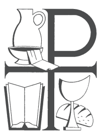
Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*



Volume 53.3

Worshiping the Triune God

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Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and ***Reformed Liturgics*** (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

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Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

I'm a sucker for a descant. Every time. Most recently, I was transported by the soaring notes of the sopranos of the Community Concert Choir of Baltimore during the opening worship service of Big Tent. "Holy, holy, holy, ho-o-o-ly, . . ." they sang, sounding for all the world like the heavenly hosts. "Holy, holy, holy," I sang, unable to resist joining in on those glorious high notes. "Holy, holy, holy," we sang, until the final phrase, when we joined the whole body in singing "God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

It's impossible to know how much ink has been spilt trying to explain just what we mean by that final phrase, or how much paint has been smeared in trying to depict that particular mystery. The authors, musicians, and artists whose work appears in this issue add their voices to the effort, offering us both images and ideas, historic and contemporary, that we might more fully understand and express what it means to worship the triune God.

The front cover of this issue of *Call to Worship* features one of the most well-known images of the Trinity, Andrei Rublev's icon *The Trinity.* On the back cover you will see contemporary iconographer Kelly Latimore's own icon by the same name; his nod to Rublev is obvious, yet it is clearly an image for our time. (You can see more of his work at kellylatimoreicons.com.) Ann Laird Jones and columnist Deborah Sokolove mention both Rublev and Latimore and invite us more deeply into conversation of how the Trinity is depicted in art, both historically and in contemporary times.

Gail Ramshaw draws our attention to the ways we sing about the Trinity, leading us through a survey of hymns in *Glory to God* in which the triune God is described and worshiped. Ramshaw points out, among other things, the wide range of language used to speak of the Trinity. Scott Haldeman's essay further explores the issue of naming the triune God, encouraging us to broaden our thinking while drawing on the long tradition of the church. Khalia Williams leads readers into yet another exploration of how the Trinity informs the church's worship, this time from a womanist perspective, urging us to consider the relationships between the sacred and the secular, Christ and community, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

I am grateful to Jihyun Oh for taking on a question I've been wondering about lately: why don't we pray in the name of Jesus anymore? This may come as a surprise to those of you who rely on the *Book of Common Worship* to shape the liturgy in your church. In my travels over the last several years, however, I've noticed that often prayers simply stop with a short and tidy "Amen," without any reference to either the Trinity or Jesus. Does it make any difference? I think so, and so does Jihyun Oh, who makes the case compellingly.

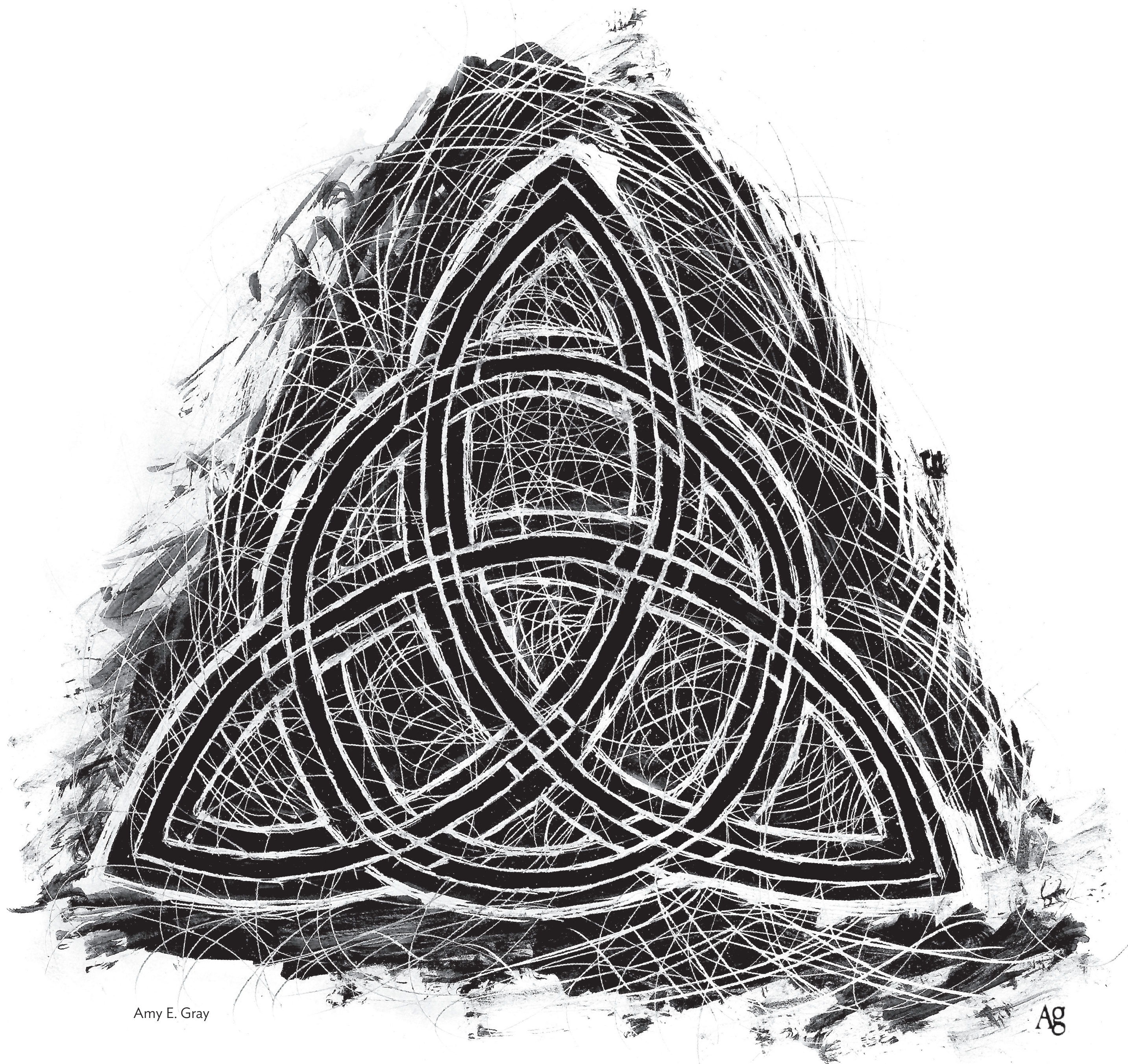
Kim Clayton equips preachers well for the daunting task of preaching on Trinity Sunday—and any other time it is apt to speak of the Trinity—helping us know what to preach and what *not* to preach. In doing so, she helps us not just talk about the Trinity, but to look for what the triune God is up to, and where. Sue Rozeboom provides a sturdy yet accessible foundation for all of our thinking, preaching, praying, singing, and painting about the Trinity, with a focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in worship. As a theology professor, she is used to helping students understand complex ideas, and she

does the same for us with imagination and empathy. Our fine columnists give their particular views on how the Trinity impacts their ministries in liturgy, music, preaching, and the arts, and we are the better for it.

The issue is image-rich, and is further enhanced by the exquisite black-and-white drawings of Amy E. Gray. Her work is also featured in this issue's Work of Our Hands section, where she gives us a view into her work with silver and the theological profundities wrapped up in the making of her art.

After reading this issue, will we all completely understand the Trinity? Well, no. I do believe, however, that the insights and images of these pages will enrich our work as we give glory to the God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Kimberly Bracken Long, Editor



Amy E. Gray

Feature Articles

In the name of . . . Baptismal Incorporation in a Gender-Fluid Age

Scott Haldeman

"If God is male than the male is god."
—Mary Daly[1]

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the
Israelites and say to them,
'The God of your fathers has sent me
to you,'
and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then
what shall I tell them?"
God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM.
This is what you are to say to the Israelites:
'I AM has sent me to you.'"
—Exodus 3:13–14, NIV

"I am God and not a man."
—Hosea 11:9, NIV

"[In Christ] there is no male and female."
—Galatians 3:28, NIV

What's in a name? The rose still smells as sweet even if we call the flower something else. The point is that we must call it something—something that is somehow connected to the object with which we seek to please a lover as we present our gift, not only in our minds but in theirs as well. Naming is not only a human compulsion but is also necessary for communication. There are other ways to speak than in nouns, but that is a large part of how we interact. To be human in community is to exercise our power and responsibility to name. Nowhere is there more at stake than our naming of God in our communities of faith.

The Divine Name

Biblically, our naming is also both gift and charge. God brings the one called Adam to see all the creatures God had made "to see what he would name them" (Gen. 2:19). God could have named the creatures but refrained. The "human from the humus," as Phyllis Trible likes to put it, is given the privilege.[2] The naming establishes (or, was meant to) a relationship of care as stewards for God of the creation that is very good, in its harmony and in its diversities.

The human does not, however, name God. It is for God to name God's self. Abraham does call God "the Everlasting One" (Gen. 21:33). However, in Exodus 6:3, God lets Moses in on a secret—I paraphrase: "I did not reveal my name to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; even as I reveal it to you and even as I tell you that you can tell the enslaved Hebrews that they know me as the God of their ancestors." Even to the ancestors God dwells in mystery. The divine trickster says: "How do you know my promise to give you a new land and progeny as numerous as the grains of sand is sure? . . . You will know when it is fulfilled." Just so, when he contended with the Divine, Jacob asked for a name; instead, he got an injury, a blessing, and a new name himself (Gen. 32:22–32).

There seems to be one exception to this rule and it is surprising. Hagar, the concubine slave, gives God a name. She has run away when things got rough as her son by Abraham overshadows Isaac and Sarah regrets her decision. Hagar and Ishmael are in trouble in the wilderness. An angel appears to show them a water source and to advise Hagar to return to her servitude and submit to Sarah. Hagar chooses

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survival over the slim chance at freedom in these circumstances. She feels seen by the Divine and is amazed that she has interacted with the Divine and yet lives. In response, she declares God to be El-roi, "the one who sees" (Gen. 16:13). Perhaps there is something about her vulnerability—and so, her dependence—which make her worthy to add a name to the divine lexicon. Surely, her name shares the characteristics of all faithful divine naming: a concern for those in bondage, a relational bond between divine and human, a promise of ongoing providential care.

