that "obedience to God results in blessing, but disobedience results in disaster." Israel's eventual downfall thus is due not to "any weakness of unfaithfulness on God's part, but [to] the community's own sinfulness." The central main section of Judges begins by presenting a neat pattern for the period of the judges: a) Israel sins, b) Israel is oppressed, c) Israel cries for help, d) God raises a deliverer, e) the oppressor is defeated, f) there is peace. Brensinger points out that Israel's increasing sinfulness results in the disruption and increasing breakdown of this pattern. The two final stories in Judges reveal a people in a state of absolute anarchy.

Against this background Brensinger considers the individual stories. The major strength of this commentary is his thorough and competent Explanatory Notes. Here the rough places of Judges become plain as he systematically explains difficult details, provides historical and geographic background and draws attention to literary features of the text. His discussion of the Jephthah story, focusing on Jephthah's tendency to bargain first with Israel, then with Ammon, and then with God, is a good example. In our time many people have forgotten how to read the Old Testament. One role of a biblical commentary, especially within a Believers Church tradition, is to make the

text accessible to those lacking technical training. This Brensinger does admirably.

The essays at the back of the book provide much helpful material. Again, Brensinger deals with complex and technical topics in a clear and understandable manner as he presents background material (e.g., articles on archaeological periods, chronology, role of the judges), expands on some literary questions (e.g., envelope structure, hero stories), and struggles with theological issues (e.g., historicity and truth, violence and war).

But if critical issues can be fully dealt with at the back of the book and do not form part of the commentary discussion itself, what significance do they have for the exegetical process? For example, both in the introduction and in an essay on Formation of the Book, Brensinger identifies Judges as part of the Deuteronomistic history, that multi-volume series of books addressed to Israel as it struggled with life and death issues somewhat before or shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Yet this agenda plays no role in the discussion of the text itself. Brensinger's exposition of the text remains within the world of the pre-kingship judges themselves. Similarly, his presentation of the Gideon narrative observes that there is a significant shift in the narrative half way through, with a very different Gideon appearing in the second half. Again, little is done with this information. In neither case does the critical observation come into dialogue with the exegetical process. The information may be interesting but not especially relevant.

Perhaps as a result, Brensingers' discussions of the text in the life of the church might be better identified as the text in the life of the individual. The disregard of the context to which the biblical Judges originally spoke makes it easy to move quickly to some universal human theme rather than to deal with how the text functioned in addressing a particular people. Consider the author's discussion of the Samson narrative: his Text in the Life of the Church section for Judges chapters 14 and 15 is sub-titled "Dealing With Emotional Fallout." His counsel for depression is to "know yourself," to "strengthen problem areas," to "recognize the occasion," and to "let God feed you." Key issues arising from chapter 16 are Misdirected Ambitions and Perverted Sexuality. These discussions seem not to struggle with what the passage meant to Israel or what it might say to the church. Rather, the text identifies issues for which contemporary psychology has answers.

The goal of the Believers Church Bible commentary is to make the biblical text clear and to allow it to speak to the church today. Brensinger does an excellent job of the first. Granted, the second goal is not easy to reach, and in this regard the commentary is less than fully satisfactory.

GERALD GERBRANDT, President, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, MB.

John D.Thiesen, *Mennonite & Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945.* Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, co-published by Herald Press, 1999.

This is an important book on a dark and controversial period in Mennonite history. The author and Pandora Press are to be congratulated on their courage to publish it.

In the preface John Thiesen sets out the book's purpose: "The main question running through the book is: 'Given a long heritage of pacifism plus resistance to the political order and relative withdrawal from it, why did some Mennonites in Latin America fall for Nazism so easily?'" (18). Thiesen's answers to this question are based on an examination of the historical and cultural background of the Russian Mennonites in South America and a careful reading of the available sources, many of which are used here for the first time.

Among the reasons for South American Mennonites' sympathies for and involvement with Nazism, especially among those groups who settled in the Chaco, Paraguay in the early thirties, Thiesen lists several historical factors: the Mennonites' tragic experiences of Bolshevism; Germany's willingness to assist Mennonites in their escape from the Soviet Union; the harsh South American economic conditions, coupled with the hope of some to return to Germany or even to their former homeland in the Ukraine. Not only did Germany provide the refugees with a temporary haven in 1929, but it also helped the settlers in South America to establish themselves economically, educationally, and culturally. That Mennonites considered themselves German and wished to preserve their German language and culture made them a natural (and some might claim all too willing) audience for Nazi propaganda.