God reveals God's own name similarly. The cry of the slaves in Egypt has reached the divine ear. God is moved. God seeks to rescue. A stuttering shepherd, an exile from Pharaoh's own house, is chosen to facilitate liberation. He asks, quite reasonably, for a name, since so far he has only a cryptic sign like the one Abraham received: "This shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." And, he receives an answer—well, two actually. As in our second epigraph above, the "God of their ancestors" (Ex. 3:15) is "I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Or, better, "I am becoming who I am becoming."[3] This is the true, unpronounceable name of the divine Liberator. The One who comes *down* to bring the oppressed *up* out of Egypt is "The One who is becoming." This is the One who *sends* a murderer, one who was born a slave but was raised in the master's house, to *bring* those held in bondage to a land flowing with milk and honey on the far side of the sea.

If this language begins to awaken echoes of language we use at baptism, all to the good. And, we will return to such resonances in a moment. For now, the point is to think differently about God's name. The name that God reveals to Moses is dynamic and mysterious. It cannot be grasped or nailed down. It is open to new futures, new interpretations, new revelations. Jews have chosen not even to say it; there is wisdom there.

Only God can truly name the divine. Only God can reveal the fullness of uncontainable divine identity.

Only God can truly name the divine. Only God can reveal the fullness of uncontainable divine identity. Yet, as we have noted, the name that we have tells us much. First, our God is a God of promise, is always going out ahead of us, waiting for us to follow and to arrive—to the land promised to Abraham and Sarah, to the land of milk and honey, to the banquet table, to the great "by and by." Second, our God is a God of relationship—this divine One selected Abram and Sarai, sustained Hagar, called out to Moses from a bush afire, chose Israel, spared Rahab, appointed Deborah, anointed Saul and David (albeit with reluctance), burned within Jeremiah, visited young Mary of Nazareth. And, third, our God is a God who acts to save—sending Moses, parting a sea, providing food and water in the desert, sending Jesus, calming roiling waves, turning water into wine for a wedding, multiplying bread to feed five thousand and more, abiding still, beckoning still, nourishing still, welcoming us all home. "I am becoming who I am becoming" fulfills promises, nurtures life-giving relationship, and establishes justice. This is simply who God is; and yet, of course, God is always yet more than we can know or imagine . . . and is always moving on.

The Divine as Trinity and Its Discontents

For Christians, this God is also known as a trinity—as three-in-one and one-in-three. This Trinity is the same God but with relationality emphasized. The divine reality dances through the one who sends, the one sent, and the one who abides. The three are necessary to the story we tell and yet there is no division, no hierarchy, no separation. There is only pulsating love, love that is stronger than death, love that creates solar systems and ants and leviathans and quarks, love that will bring all reality into harmony—when every tear will be wiped away and all creatures dwell together in peace. This Trinity always and forever relates in love within itself. This Trinity always and forever relates in love to all that has been created. This Trinity is dynamic and mysterious. It cannot be grasped or nailed down. It is open to new futures, new interpretations, new revelations. It is not a name; it is claim. It is the claim that the One who is "I am becoming who I am becoming" is Love.

For better or worse, the members of the Trinity have been given titles. The dynamic, ungraspable Trinity has become known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Many contend that this is the one and only name. However, Father, of course, is not a name, but a social role. Same with Son. Whether the Spirit

proceeds from the Father only or from both Father and Son, the relation of Holy Spirit to the other persons is oblique. Given the story being told—that one sends, one was sent, and one abides—this was understandable, perhaps inevitable. Jesus spoke of the unnamable one as Father and so we, of course, identified him as the Son.

There are several problems with identifying the God of Moses and Miriam and Jesus and Paul with the "name" Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The flow of love that is the dance of the one-who-is-three becomes halting. The sense of how the three-who-are-one relate to creation becomes divided and fixed. "I am becoming who I am becoming" seems to stand still rather than remaining on the move. The one who declares, in our third epigraph above, "I am God, and not a man" has their gender fixed in bald contradiction. And, so, as Mary Daly declares in our first epigraph, God becomes male and the male becomes God. The casting in stone of any name flirts with idolatry in attempting to contain the uncontainable. Fixing the name in a way that reinforces hierarchical social dynamics misconstrues the heart of the divine in ways that make this God of ours unrecognizable.

Late twentieth-century feminist theologians were not the first to contend with the constraints inherent in language such as "Father" and "Son." Augustine had hundreds of ways of characterizing the Trinitarian reality. But they articulated well the consequences of fixing the name and its gender. Ruether and Trible and McFague and Thistlethwaite and Procter-Smith and Duck and Ramshaw, among many others, pursued the conversation, offered alternative metaphors, created inclusive translations of Scripture, changed the way we talked and sang and preached and prayed in relation to both the divine and the human.[4] They demonstrated not only that sole use of masculine images for God was harmful to women, but also that inclusive language was more truthful, more biblical, and more faith-filled for all believers.

The Divine Name Reconsidered

The first insight of which feminists remind us is that all God-language is metaphor—and that metaphors have social consequences. In her *Models of God*, Sally McFague reminds us that all of our "namings" are inadequate yet powerful in shaping our beliefs and our ethics. More particularly, she challenges the dominant metaphor of monarch and probes instead three other possible metaphors for God: mother, lover, and friend. She seeks a theology that can respond to sexism, damage to earth, and the threat of nuclear war. Naming God is one way to remind us, at the heart of our faith, of the sacred worth of women, of our fragile planet home, and of life itself—and, God always exceeds such issues and agendas. Metaphors always contain an "is" and an "is not." In any faithful naming, it should be clear that the name reflects something of who God is; but it should also be clear that all of who God is not is contained within any name. God remains "I am becoming who I am becoming."

Marjorie Procter-Smith focuses specifically on liturgical language. She writes: "Since liturgy speaks both about and to God, the liturgy has always sought clarity and beauty in its language about God. The feminist critique that our traditional liturgical God-language is exclusively male charges that such language is not in fact clear because it is not truthful and not beautiful because it is oppressive."[5] She, then, goes on to identify categories of language that are both more true and more beautiful: nonsexist, inclusive, and emancipatory. The nonsexist approach strives to avoid terms that carry a particular gender (e.g., humankind rather than mankind, Sovereign rather than King). Because masculine terms were considered generic while, at the same time, they made women invisible and silenced, this is an important corrective. Yet, she concludes, "a genderless world . . . is rather flat and colorless." Inclusive language employs gendered language but in a balanced way. For every "God/he" one interjects a "God/she" and vice versa. This may restore vitality to our language, but the asymmetry of gendered language also quickly becomes apparent (e.g., Queen is not an equal alternative to King, nor Mother for Father). At the most fundamental, "God" is a male, not a genderless, term. Procter-Smith reaches further still. In her rendering, emancipatory language is language chosen by women for their own liberation. It involves both reclaiming words used previously to deride and constructing new language. Here, no particular images are rejected; instead, more and more images are juxtaposed—images which affirm the agency and voice of women. To name both humanity and divinity in ways that reflect diverse particularities—both of strength and suffering—in ways that heal, reconcile, provoke hope, and promote justice is the promise of emancipatory liturgical language. It may, then,

facilitate talk about and to "I am becoming who I am becoming" in ways that are clear and beautiful and which engender among us new visions of the promised future when love reigns.

In one of her numerous, evocative eucharistic prayers, Gail Ramshaw shows us what a bit of emancipatory Trinitarian language looks like:

"You, Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three,
Our Life, our Mercy, our Might,
Our Table, our Food, our Server,
Our Rainbow, our Ark, our Dove,
Our Sovereign, our Water, our Wine,
Our Light, our Treasure, our Tree,
Our Way, our Truth, our Life.

"You, Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three!

Praise now,
praise tomorrow,
praise forever.

And so we cry, Amen: Amen!"[6]

The Divine Name at the Font

Critiques of, and alternatives to, the "naming" of God by Christians as "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" hit a wall at the font. The following is from the official site of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

> On November 16, 2010, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ratified a Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism with four ecclesial communities of the Reformed tradition. The Common Agreement was the result of six years of study and consultation by Catholic and Reformed scholars during the seventh round of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue in the USA. The dialogue has been co-sponsored since 1965 by the Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs along with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ.
>
> The key provision in the Common Agreement is that only those baptisms which are performed "with flowing water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" will be considered valid by the signatories. Proof of baptism will be accomplished by the use of common wording on baptismal certificates for baptisms performed after the effective date of the agreement.[7]

Such an agreement constitutes a triumph for any ecumenically minded Christian. Our divisions are a scandal when we "are by one font, one Spirit, one faith made one."[8] Mutual recognition of baptism by the Roman Catholic Church and these four Reformed Churches must be celebrated. The compromise on the baptismal formula was inevitable. And, in my view, assuring that "flowing water" is used in the baptizing by Reformed congregations might actually be a higher bar than the pledge to use the traditional Trinitarian language. Still, as you can imagine from the above, treating "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" as the sole designation of our God troubles me.

Further, there are several particular reasons to explore this baptismal formula and its effects. The first is that baptism has become captive to the nuclear family—when it should be quite the opposite. Second, talk of baptism as second birth implies a need to be cleansed after one's first birth. Finally, baptism is about incorporation into the living, fleshy body of Christ and not into any name.

But, first, let us briefly situate these concerns in a larger context. Nearly thirty years ago, Ruth Duck wrote her dissertation on gender and the baptismal formula. Her conclusion is clear: "Research and reflection have led me to two conclusions: first, that revision of the baptismal formula is urgently needed; and, second, that a question-and-answer method is better than a declarative formula as a way to affirm baptismal faith in the Trinity."[9] She comes to this conclusion because the traditional formula undermines the central meanings of baptism itself. She writes:

> [Use of traditional Trinitarian formula] epitomizes the contradiction between the church's offer of new life in Christ and its use of language reflecting patriarchal social systems. Baptism means conversion from the ways of this world to new life in communion; it means participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in solidarity with the oppressed. These and other meanings of baptism are contradicted

when the pivotal words of the formula reflect old ways of patriarchy" (p. 4).

She also finds:

- that, while Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 may serve as warrant for the sacrament of baptism, the formula found there, which logically Jesus never would have said, was not designated as the sole formula until quite late through a historical process, which means it can also be faithfully changed through a process of recovery and re-imagination (p. 4); and,
- that other formulas, such as "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38; 10:48), and interrogatory forms (e.g., as in The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, the presider asks a series of questions—"Do you believe in . . . ?" I believe . . ."—as the baptism is performed) were also used in the early church and in other times and places in church history and may constitute a more adequate approach to a declaration of faith at the font (p. 124 and 131, respectively).

Her concern, again, is theological: "Because the naming of God in baptism is appropriately the community's characteristic address to God, this naming should be as theologically adequate as possible" (p. 154). Her solution is elegant and contextually flexible while also being biblically and theologically sound. However, the ecumenical consensus has left the patriarchal formula at the heart of a central rite that is, surely, meant to express the free gift of grace from a living God and equality and mutuality among the Body and its members.

> Some have proposed formulae such as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer as nonsexist; while other are concerned that by dividing soteriological tasks among the persons of the Trinity, we risk a creep towards modalism.

Finally, and more concretely, we might return to Procter-Smith's categories to consider alternative formulae.[10] Some have proposed formulae such as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer as nonsexist; while other are concerned that by dividing soteriological tasks among the persons of the Trinity, we risk a creep towards modalism. Jim Kay, while a doctoral student at Union Theological Seminary, famously convinced the clergy at the Riverside Church to move to a formula that can be considered "inclusive": "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all."[11] While for some Kay's offering skirts ecumenical strictures, it may still reify the gender binary and valorize anthropocentric and parental metaphors, which are held dear by many but remain problematic to many as well. Instead of offering an example of emancipatory language at the font, Procter-Smith despairs of a church where women are honored except in eschatological terms and relies on Ruether's model of women-church, an exodus community that is by and for women. Perhaps we are still searching for a formula that adequately counters the church's misogyny. And, as we do so, let us also make these questions even more complicated.

Baptism as Adoption

As we have been focusing on critiques and proposals of late-twentieth century (or, so-called second-wave) feminism, we have been speaking in fairly essentialized terms of the gender binary—the male and the female as the two exclusive types of human beings. Folks like Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde, among many others, have long been reminding us of other structures that are meant to divide us: elevating some and oppressing others have of course been present as well.[12] With the increasing visibility of LGBTQIA+ folks both in church and society, not only must we account for the intersectionality of race and class and so on with gender, but the binary itself is troubled. Are we as church able to honor the increasing complexity of our communities, not that such complexities have not always been there but because now they are visible and audible and tangible? These are our children, our friends, our siblings. They are us. Do we dare to believe, with Paul, his baptismal theology (which may even be a baptismal formula), that, among those of us who have been clothed with Christ in the waters, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3:27–28)? It is not, of course, that these sub-identities go away, but how they are valued is transformed. We cherish our ethnicity and culture and skin color and gender identity/presentation, but we do not lord it over

one another. We are all equal, called to honor every other member's dignity, and inescapably bound together. We are all, no more and no less, adopted children of God, siblings to one another. No one can say to another: "I have no need of you."

We fail at this, of course, but that does not mean we are not called to strive towards such egalitarian community. This is why I am troubled by the way in which baptism has taken the shape of a celebration of the nuclear family in so many places. The beaming new parents (who are also exhausted) carry their infant to the font. Yes, the community also makes pledges of care, but the parents and their child and perhaps other children remain the focus. I am wondering how the parental metaphor, raised to sacred status at the heart of the ceremony, encourages this. The problem may be infant baptism itself. Instead of participating in an act that echoes dying and rising, the baby is sprinkled and paraded around. It's not that we shouldn't support parents as they raise children among us, nor that there isn't something powerful about witnessing a claiming of one who cannot respond as bound to God in love forever. But the optics still seem to foster a "blood thicker than water" image of church. In contrast, Barbara Lundblad writes: "It's impossible to travel very far in the Gospels without bumping into stories, images, encounters, and teachings through which Jesus is shaping a new community. This is a community in which water is thicker than blood, family is redefined, lepers are touched, and outcasts sit at table."[13] If baptism means "water is thicker than blood," all biological ties are subordinated to our identity as members of the Body.

This has implications for ecclesial debates about gender and sexuality and all other identity categories. Elisabeth Stuart draws upon queer theory to suggest that baptism may be seen as bestowing a new sense of identity, one that relativizes all other notions of identity. Worth quoting at length, she writes:

> Through baptism human beings are transformed from being atomized individuals and taken into the very life of the Trinitarian God that is incarnated in the Church. The ontology of the baptized is radically changed, they become what might be called ecclesial persons.[14]

And, further:

> The ecclesial person is . . . one in which all other identities are deconstructed and rendered non-essential, as in Gal. 3.28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." But culturally constructed identities are not abandoned, they are redeemed and given back to us as parodies of their former selves. I do not use parody in the conventional sense of sending up something. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "an extended repetition with critical difference" which has "a hermeneutical function with both cultural and even ideological implications." Christians operate within culture that is in the process of being redeemed. It is hard if not impossible to resist the identities our culture gives to us but the Christian is obliged to live out these identities with "critical difference," the difference being shaped by ecclesial personhood. This will often involve a deliberate subversion of identity categories. The Christian performance of maleness and femaleness will therefore be strange (and indeed throughout Christian history has often been very strange), because gender is not determinative of our relationship to God.[15]

I agree with Andy Buechel's critique of Stuart that, despite our theological ideals, regimes of normalization and naturalization reside nonetheless within our rites—even within baptism.[16] The exclusively male "name" which authorizes our washings could certainly be one example of how phallocentric and gender binary assumptions sit at the heart of this rite. This being the case, Christians, then, are not simply enabled and obliged to live ecclesially rather than culturally but also must parody the ecclesial itself. Nonetheless, I appreciate how Stuart provides a helpful reframing of debates about the ways Christians ought to "do" gender and sexuality. She notes that our individual gender performances should look strange. Further, she embeds individual members within a community that also does things strangely. Both individual Christians and the Body to which we belong are beginning to look rather queer. And, if instead baptism is meant to emphasize "adoption" by the

Divine rather than biological reproduction as our primary "family tie," we should not be surprised that those marginalized because of the gender identity/ presentation or their sexual orientation would want to join this queer Body. Should we not only welcome them, but, in some sense, follow their lead?

Baptism and First Birth

Duck rejects the traditional formula because it contradicts a key meaning of baptism: that our symbolic dying and rising frees us from the "old ways" (the ways of hierarchical patriarchy) and initiates us into the new ways of Christ. I agree. It also makes me wonder about another central meaning, that of "second birth." A few years ago, in a class discussion of baptismal theology and practice, some feminist students pressed the question of "second birth" as one of the key meanings of this sacrament. "Why does one need a second birth?" they asked. "Doesn't that imply that the first birth was somehow 'dirty'?" When one contemplates celibate male clergy presiding over a ceremony to welcome infants into a male-dominated institution by lowering an unavoidably phallic candle into a large bowl of water to make the passive substance vital with life-giving power, one might indeed wonder what is being communicated about gender dynamics at the font. Whether or not "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is used in the formula, this would still be the case. However, this male name reinforces rather than mitigates the problem.

I wrote the following "flood" prayer as a first response:

Invitation

Come, come to the waters,
all who thirst.
Come, come to the water,
all women and men,
daughters and sons,
black and white,
red, brown, and yellow,
gay and straight,
single, married, widowed,
and divorced.

Come, drink, there is no price.
Come, without money,
to slake your thirst.

Come, be cleansed and renewed.
Come to this water,
holy water,
ordinary water,
water of womb,
both human and divine.

Come to this font,
of joy and pain and life,
for bloody washing,
not unclean,
a mother's blood,
a divine shedding.

Come, to this font,
to remember,
to imagine,
to mark,
to find courage,
to find power,
as we wade in the water to baptize!

A Prayer over Water

Word on the water,
We offer this day our thanks and praise,
as we gather around the water
and recall your mighty acts:

In water, all life took shape;
through the sea, your people fled from bondage;
in a river, you declared the One-who-came-in-flesh Beloved;
on a beach, he grilled fish for friends who had thought him dead;
by still waters, you lead us in peace;
on the banks of a flowing river,
the city where you will dwell with your people will be built.

With us, this day, act again to bless,
to liberate, to empower—through water.
Life-giving Spirit, who hovers over the deep,
stirring the waters,
kindling the lights both bright and dim,
knitting together creatures of sky and land and sea,
stir this water,
kindle the flame of our faith,
knit us together as one body
as we wade in the water to baptize.
Womb of all life,

surrounding, protecting, nourishing,
making of your own blood food,
within your own body grows hope and life;
surround this child, this mother,
this family, this community;
feed us again with bread of life and cup
of love;
make of us a holy people;
mark for protection this young life.

Great Mother,
cradling, releasing, pushing,
opening, tearing, birthing,
we are bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh,
made in the water of our mothers,
born with the shedding of our mother's blood;
we are wondrously and fearfully made;
we are blessed, holy, fragile, hopeful, afraid;
abide with us, assuage our fears;
fill us with your spirit.

Mother of all,
with and for all mothers,
wash now this [daughter/son];
accompany [her/him] through these waters;
accompany us all in our journeys;
make of us a holy people.

Word, Spirit, Womb, Mother,
stir this water;
kindle the flame of our faith;
knit us together as one body
as we wade in the water to baptize.

I am quite confident that the formula implied in this prayer, "I baptize you in the name of Word, Spirit, Womb, Mother," will never be used. But, both the formula and the reasons that it may be beyond the pale are, perhaps, worth pondering.

Baptized as Incorporation

Next, let us take a closer look at current baptismal practice. After the presentation, the scrutinies, and a prayer over the water, the presider says:

"I baptize you in the name of the Father
(sprinkle/dunk),
and of the Son (sprinkle/dunk),
and of the Holy Spirit (final sprinkle/dunk)."