According to Thiesen the Mennonite soil was well prepared for Nazi ideology before 1933, the year the Nazis came to power in Germany (104). All that was needed was influential leaders among the Mennonites who would sow the seeds of Nazism and cultivate its growth. In Germany, Benjamin H. Unruh and Walter Quiring had a powerful influence on the Mennonites in Brazil and Paraguay. These men sang the praises of the Nazi regime and presented Hitler as the savior from Communism. In Paraguay the educator Fritz Kliewer and the chief administrator of the Fernheim Colony, Julius Legiehn, welcomed and promoted the Nazi regime and ideology. They argued that Mennonitism and National Socialism were natural allies for the good of all things German (*Deutschtum*) and Christianity. This in spite of Hitler's alleged denial of the possibility: "One is either a German or a Christian. You cannot be both" (25). Kliewer and Legiehn performed their *völkisch* work in the schools and with the youth of the colonies with an almost religious zeal.

There were individuals and groups who either opposed the Nazi movement or remained indifferent to it. While some among the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites were drawn toward Nazism, Old Colony and Alliance Mennonites were not much affected by *völkisch* ideas. Other Mennonites, including some church and community leaders and a number of North American Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) personnel, believed strongly that Mennonite faith-principles and Nazi ideology were mutually exclusive. The involvement of MCC was seen by some as "American-motivated" and consequently resented by the *völkisch* group. Toward the end of the Second World War, with Germany's defeat and Paraguay's siding with the victorious Allies, the Nazi movement in South America came to an abrupt end. Kliewer and Legiehn were expelled from the colony by the Paraguayan government. In 1947 Canadian MB leader B. B. Janz sought to bring about a reconciliation between the two groups, but as Thiesen notes: "The Latin American Mennonites' encounter with National Socialism left a lasting legacy of bitterness . . . ." (226).

Thiesen's book has caused a stir, especially among some South American Mennonites. Peter P. Klassen, author of *Die deutsch-völkische Zeit in der Kolonie Fernheim, Chaco, Paraguay, 1933-1945* (1990), in a letter to Thiesen objected to the word "Nazi" in the title. Mennonites in the thirties and forties, according to Klassen, spoke of "National Socialism" and "*völkisch*," not

"Nazism," and considered Germany positively; it was the country that had helped them in their distress at the hands of Soviet Communism. Gerhard Ratzlaff, in a review, feels that the author should have been more sensitive to the feelings of Paraguayan Mennonites. He finds some of the book's photographs and expressions like "violent call to arms" (91)will "hurt the feelings of an inside reader" (*Mennonite Life*, Dec. 1999, 40). Both critics agree, however, that Thiesen has generally been objective and fair in his interpretation of a painful period.

Thiesen's interpretation of why South American Mennonites so easily fell prey to Nazism, while generally correct, does not consider sufficiently the role that pacifism – or the loss of it – played. His book demonstrates that pacifism was the one traditional principle which kept the *wehrlos* (nonresistant) group, as opponents of the *völkisch* movement were called, from falling in line with Nazi ideology. Throughout Mennonite history groups that adhered to the principle of nonviolence were able to resist the pressures of governments and society, whereas those who abandoned this principle, as happened in nineteenth and twentieth-century Germany and elsewhere, were more easily assimilated in society, with a subsequent loss of traditional biblical principles.

Thiesen observes in the end that the "best concise interpretation of the whole encounter [with Nazism] comes from a person who had a hand in triggering it in the first place, Walter Quiring" (226). Thiesen quotes from a 1953 letter of Quiring to B. B. Janz in which the writer speaks of the German people, including himself, who "let themselves be deceived by Hitler" and states that "Hitler was the misfortune of the German people" (226). In my view, this does not explain what happened nor does it sound like genuine contrition and a change of heart. Many former Nazis and their sympathizers spoke thus, and one still hears such statements, also among Mennonites. They are attempts, frankly, to blame a dead man for the evil of Nazism and to pose as victims rather than as participants in that evil. There are, fortunately, Mennonites today, especially among the young, who have gone beyond the likes of Quiring and see Nazism for what it was.

This well-written, attractively produced book with its copious sources and notes belongs on the shelf of all serious students of Mennonites' encounter with National Socialism.

HARRY LOEWEN, Kelowna, BC

John D. Roth and Ervin Beck eds., *Migrant Muses: Mennonite/s Writing in the U.S.* Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1998.