Elsewhere in the English-speaking world, when we say "in the name of," we mean to indicate ourselves as a stand-in. So, "The President cannot be present but, in his absence, I declare this to be Happy Hunting Day." Or, "By the power invested in me by the state of Massachusetts, I now declare you husband and wife." It is a phrase that clarifies the authority by which a speech-act is made effective—a crucial part of "how to do things with words," to recall J. L. Austin's speech-act theory.[17] Grammatically, then, we are not baptized into the Trinity; rather, baptism is done by the authority of (or, in the stead of) the Trinity. This is a question of warrant, not a question of effect. Duck may be correct that the way we name God as we make new Christians by passing them through the waters should be "characteristic" of our understanding of who this God we follow may be. But "characteristic" does not mean fixed. As we have discovered above, like the One it designates, the Name cannot be grasped or nailed down. It is open to new futures, new interpretations, new revelations. And again, "Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit" is not a name; it is a claim. It is the claim that the One who is "I am becoming who I am becoming" is Love. Let the name by which we say "in the name of . . ." be recognizable and subject to scrutiny, but let our namings be multiple, as free as the One to whom it belongs.

Baptism is not about arguing over the sole and true name of God, but of having our children and strangers now become family incorporated into the fleshy, messy, diverse, and glorious Body of Christ.

God of the Gender Spectrum and the Rainbow Body

We all know, as we/they are coming out in self-identification and social visibility, folk from across the gender spectrum—from cisgender to transgender and at every gender queer and nonbinary spot in between. Both science and the testimony of our neighbors, friends, and children tell us that there are not two genders but a gender spectrum. Those who reside somewhere "in between" remain worthy of honor and to be treated with full human dignity. As we/they are created in the divine image, we must affirm that their lives reflect God. In fact, because of their marginal fluidity, "I am becoming who I am becoming" may be more their God than those tied to normative roles and ways of being. God has already welcomed and claimed these siblings. What

are we waiting for? If we know God as always going before, we do not proceed in fear but in courage.

Let us wade into the water, the water that God is troubling. Let us declare in the name of . . .

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
One God, Mother of us all
Word, Spirit, Womb, Mother
Lover, Beloved, Love
Way, Truth, Life

that all are welcome, that all are claimed, that all of us are on a journey towards what we might yet become, that all of us will be welcomed home by the one who is "I am becoming who I am becoming."

Notes

1. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, originally published 1973), 19.
2. I recall this pun from her lectures, but the background for it (*adam* from "ha'adamah" in Hebrew; or, the "earth-creature" from the "earth") can be found in her *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 75–82.
3. Charles R. Gianotti writes of this verse: "God's manifestation to Israel is yet future at the time of the burning bush incident. This [name (an imperfect verb)] is God's promise that He will redeem the children of Israel," in "The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Vital Old Testament Issues: Examining Textual and Topical Questions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 28–38 at 35. See also Tom Driver, *Patterns of Grace: Human Experience as Word of God* (Harper and Row, 1977).
4. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadephia: Fortress Press, 1978); Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987); Susan Thistlethwaite was on the translation team of *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); as a result of the publication of this volume, Susan was invited to speak to questions of God and gender on national television shows—and she received numerous death threats; Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Akron, OH: Order of Saint Luke Press, 2000, originally published 1990); Ruth Duck, *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991); and, Gail Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
5. Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite*, 51. The rest of this paragraph is based on her third chapter, pages 48–71.
6. Gail Ramshaw, "Eucharistic Prayer F," in *Celebrate God's Presence* (Etobicoke, ON: United Church of Canada, United Church Publishing House, 2000), 256–8; Prayer #11 in the *Book of Common Worship*, Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 132–4.
7. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, "The Common Agreement on Baptism," accessed August 12, 2019, www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/baptism.cfm.
8. A phrase from the inscription within the baptistry of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Rome, which was built in the fifth century.
9. Duck, *Gender and the Name of God*, 9. For the remainder of this paragraph, I will insert page numbers from Duck's book in parentheses in the body of the text.
10. See also Duck, *Gender*, 159–184.
11. Ibid., 163–166.
12. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2003, originally published 1983); bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); and Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).
13. Barbara K. Lundblad, *Transforming the Stone: Preaching through Resistance to Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 53.
14. Elizabeth Stuart, "Sexuality: The View from the Font (the Body and the Ecclesial Self)," *Theology and Sexuality* 11 (1999): 14.
15. Ibid., 16–17.
16. Andy Buechel, *That We Might Become God: The Queerness of Creedal Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).
17. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* The William James Lectures, 1955 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

The Work of Our Hands
Practice Imperfect

Amy E. Gray

About the Work

When a large root needed to be removed from the tree next to my home because it was damaging our pipes, there was a conversation about how much damage a tree could take to its roots system before it would die. Apparently there are equations for such things, allowing arborists to determine if the removal of roots for the repairs can be made without killing the tree. At the time we were having this conversation, the news was full of stories of the Syrian refugee crisis. I often use trees as a stand-in for humanity, connecting the stories of our environment and human experience. Trees and plants survive through roots, their connections. People are no different, connected to our families and homelands, putting down roots through generations. But unlike the trees, there are no equations dictating how much trauma a person can sustain cut off from their roots before they will fail to survive. *Wholeness* is the first of three panels in a set of images that loosely follow Walter Brueggemann's cycle of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. They were created, in part, in response to damage to a tree in my own yard and the Syrian refugee crisis. The piece is part of a larger series of work using silver leaf and trees to engage questions of human frailty and was created as part of a personal contemplative prayer practice.

Artists have been using gold leaf as a shorthand for the presence of the Divine in their work for centuries. Think medieval manuscripts or icons. Silver leaf is used less frequently, as, unlike gold, it tarnishes when exposed to the air. Artists who desire the look of silver either seal the metal by coating it with a varnish or fixative, or substitute some other metal with a similar appearance. "Have you fixed it?" is often one of the first questions I am asked when people encounter the work. The natural process of oxidation is often perceived as a flaw, making it an imperfect medium for speaking of God. As an artist living today, I have found that past imagery of the grandeur of God does not speak to my own questioning. The imperfect nature of silver has provided an ideal medium for meditation on human frailty and our impermanence in conversation with the Divine.

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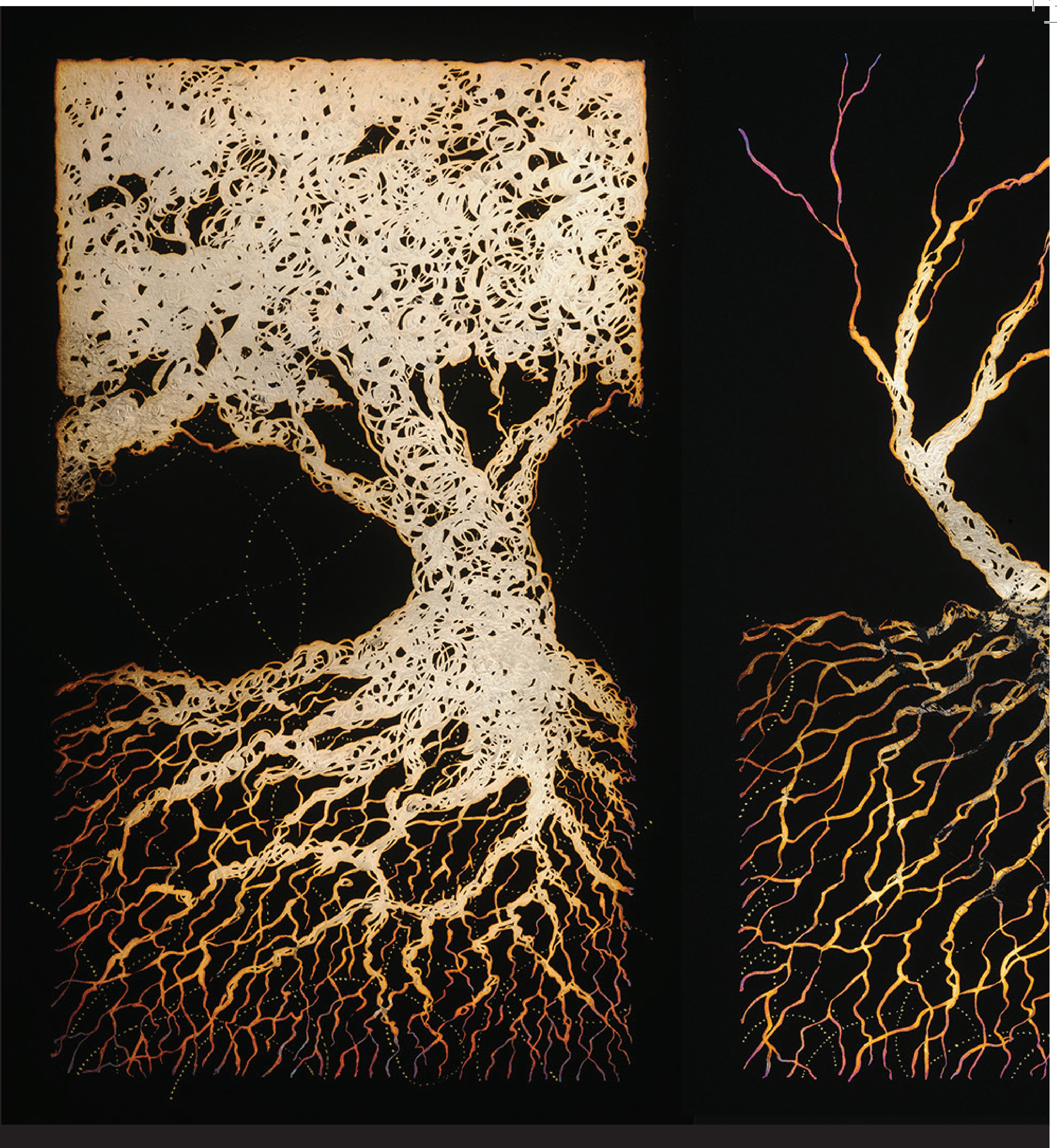
Wholeness, *silver leaf and shell gold on Plike, 10.5 x 17.5", 2016*



My studio practice emphasizes process over product. I am deeply engaged in the physicality of making the drawings. It is through the act of handling the materials that I gain insight, observing the process as it unfolds without making an effort to control the outcome. I have no control over the oxidation process and cannot predict how long it will take for a piece to reach its final state, and that is humbling. That moment of humility at what is beyond my power reverberates through my prayer practice. I find the process to be reassuring. In so many situations—the life of faith, the life of the

Wholeness, Trauma, *and* Renewal, *silver leaf and shell gold on Plike, three images, each 10.5 x 17.5", 2016. Image from 2018 shows oxidation on all three drawings.*

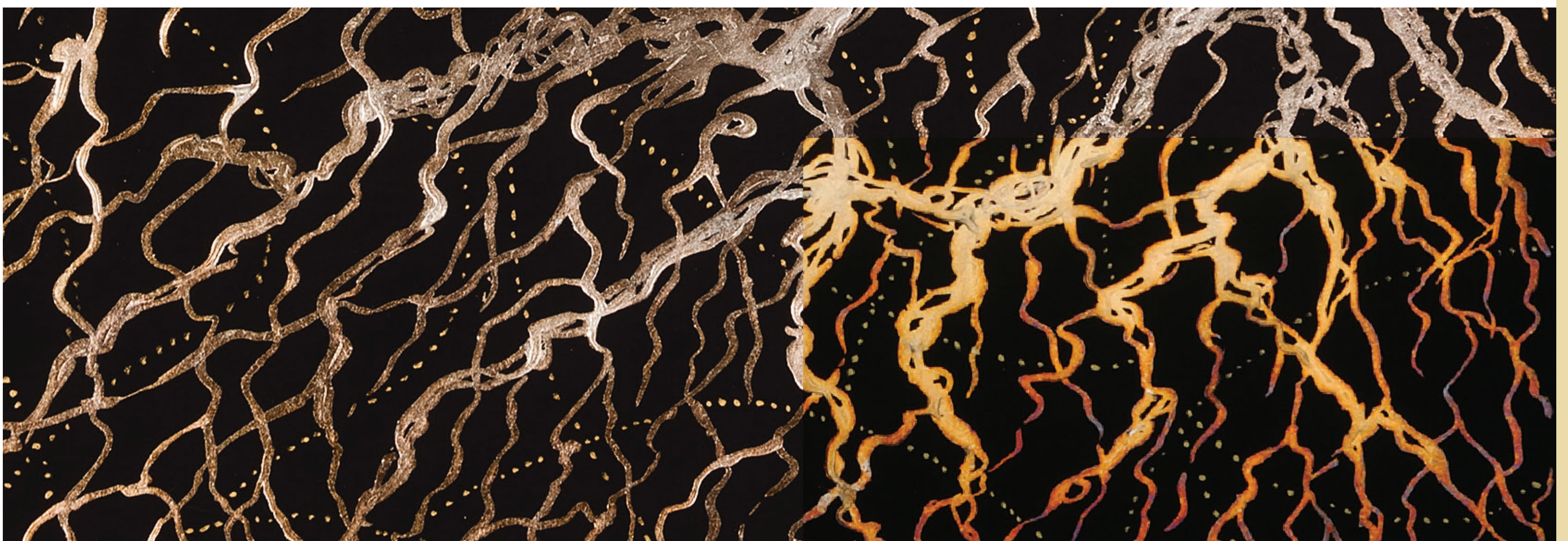
artist, or just modern life in general—there is so much pressure to be perfect, without blemish, and show no signs of aging. But the beauty of this work is in their flawed, impermanent nature. They are what they are because the silver is behaving the way that it was created to be. It has changed the way that I approach my work from striving for a perfection that I cannot reach to leaning into the irregularities and allowing them to tell stories of hope, creating images that affirm the existence of beauty in the world and the interconnectedness of all creation.

About the Process

These images were created using silver leaf on Plike, an artificial paper made from sulfur. A very loose underdrawing is made with a piece of soft silver wire. This technique, called silverpoint, was widely used for drawings prior to the discovery of a large deposit of graphite in England in 1565. On the black Plike, the fine lines of silver quickly tarnish and become nearly invisible, alleviating the need to erase any extraneous visible lines from the final piece. The actual drawing is done with a brush to apply a clear adhesive binder. Silver leaf, which is only a few atoms thick, is cut into narrow strips, then placed onto the adhesive and allowed to dry. The silver that has not adhered to the binder is so thin that it can be swept away with a soft brush. This same process is used for gold or any other metal leaf. The picture at right shows an example of a tree as the extra silver is being brushed away. A detail from *Wholeness* shows the change in oxidation between the time when only a slight amount of oxidation was present, from an image taken not long after the piece was created and one taken two years later. The process of oxidation begins at the edge of each piece of silver and gradually extends to cover the entire piece. Because this image has been in storage it has had reduced exposure to the air which has slowed the process substantially, but the piece continues to change. The tiny gold dots in the images are shell gold, which is pure gold watercolor. It has been used to represent the life force or a divine spark.

Above: Extra silver is brushed away, revealing a final drawing at the top.

Below: This composite image shows a detail of Wholeness *to compare the change in oxidation from an image taken not long after the piece was created to one taken two years later. The lower right corner overlay shows the amazing shift in color as the silver turns coppery, followed by a red wine phase then blue. The changes move from the edges of the silver inward.*



Art and Trinity: Two Men and a Bird?

Ann Laird Jones

Ann Laird Jones is the director of arts ministry at Montreat Conference Center and a minister member of St. Andrew Presbytery in Mississippi.

Every year the liturgical calendar places Pentecost squarely on the map, based on how long it takes to get past the fifty days of Easter. The church has become comfortable with the visualization of Pentecost, as evidenced by red everything. We wear red stoles. In our closets are the red clothes reserved for Pentecost Sunday. The outpouring of color evidences the occasion.

But squarely and intentionally on the heels of Pentecost Sunday is Trinity Sunday. The two Sundays function together, back to back. We do not wear special colors for Trinity Sunday. We do not have special clothes in our closets for Trinity Sunday. On Trinity Sunday clergy and choir wear white stoles, the pulpit and lectern are dressed in white paraments, and the sanctuary looks very different this Sunday from seven days ago, when the red explanation marks of Pentecost filled the air. Trinity Sunday feels visually more like a question mark. The Sundays are disconnected. One is visual. One is not, except for the occasional interconnected triangle and trefoil. One involves the entire space, with Pentecost red on walls, on special paraments and antependia, even moving in through the doors as the congregation, dressed in red, joyfully and expectantly gathers. Yet Trinity Sunday, for all its central meaning and theological foundation, is visually subdued and "quiet," even as we sing the hymn standards like "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The PC(USA) *Book of Common Worship* offers a beautiful and expansive explanation of Trinity Sunday, which began to be observed in the tenth century and was "formally established on the Sunday after Pentecost by Pope John XXII in the fourteenth century."[1]

> This theological festival celebrates the nature and mission of the triune God—an identity and purpose we share as those who are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Trinity is a fitting summation of the first half of the Christian year, as we have remembered the saving promise of God through history (in Advent and Christmas), proclaimed the mystery of faith in the crucified and risen Lord (in Lent and Easter), and witnessed the transforming work of the Spirit in the world (at Pentecost). *We may also say that every Sunday is Trinity Sunday, as on the first day of the week the Lord God began creation, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the church*.[2]

Even with this firmly grounded celebration and articulation of a doctrine which is both foundational and central to what we believe, we struggle to proclaim, understand, and visualize the Trinity, despite its being a cornerstone of our faith. In

baptism we are given *our* very name in the *name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Our name is connected to and defined by God's Trinitarian name in the moment of our baptism, as we are bathed in the waters of forgiveness and life.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) wrote extensively about the Trinity, starting his *Confessions* with a proclamation: "You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." For Augustine the Trinity offered an avenue to deeper relationship with and understanding of the nature of God. He believed all three persons of the Trinity are both distinct and interactive, at the same time. In his search for God, Augustine turned inward, looking at his own sense of who he was as human, with his own individual human nature, to work out the distinctions about relationship with God.

Gregory of Nazianzus (who along with Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea became known as the Cappadocian Fathers) described the three persons of the Trinity as interdependent and interactive:

> I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One."[3]

Also from Gregory:

> When I say "God," I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[4]

Mark Achtemeir suggests the following:

> In both these cases, rather than suggest a pictorial representation for the triune God, Gregory suggested a certain habit of mind and pattern of thought which keeps Christian reflection faithfully anchored in the reality of God.[5]

Augustine, clearly guided by Nicene orthodoxy and influenced by the Cappadocian Fathers, looked for analogies in human nature that manifest who God is, particularly in terms of *our* nature and *our* relationship to God. Augustine's first analogy described the Trinity in terms of lover, beloved, and love that binds them together. He soon found that analogy to be inadequate, and moved in the direction of memory, will, and understanding within the operative human nature. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet interconnected. They are never separate. Each is involved with the other. God's reaching out to us proceeds from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Our response to God is in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, and to the Father. In response to the question "What does the Trinity look like?" Augustine arrived at the answer that, in the end, God's nature is love, God is unified in that love, and our response must be the same. This is what the Trinity strives to depict.[6]

How then do we imagine and visualize this active and moving God, in whose name and by whose love we are named?

The earliest art of Trinity is found in illuminated manuscripts or carved in stone on sarcophagi. The Trinity occasionally shows up as three bearded men, the oldest one creating Eve from Adam, or holding a wounded and dying Jesus, or enacting the Coronation of the Virgin. In the early Coptic Orthodox Church, areas of brightness (gold, typically) identify God the Father. In early Ethiopian Orthodoxy icons are written to show three persons on a single throne, depicting unity. Jesus' baptism also serves as a common scene to depict the Trinity. Occasionally Jesus is visualized as the Lamb of God, while the Holy Spirit appears as the cloud around Mt. Sinai or Mt. Tabor.

In later baroque and Rococo artistic renditions of the Trinity artists relied upon triangular compositions, the golden ratio in evidence, with Jesus, bare to the waist, God the Father nearby in flowing robes offering the two-fingered sign of blessing, and the

Luca Rossetti da Orta's fresco, *Holy Trinity*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luca_Rossetti_Trinit%C3%A0_Chiesa_San_Gaudenzio_Ivrea.jpg

composition in Luca Rossetti da Orta's fresco *Holy Trinity,* 1739, St. Gaudenzio Church, Ivrea, Italy.

Corrado Giaquinto, also an Italian artist (1703–1756), produced a number of paintings on the Trinity, always with clouds and cherubs. *Holy Trinity, The Virgin and the Saints* is a composition of many triangles of persons, in addition to the Trinity, with the Virgin standing out in blue flowing robes. The eye is drawn up to the heart of the painting, the Trinity, but balanced by the Virgin.