Community, identity, binary oppositions, rootlessness . . . discussion of all this rang out in the Goshen College chapel, then hummed and buzzed in conversations through the hallways. We were a great wheel of people gathered for the literary conference, sitting in its hub, intent on the words of the plenary speakers, then streaming out through the exits to gather in classrooms for seminars. Papers given at that October 1997 conference have been collected in *Migrant Muses*. (Previously they were published in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 72.4, October 1998) The volume begins with an essay by Denise Levertov on "The Migrant Muse." She acknowledges the advantages an artist deeply rooted in a particular culture has but invites the reader to think about writers who "don't really belong anywhere" (3). Like poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who found his home in the German language, Levertov (the only presenter without a prior Mennonite connection) suggests that a writer's faith can be their home, their root, if they have grown up in that particular cultural context. The next few essays outline the general state of contemporary Mennonite literature in America, and the collection then moves through such topics as Mennonite poetics and voice, silence, representation, Mennonite archetypes, embodiment, and theological approaches to literature.

The most compelling essays trace significant discussions in Mennonite literature. Mennonites speak so often and so fondly of community; what form does that discussion take in their writing? Hildi Froese Tiessen's "Beyond the Binary: Reinscribing Cultural Identity in the Literature of Mennonites" points to the community's effort "to make sense of what it means to live between cultures" (12). She points out that Mennonites, tendency to perceive their cultural contexts through the lenses of binary oppositions (i.e., seeing people as "insiders" or "outsiders") has contributed to the monolithic concept of "the Mennonite community," which does not exist as a homogenous entity. Ann Hostetler's essay describing "The Unofficial Voice: The Poetics of Cultural Identity and Contemporary U.S. Mennonite Poetry" suggests that some binaries are useful, indeed necessary, since "tension between margin and center is a vital pre-condition of writing, especially ethnic poetry; without it the poet cannot thrive" (40). Jeff Gundy speaks to this with "In Praise of the Lurkers

(Who Come Out to Speak)." Writers, those "lurkers" on the edges of their communities, contain within themselves both the insider and the outsider. They move back and forth across cultural boundaries, "knowing at once that [they] are in the community, inseparable from it, and at the same moment in a world far away"; to be a writer/lurker is "[t]o feel responsible and alien, bound and free, sinful and prophetic, at the same moment" (30).

It would have been very interesting if presenters had dwelt more specifically on the faith aspect of Mennonitism, as questions concerning it are directly addressed in only a few essays. Edna Froese, in discussing "Voices of Faith" in two Mennonite novels, hears the main characters of Rudy Wiebe's *Blue Mountains of China* asking a question that, with the addition of "writer" after "Mennonite," was a central theme of both the 1997 conference and *Migrant Muses*: "What does it mean to be a Mennonite in the world?" (128). Two particularly interesting essays engage an aspect of identity not often considered in the wider Mennonite church, that of lived experience as physical bodies. "Embodied Voices, Imprisoned Bodies: Women and Words in Janet Kauffman's *Collaborators*" (Jessica W. Lapp) draws on French feminist Hélène Cixous's call for women to be cognizant of their bodily reality as they write, transcending the binary oppositions that have valued some people and ideas at the expense of others. "When Flesh Becomes Word: Creating Space for the Female Body in Mennonite Women's Poetry" (Beth Martin Birky) considers the work of three poets, with one eye on the patriarchy that has "alienated women from their own bodies" (197).

This collection of seventeen essays, three tributes (including a particularly poetic one by Julia Kasdorf honouring John Ruth's pioneering contributions to Mennonite literature), and seven book reviews is thoughtful and well-crafted. Mennonite literature is a strong and growing body of work, and the scholarship represented here echoes that. Had this volume included at least a few more works of poetry or short fiction (in addition to portions quoted in the essays), more of the energy of the 1997 conference might have been conveyed. Nevertheless, this book will appeal to literary scholars both within and outside of the Mennonite church: graduate and undergraduate students, professors of literature and other disciplines, and people who simply delight in good writing. I recommend *Migrant Muses* to anyone engaged in the life of the Mennonite church in North America. It is a good place to start in an examination of

contemporary "MennoLit," but I would advise readers not to stop here. As essential as this collection about Mennonite writing is, it is even more vital that we read the poetry and fiction itself.

KRISTEN MATHIES, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN.

Sarah Klassen, *Dangerous Elements*. Kingston, ON: Quarry Women's Books, 1998. Susan McMaster ed., *Siolence: Poets on Women, Violence and Silence*. Kingston, ON: Quarry Women's Books, 1998.

Danger its persistence, its manifestations, its implications is the theme of these two books, but this is a thin link between volumes that approach the theme very differently and seek different conclusions.

Sarah Klassen is a well-regarded Canadian writer whose debut volume of poetry, *Journey to Yalta,* won the 1988 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award for the best first book of the year. *Dangerous Elements* is the Winnipeg writer's fourth collection of poems, and many of its themes reflect her Mennonite heritage.

As the title suggests, the collection, broken into six sections, dissects the danger emerging naturally from the world around us. Darkness and light pervade the poems, which are laden with religious imagery: a heron is an "awkward angel" offering "a benediction"; pelicans are "white-robed/apostles airborne above the winding highway"; an underground café approximates hell, and in the poem following, heaven is another café, located up a set of stairs. By grounding these symbols in ordinary, recognizable objects, Klassen implies that the spiritual is inextricably, even comically, bound to human experience and the human world.

Many of Klassen's poems respond to the danger of living in what is an unfair, amoral place: the insistence of the natural order has nothing to do with justice or peace. In "Letter from Lithuania" the poet states that "My mind's gone underground with peanuts/the squirrels buried, carrots I couldn't rescue/ from the slugs, the sleek gray cat/obscenely stalking sparrows. ... *begins Relentless endings/nothing can prevent*" [emphasis hers]. The circular, destructive force of seasons is not limited to the natural world but is equally

present in human relationships. In "Salt," from a section of the book devoted to the lives and deaths of early Anabaptist martyrs, Klassen fiercely and very simply illustrates how humans repeat cycles of violence. While being burned at the stake in Salzburg, 1542, Leonard Bernkop quotes St. Lawrence, who was martyred by the Romans: "A saint Bernkop's executioners revered,/whose death they regretted./Whose murderers they'd gladly burn alive." History, here, is a blind tumble, around and around.

Dangerous as the natural order may be, Klassen remains nevertheless exhilarated by the persistence of light and the human desire for life. The most innovative cycle of poems in the book is a section called "Born Again: excerpts from a woman's space journal." A somewhat bizarre fantasy sequence charts the experiences of a female astronaut, who, literally freed from her earthly burdens, says, "Now that I'm able to stare/God in the face/I find no room for doubt." Other poems in the collection deal with the deaths of parents and friends, political travesties like Tienamen Square, and disasters like an explosion in a coal mine, and throughout there is the question: "And where, you ask, was God/when it happened?" The answer, Klassen suggests in the final moving verse of "Born Again," is right there waiting to emerge. "I want to say how beautiful/are footprints on the cosmos:/radiant vibrations that give rise/to matter that in spite of the extravagant/glory of the light/is mainly dark." Human matter may be mainly dark, but it is born of light. Within darkness is beauty, and without darkness the contrast of light would not appear so extravagantly.

One of the book's drawbacks is the disheartening frequency of typographical errors. This is a minor distraction, however, and readers interested in seeing the ordinary, everyday "kitchen" world in a new light will enjoy reflecting on Klassen's ideas.

Danger is also the topic of *Siolence*, a slim anthology of essays and verse by writers from the "Feminist Caucus" of the League of Canadian Poets, who have been meeting since 1982 to discuss ideas of language, gender, and violence. Sarah Klassen appears here, as does Mennonite poet Di Brandt, among an impressive range and variety of voices, including those of several men. Asked to reflect on women, violence, and silence, authors of the various essays and poems address the topic from different angles. Some pieces, like Di Brandt's, are highly personal, revealing and disturbing, while others, like Susan

McMaster's, focus instead on structural manifestations of violence. The result, like most anthologies, is a hodgepodge, but an interesting one.

I found the title off-putting – "Siolence" is, of course, a neologism combining the words "violence" and "silence" – because it smacked of the postmodernist desire to have it all (ambiguity and clarity; multiplicity and singularity). And in a way, that desire also seemed to be the overwhelming issue faced by the anthology. Feminism has long been troubled by contradictory ideas. One might argue that one stream of the feminist movement wants to celebrate the similarities between women, the characteristics and desires and experiences which all women share; while another stream wants to empower multiple perspectives and is more interested in individual experience than in some communal, exclusively feminine bond. It is glib to say that if women were in charge of the world there would be no war; but it is equally foolish to say that my experiences are not related to those of other women. How, then, to unite such views? Is it even possible?

Siolence may not provide groundbreaking responses to a theme burdened with the notion that all women are to some degree silenced by violence, but it does offer a fascinating kaleidoscopic glimpse into the recent feminist movement and its shifting concerns, beliefs, and myopias. Because these essays and poems were written and presented between 1982 and 1995, an anachronistic quality pervades some of the ideas and themes presented. This is the book's peculiar strength: it captures the changing focus of a movement; it shows how far we, as a society, have come but also reveals how much we continue to labor over the same issues.

The pleasure in this collection is its unselfconscious sweep. Siolence is a brave venture – not afraid to contradict itself, sometimes jarringly disparate in tone and intention, and entirely provocative. It could also be a great resource for teachers who want to give their students a snapshot of the feminist movement in Canada, 1982 to 1995.

CARRIE SNYDER, Copy Editor, Review and Books section, *National Post*, Toronto, ON

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