Corrado Giaquinto, *Holy Trinity, The Virgin and the Saints*, http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/list.php?m=a&s=tu&aid=3659

Giaquinto's *The Trinity with Souls in Purgatory*, 1740s, shows a Pietà-like Christ, casting the light of salvation that seems to emanate from both God the Father in resplendent robes and the healthy dove above, reflecting onto three desperate but highlighted persons below.

Similarly, in the painting on page 18, top left column, called simply *Trinity*, by Spanish painter Juseppe de Ribera (1591–1652), Jesus is shown as if he is still on the cross, or perhaps just lifted off. He is cradled within the abundant robes of God the Father, with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove fluttering right above his head. Cherubs act

Corrado Giaquinto, *The Trinity with Souls in Purgatory*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Corrado_Giaquinto_-_The_Trinity_with_Souls_in_Purgatory_-_68.2_-_Minneapolis_Institute_of_Arts.jpg

as supporting cast, holding up the shroud. Unlike the previous painting, little else is shown. The only color is the red in the robes worn by God the Father, and the stark, yellow background. Is this a nod to gold leaf, increasingly the material used to depict God, or is its purpose to draw our eye down to the triangle created by the dove, God's hands, and Christ's head?

Jusepe de Ribera, *Trinity*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jos%C3%A9_de_Ribera_047.jpg

In a woodcut of 1511, the German Renaissance artist Albrech Dürer depicts the Trinity as the Throne of Mercy. God the Father's hands are no longer evident, as in earlier depictions when they are often held up in a blessing. Now flowing robes cover the hands of God as he cradles the Pietà form of his Son, whose body bears the wounds of crucifixion

Remnants of the cross point to the resurrection moment of this scene. God the Father, wearing an ornate crown, maybe depicting a connection with the pope, holds the Son. The four heads at the bottom depict the four winds, indicating that this event takes place in heaven. Jesus is placed at the right hand of the Father. The dove tops the triangular composition.

Albrecht Dürer, *Trinity*, woodcut, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albrecht_D%C3%BCrer_-_The_Trinity_(NGA_1943.3.3674).jpg

So far, artistic renderings of the Trinity, at least in the West—"two men and a bird"—reflect ongoing theological conundrums. We believed in the Trinity. We used the language of the Trinity as the very basis for our identity as Christians. But we could not quite get beyond God the Father/Creator with a long white beard, a sort of visual combination of Moses and Elijah, dressed elaborately with flowing robes and increasingly larger crowns; or Jesus as young, bearded, about to be baptized, or wounded, or dead; or Spirit, in the form of a healthy and hovering dove, wings outstretched. The Trinity is often depicted as a triangular Throne of Mercy or Throne of Grace. The Father supports a crumpled, crucified Son, usually bare to the waist, showing his earthly wounds. Cherubs abound.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Second Council of Nicaea (787) made the decision that while representations of Christ were allowed, depicting God the Father was problematic. By 1667 the Russian Orthodox Church forbade portraying the Father in any semblance of human form. In the West, the English Lord Chamberlain's office forbade any depiction of God in plays, or later on radio, between the time of the Reformation and the 1960s.

In the midst of the continuing struggle about how to depict God, how to picture that which we know but cannot see, Andrei Rublev completed his triumphant Trinity icon in 1426, a masterpiece created for the iconostasis of the principal church of the Holy Trinity Monastery near Moscow. The monastery was founded in the fourteenth century by St. Sergius of Radonezh, who believed that "contemplation of the Holy Trinity destroys all discord."[7] For the Orthodox Church, expanding the dogma of the Trinity was the fundamental theological theme of Pentecost itself, thus providing an intrinsic connection.[8] Rublev's creation of the icon of the Trinity, based on the three angels who appear to Abraham and Sarah by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–15), is often described in terms of its "immaterial and divine light": "Nowhere in the world is there anything like it from the point of view of theological synthesis, symbolic richness and artistic beauty."[9]

Rublev's *Trinity* is a welcome departure from the anthropomorphic and avian depictions of the Trinity. In Genesis 18, the Lord visits Abraham and Sarah in the form of three men who meet them by the oaks of Mamre. The visitors at Mamre gather around a table and are shown great hospitality, welcomed with food and drink.

The three angels invite us into this meal. There is no action in this moment of invitation, but complete stillness. Inverse perspective leads our eyes out from the scene, rather than into it. The three figures are both male and female in their facial features, identical in size and pose, great intention given to the expression of unity. The meal is now a chalice, holding the sacrificial ram's head. They look at each other, with unified, harmonious gaze. There is a space for a fourth guest at this four-cornered table, presumably the viewer.

The middle angel represents Christ. He wears a *clav* on his shoulder, a stole symbolizing his priesthood. He wears both purple and blue robes, symbolizing his humanity and his divinity. His hand on the table also represents his humanity and divinity, two fingers open in the sign of blessing as he offers blessing for the cup. To his right is God the Father, wearing transparent robes whose color is beyond description. His right hand is undefined as he blesses the cup. His gaze rests upon the Spirit across from him, dressed in brilliant sapphire

Andrei Rublev, *Trinity*, woodcut, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Andrey_Rublev_-_%D0%A1%D0%B2._%D0%A2%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

blue and emerald green robes, symbolizing his connection to the earth and all things now living. His hand points down to the earth beneath his feet.

Each angel holds a staff, pointing to something beyond them. The staff of God the Father points to a house, symbolizing the everlasting church, with open doors. The staff of Christ points to a tree, symbolizing the Tree of Life mentioned in Genesis and Revelation, alluding also to the tree that formed the cross. The staff of the Holy Spirit points to ascending rocks and mountains, symbolizing Mt. Moriah, where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed, or Mt. Tabor, where the transfiguration of Jesus took place.

The visual composition of the icon is a combination of circular, rectangular, and triangular motion. Even as a chalice rests on the table, the three figures form a chalice shape between their heads and down to their feet. We are invited into the scene both as a feast of hospitality and as eucharistic meal of grace.

The Trinity is not a gathering of three persons each with a job description. The Trinity is God in motion, one in three, in the dance encapsulating all time and space: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Clearly there is a growing visual understanding of the Trinity that is beyond the baroque anthropomorphic "triangle." A beautiful example of this is the Trinity stained-glass window at Eglise Saint-Martin Church in Cougenard, Sarthe, France, which shows unity through three different visions, surrounded by circles of gold and white.

Three different gazes, all within one face. The viewer is connected to the eyes of God. God is not anthropomorphized, but is unified within the powerful design of the window.

What next? How do we move beyond the two-men-and-a-bird approach in our efforts to visually imagine the unity and power of the Trinity, and to imagine visually the connections and movement from the power of the Pentecost moment and the

Rare depiction of the *Trinity*, detail of stained-glass windows in Saint Martin Church, Courgenard, Sarthe, France. Photo by Selbymay, wikimedia.org.

Envisioning Trinity means thinking of God, and how we relate to God, in terms of community, space and relationship; in terms of care for one another and all creation; in terms of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer and the One alone who sustains us all the day long; in terms of how we know and celebrate God's presence at all times.

life of faith? As Rublev imagined his iconic Trinity in terms of circles, rectangles, and triangles, we see these same shapes today used to imagine Trinity in art and architecture, whether in the tracery of trefoils or the intentional architectural use of apses in a worship space (*triconchos*: three apses). Rublev was drawn to the three angels in Genesis 18 to visualize the unity of the Trinity. In the same way we are free to imagine the Trinity, visually, as we celebrate God with us. Where will we go with this?

Claude Monet used light as a means of understanding. After breaking free from the restraints of the nineteenth-century Academy in Paris, Monet went out to the countryside to capture light as it interacted with the surfaces of everyday objects and scenes. Monet realized that as *light* changes with every moment, so does *everything* it illuminates. He discovered if he painted the same subject at every hour of the day, whether haystacks or fishing boats or water or cathedrals, the effect would change. Light cannot be painted. What can be done is to elicit the memory of light, and movement, and change through painted subjects. Imagining art and Trinity in the same breath means going beyond the "haystacks" and remembering the light, the movement, and change. Imagining and visualizing the Trinity—God, three in one—is difficult no matter where you start: words or images. Different times of day, or stages in the journey of life, will offer different images.

My seminary graduation was on Pentecost Sunday. I was awarded the preaching prize that year. Upon receiving the prize at graduation, I was told that the prize carried with it the stipulation that the recipient must preach the following Sunday at the church that gave the money for the prize. That year the Sunday after graduation was Trinity Sunday. I remember the angst of writing my first Trinity Sunday sermon as I tried to find even one doctrine of the Trinity that wasn't dubbed heretical by at least three million people in church history. By Wednesday I wanted to return the prize. By Sunday I was in a panic. I left the prize-issuing church Sunday in my brand-new flax alb and white stole, knowing much more about what *not* to say, and how *not* to preach, than how to visualize and embrace the Trinity.

The next year I preached on the Trinity at the first church I served. The life of associate pastors typically includes preaching the Sunday after Christmas, the Sunday after Easter, and Trinity Sunday. This time I went visual. I sewed three tennis balls onto three pieces of elastic. Holding the elastic in my hand I flung the tennis balls out into the congregation. Luckily the thread held and the tennis balls bounced back to me and not onto their heads. This is Trinity! They are one! They are three! They go together! They dance!

Since that time, I have imagined Trinity in terms of language, words, descriptive phrases, and interrelationships. The descriptions fall short. The words are limited. Imagining Trinity means following the lead of the erstwhile tennis balls, dancing together around us, over our heads, beneath our feet, holding us close. Envisioning Trinity means thinking of God and how we relate to God, in terms of community, space, and relationship; in terms of care for one another and all creation; in terms of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, and the One alone who sustains us all the day long; in terms of how we know and celebrate God's presence at all times. Art as a starting place for imagining Trinity, envisioning Scripture, enabling movement out of the tight language box where words are never adequate to describe God, gently guides us into deeper experience with the triune God. Art as a *vehicle* for Trinity opens up a new vista, where light reflects on relationship and connections and space, even as the light changes as time moves on.

Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, musician, philosopher, mystic, theologian, and artist, truly a Renaissance woman and one of history's great thinkers. In the words of Jonah Winter,

Hildegard von Bingen, *Trinity*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_des_Hildegardis-Codex_003.jpg

> Hildegard was a girl with a secret world.
> Flames danced.
> Flowers blossomed.
> God said, "Write what you see."
> And she could only become all she was when she let her light shine.[10]

Hildegard of Bingen's drawing of the Trinity is found in her 1152 book *Scivias*, from the Latin *Sci vias Domini*, which means "know the ways of the Lord." The book describes twenty-six of her visions in three parts, based on her love for the Trinity. Her rendering of the triune God in this drawing reflects her second mystical vision. Here a glowing, sapphire-blue Christ stands within two brilliant circles: a gold circle and a silver circle bound in gold thread, surrounded by a border of flowers. Here is a visual rendering of the Trinity that is not based on distinctions between the three persons, nor by divisions, but focuses our attention on a fluid, circular unity, where God gazes upon us with contemplative attentiveness. Jesus does not stand alone in this quasi-mandala Trinity, but is illuminated by the *fire* of the Holy Spirit and the *light* of God the Father:

> This is the perception of God's mysteries . . . that bright light bathes the whole of the glowing fire and the glowing fire bathes the bright light; and the bright light and the glowing fire pour over the whole human figure, so that the three are one light in one power of potential.[11]

We do not see God. We do not see Christ standing before us. We do not see the Holy Spirit. What we *do* see is the very visual outcome in the context of our space and time. In Paul Tillich's *On Art and Architecture*, he includes a chapter called "Dwelling, Space and Time," in which he says:

> Space is not a thing, nor a container in which things exist: rather, space is the manner in which living things come into existence. . . . Connected with this external transcending is an internal one. Man is the entity that does not stay with anything given (*Gegebenes*) but presses beyond it to something still to be done (*Aufgegebenes*). . . . One must therefore strive . . . to create spaces in which the tension is balanced between the will to fence oneself off, in order to protect oneself from the infinity of space that draws one in, and the will to thrust forward into infinite space, to leave the sustaining and simultaneously constricting cave.[12]

This tension compels us to take seriously the challenge to visually draw ourselves into the dance/action/movement/journey of the Trinity. It is not a matter of adding a Trinity Sunday collection of colors, clothes, banners, and paraments. It is not about keeping up with the colorful, visual "Pentecosts" of the liturgical year. Rather, it is about celebrating how we see ourselves in the same dancing space as God, the first "Creator," and Christ, the Son who redeems us, and the Holy Spirit, Wisdom, who sustains us, daring to imagine what Trinity looks like at all times and in all space, throughout the Christian year and in our own context. Trinity is an incarnational vision and touches every aspect of our faith.

I have long believed that the visual arts play a vital role in "bringing theology from behind the pulpit." For too long we have relied upon the words and questions and answers of one or two persons to tell us what to believe about God. What Trinitarian understanding brings is the dancing, living God

with us, who is not to be contained behind a pulpit, who is not to be hidden from our eyes, but who bursts forth into our lives with life and energy and purpose and flames of fire! Nancy Chinn, painter and textile artist, wrote about the deep importance of the visual arts as a regular element of worship. Chinn's book *Spaces for Spirit* speaks of art in worship as metaphor:

> The advent of modern art has suggested another use for art in worship. The church has not yet begun to embrace abstract art seriously, but perhaps this is the most powerful use of art: Art creates metaphor, as a figure of speech, takes two things normally thought to be separate and yokes them together, identifies them as somehow being continuous. . . . Our response is liminal, not rational."[13]

She offers the seven basic elements of design as a challenge in celebrating the meeting of scriptural text and art for liturgy:

> The best art for liturgy successfully embodies basic elements of design, of which I name seven. Sometimes a work includes several of these. Rarely does a single work employ all seven. The elements are: light and dark; transparency and opacity; color; pattern; texture; scale; movement. . . . These are not offered as patterns to copy, but *in the hope that the specific examples will stimulate your imagination and your own creativity*.[14]

Visualizing the Trinity in new, abstract, and changing artistic renderings does not in any way *threaten* the Trinity, but opens us up to the possibility of deeper understanding of the powerful meaning the Trinity imparts in our daily living and breathing and dancing and believing and imagining. Recently I made three porcelain pots with the same clay body, the same amount of clay per pot, the same wheel, the same potter, the same firing, the same glazes, which I mixed from the same chemicals. The pots started out the same, but they were different after the firing. The transformation of fire allows three in one, and one in three.

The late Professor Edgar G. Boevé (1929–2019) was a teacher and artist at Calvin College. He "encouraged many to see art as a manifestation of ultimate human concerns."[15] For Boevé, art and faith were "intricately intertwined." In his words, "Art must point to God, not in an attempt to redeem humanity, but rather to express praise and joy for God's gift of redemption."[16]

Ann Laird Jones, three porcelain pots, photo supplied by the author.

Hannah Garrity, liturgical artist at Montreat Conference Center, and I work collaboratively with the worship team for Montreat summer Sunday worship. In this role we create ten new visual installations every summer, based on the texts for each service. Trinity Sunday showed up soon after we started working together. Mary Louise Bringle, a brilliant hymn writer in our time, had recently written a hymn called "The Play of the Godhead," which is included in *Glory to God*. She imagines *perichoresis*, the dance of the Trinity:

> . . . In God's gracious image of coequal parts,
> We gather as dancers, uniting our hearts.
> Men, women and children, and all living things,
> We join in the round of bright nature that rings
> With rapture and rhythm: creation now sings![17]

Hannah and I created three large banners with three dancers: intertwined, yet separate, unified, yet individual, different, yet one. The action of painting the dance was not idolatry: we were in no way depicting God. We were responding to the dancing joy within us as we imagined the movement of the One God by whose name we found a new way to dance in faith.

N. T. Wright refers to the interrelation between theology and art: "The arts have a vocation to open our eyes to see."[18] In terms of Trinity, where words fail and we are unable to verbally access the unity and wonder of God, three in one, music and art have agency to layer all three into one breath. "Art at its best draws attention not only to the way things are but also to the way things will be, when the earth is filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."[19] Whether we use circles, triangles, rectangles, men, women, or birds, the importance is seeing God's story in ours, and our image in the imagination of God, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

> Let us love one another, so that with one mind we may confess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided.[20]

Ann Laird Jones and Hannah Garrity, Trinity banners, photo supplied by the author.

Notes

1. Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 353.
2. Ibid, emphasis added.
3. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration XL on Holy Baptism," section xli, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church:* Second Series, reprint ed., vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaaf and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprinted 1996), 375; cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I.xiii.17.
4. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration XXXVIII on the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ," section viii, in *A Select Library*, 347.
5. Dr. Mark Achtemeier (Augustine scholar and friend), in discussion with the author, September 2019.
6. Ibid.
7. Forest, *Praying with Icons* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 97.
8. Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lassky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 200.
9. Forest, *Praying with Icons*, 97.
10. Jonah Winter, *The Secret World of Hildegard* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007).
11. Hildegard von Bingen, *Scivias*, 1152.
12. Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 82–85.
13. Nancy Chinn, *Spaces for Spirit: Adorning the Church* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), 5.
14. Ibid., 17, emphasis added.
15. "An Artful Life . . . Remembering Edgar Boevé," *SEEN* Journal 19 (2019): 66.
16. Ibid.
17. Mary Louise Bringle, "The Play of the Godhead," *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 9.
18. N. T. Wright, "A Future for Theology and the Arts: A Breakfast Conversation," (lecture, DITA10 [Duke Initiative in Theology and Art], Duke University, Durham, NC, September 8, 2019).
19. Ibid.
20. Forest, *Praying with Icons*, 96; a prayer recited during the Orthodox Liturgy.

Singing into the Trinity

Gail Ramshaw

Walters Art Museum, *The Hospitality of Abraham*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_-_Hospitality_of_Abraham_-_Walters_371185.jpg

Some Christians seem to attend only minimally to the triune nature of God. Indeed, it has been suggested that each Christian denomination has a single "Trinity affinity," one person of the Trinity who most captures its imagination in prayer, praise, and preaching, and that the single Trinity affinity in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the Father.[1] (Do you agree?) Yet many theologians have claimed that receiving God as Trinity is the primary doctrine of the faith, the fundamental key to what makes Christianity a distinctive religion, the brilliant articulation of God's connection to the world. Such theologians teach that to be Christian is to be gladly Trinitarian; to praise God on every Lord's Day is always to be welcomed into a triune reality.

Yet given that many contemporary Christian assemblies are wary about the regular recitation of the historic creeds, churches need to find other roads on which to travel so as to encounter the Trinity. The good news is that Presbyterians need not worry about being stuck with only the first person of the Trinity: to enter more fully into the mystery of the triune God, one need only sing through many of the hymns in the splendid 2013 worship resource *Glory to God*.[2] In fact, it may be that the kind of language Christians use when naming and describing the Trinity is better sung than spoken, more poetic than philosophical, more given to rhythm and rhyme than to expository prose. The hymnal *Glory to God* is a treasure chest in which are many such hymns, gems that shine out to us from the first century into the twenty-first. Let us test this claim by looking carefully at some of these hymns.

Gail Ramshaw, a retired professor of religion, studies and crafts liturgical language from her home outside of Washington, D.C.

Since the origins of Christianity, worshiping communities of the baptized have borrowed the metaphors in the Jewish psalms for daily praise, and some of those psalms were themselves adapted from the pagan rites of their neighbors. The best example of this transfer of sacred language from one religion to another is Psalm 29.[3] It is most likely that much of at least verses 1–10 was originally a Canaanite praise of Baal, the storm god who reigned from above the earth and skies and whose power was manifest in tumultuous weather events. First Israelites, then Christians appropriated this poem to praise the one God whose voice is heard not only in thunderous might but also in blessings of peace. Especially the Reformed tradition of Protestantism advocated that to assist the baptized in the Christian interpretation of the psalms, the Hebrew texts should be Christianized into rhyming, rhythmic texts, and in "Sing Glory to the Name of God," #10 in *Glory to God*, the Presbyterian David Gambrell composed just such an explicitly Trinitarian version of the ancient Canaanite song. This God not only speaks peace but indeed is the believers' peace, and in honor of the name of the three-in-one, Christians sing out their alleluia. According to the Revised Common Lectionary, Psalm 29 is the response to the first reading of the Baptism of our Lord in all three years and in year B on Trinity Sunday,[4] and thus those Sundays are especially appropriate occasions for singing this hymn.

This God not only speaks peace but indeed is the believers' peace, and in honor of the name of the three-in-one, Christians sing out their alleluia.

Another example of Christians adapting Jewish prayer texts is found in Revelation 4:8. In the early second century, the seer of the book of Revelation set the angelic song of Isaiah 6:3 into the mouths of the redeemed who are gathered around the throne—both those already beyond death and those assembled on earth on the Lord's Day. To Christians, the triple "Holy, holy, holy" suggests the divine mystery known as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and two hundred years ago Reginald Heber elaborated on the biblical quote in his composition of the well-known hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy," #1 in *Glory to God*. In this hymn, the heavenly chant heard by the ancient prophet Isaiah is now addressed to "God in three persons, blessed Trinity," for Christians believe that God was always, from before the beginning of time, a triune holiness.

During the church's early centuries, candidates for baptism were asked three questions: Do you believe in God the Father almighty? Do you believe in Christ Jesus, Son of God? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? During the fourth century, these questions came to be formed into a baptismal creed that expressed the faith taught by the apostles and their descendants. An early medieval legend, now recognized as false, claimed that the apostles themselves were the authors of what we call the Apostles' Creed, each disciple in turn adding one line to the text. But although not composed by the original twelve, this ancient statement of faith circulated throughout the churches for use at baptisms and has been so used in the rites of baptism for over a millennium and a half.[5] In an example of the Reformed pattern of composing hymns out of liturgical texts, David Gambrell composed a metrical version of the Apostles' Creed, "I Believe in God the Father," #481. Singing this succinct statement of classic Christian faith bonds current believers to the long history of those receiving life at the font.

From the fifth century comes a poetic Latin text titled by its opening words, "Te Deum Laudamus."[6] According to another false but charming legend, this hymn was spontaneously composed by Ambrose and Augustine as they emerged from the font in Milan at the Easter Vigil in 387 after Augustine's baptism. Over the centuries, the hymn was appointed for monumental occasions of communal thanksgiving, such that the term "Te Deum" became an abbreviated way to indicate epic praise to God. Versified in #4 as "Holy God, We Praise Your Name," the hymn joins our voices with those of angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, indeed, the whole church, singing to the triune "undivided God" who is "in essence only one."

A fascinating elaboration on the baptismal creed is "I Bind unto Myself Today," #6. The original text, found in an eleventh-century manuscript, was shaped into a hymn by Cecil Frances Alexander in 1889. This text carries the delightful legend that it was St. Patrick who composed the original prayer in the fifth century. In this prayer, believers don their identity as if it were a breastplate, armor protecting them from evil, as if the name of the triune God defends with divine strength all who

face danger. The second stanza of this hymn, like a creed, summarizes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The third stanza puts into Christian mouths an ancient pagan spell, in which the earth itself offered protection and peace; for Christians, this created universe of stars, sun, moon, lightning, wind, sea, and rocks is a sign of the majestic power of the Creator. The fourth stanza recalls a religious incantation, a repetitive spell in which the devotees call down upon themselves the qualities of God. The fifth stanza is a mantra on the name of Christ, and then with the sixth stanza, we repeat once again the bond between the believer and Father, Spirit, and Word. You may enjoy accessing on Wikipedia a rightly suppressed stanza that lists the dangers from which protection was sought, including "the spells of women, smiths, and wizards": I love it.

As we sing through the many Trinitarian hymns composed later in history for Protestant congregational singing, we discover texts that especially focus on a single biblical image which the author applies to all three persons of the Trinity. This practice is a helpful corrective to some Trinitarian talk which imagines God as a committee of three, each with specific and unique tasks. But theologians have taught that all of God creates, all of God saves, all of God inspires.[7] An example of a single image governing the full text is the eighteenth-century anonymous "Come, Thou Almighty King," #2. Composed for a people who lived in the British Empire under a monarchy, the hymn applies royal imagery to the Trinity. God is King and Lord. The three persons of the Trinity reign and rule in sovereign majesty. Even though many singers of this hymn now reside in a democracy, it is clear that the desire for a benevolent monarch remains a powerful archetype in human consciousness, and in this hymn, even a twenty-first-century assembly of the baptized can utilize this classic imagery in praise of the Trinity.

All of God creates, all of God saves,
all of God inspires.

From the nineteenth century comes "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" (#8). Composed by William Whiting for a student who was journeying across the sea, the stately hymn has rightly served the navies of both the United Kingdom and the United States. Many Americans remember it as accompanying the coffin of the navy veteran John F. Kennedy to his funeral in 1963. This hymn has gathered from the Bible its stories of God's mastery over water: God containing the waters of creation, Christ stilling the sea and walking on the water, the Spirit brooding over watery chaos and bringing to us peace. The whole Trinity is praised for water, by means of water. Even though many churches have only the tiniest amount of stale water in their small font, we sing here of these colossal biblical waters, and we praise the triune God for the life of water. It may be that this hymn will inspire some churches to enlarge their fonts.

During the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, the church witnessed an astonishing creativity in hymn texts composed by Christian authors. Perhaps in part the result of a resurgence of use of the Psalter (count the number of images for God in, for example, Psalm 18), perhaps in part thanks to a new respect for how metaphors express reality, the church has come to adopt bountiful poetic imagery when praising the Trinity. Some of these hymns have countered the largely male imagery of classic Christian praise with female images for the Divine. With "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth" (#7), Jean Janzen found inspiration in the mystical writings of the fourteenth-century anchorite Julian of Norwich. This woman, bearing a male name, developed in uniquely exquisite prose the medieval metaphor that Christ is our mother, feeding her children with her own body.[8] In composing a full hymn text, Janzen expanded the mother image to praise not only Christ but the entire Trinity. The motherly creator, the motherly food of life, the motherly nurturer of Christian growth: the whole triune God is like a mother. We stand grateful to Julian, the author of "And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well," for delivering to us God as mother, albeit that it took the church about five hundred years to appreciate and adopt her metaphor.

A minister in the United Church of Christ, Ruth Duck has given to the church many hymn texts that fill gaps in the church's collection of song. In her "Womb of Life and Source of Being" (#3), Duck celebrates especially imagery that roots in the female body and in stereotypically female associations. God is womb of life, our home, nurturing us at the table; God is enfleshed, bringing the faithful to second birth; God is the breath of Spirit, laboring with us for the birthing of a new world. The "one-in-three and three-in-one" is "Mother, Brother, Partner," the whole Trinity seen through a female lens.

In “Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” (#174), Ruth Duck has mined the biblical poetry of the Wisdom tradition to depict the Trinity as wisdom.[9] While biblical scholars debate the origins and trajectory of the image of a divine woman of wisdom, contemporary worship resources apply this figure to God in the fifth reading of the Great Vigil of Easter[10] and to Christ in the “O Antiphon” for December 17[11] and in stanza 2 of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (#88). In Duck’s hymn, Wisdom is applied mainly to Christ, yet in her third stanza, “Sister Wisdom” and “Spirit-guide” bring us to be “holy friends of God and earth.” The Trinity is there.

Some ancient Christian writings describe the life of Trinity as an interaction of loving mercy, a threesome of mutual vigor.[12] Thinking of the Trinity as a divine dance inspired the well-known Episcopal church of St. Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco to adorn the walls of its sanctuary with dancing saints, as if in praising God, we are joining in God’s eternal dance. The Presbyterian laywoman Mary Louise Bringle has seen in the imagery of the dance a welcome depiction of a lively “Three-in-One.” In the second stanza of “The Play of the Godhead” (#9), the wonders of nature point toward the mystery of the dancing Trinity, and in stanza 3, the people gathered into God’s dance of worship are a sign of the One-in-Three. Will it ever come to be that characteristically staid assemblies of the faithful could learn from those Shaker sectarians how to move in a gentle dance together at worship?

In “God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian” (#303), Episcopal priest Carl Daw has led singing assemblies into the Trinity through the Spirit, which is indeed how the church has understood the entry of the faithful into God.

Several hymn texts in *Glory to God* have gone beyond a single image for the Trinity and pile on images, one after another. In “God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian” (#303), Episcopal priest Carl Daw has led singing assemblies into the Trinity through the Spirit, which is indeed how the church has understood the entry of the faithful into God. Thus, the opening stanza addresses the Spirit as guide and guardian, flame and dove, breath and prophetic voice; in stanza 2, Christ is savior, sovereign, shepherd, teacher, healer, servant; in stanza 3, God is creator, fount of wisdom, womb of mercy. The fourth stanza calls the triune God “mysterious being, undivided and diverse.” This hymn is shaped especially for occasions focusing on the church’s ministry, but its rich text ought to find a place also on more standard days of prayer and petition.

In “God the Sculptor of the Mountains” (#5) by the Methodist minister John Thornburg, biblical narratives have been condensed into one image after another. God as creator is sculptor, jeweler, potter, womb of all creation. God is praised for the salvation of the Israelites, “the fount of all deliverance.” The God who provides food is seen as dresser of the vineyard and reaper of the harvest—thus as the source of the wine and bread of holy communion. God is in the infant of Bethlehem, the “resurrected truth.” Although this hymn does not explicitly name the Trinity, the biblical stories of God as creator, savior, and life-giver are brought into the present assembly, the triune God invoked now.

Ordained in both the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, prolific hymn writer Thomas Troeger composed “Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud” (#11), a remarkable compendium of biblical images in praise of the Trinity. In stanza 1 are thirteen images traditionally associated with God as Father; in stanza 2 are thirteen images associated with God as Son, as well as the I AM of Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58; and in stanza 3 are thirteen images associated with God as Spirit. Thus, the hymn has a total of forty images for God, that number itself being a biblical image for the space of faithfulness, the hours of fulfillment, the time of worship.

This songfest through *Glory to God* has featured fourteen of its hymns. However, many more can be seen as celebrating the Trinity and as drawing the people of God into the triune life. There are, for example, the five versions of the doxology (#605–609), which praise the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the Three-in-One, Almighty, Holy One, the triune God, “Creator, Word, and Spirit,” and for those who prefer the older language, “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” So, when will these songs and hymns be appointed for use? That there is a Lord’s Day given the title Trinity Sunday ought not suggest attention to the triune God only on that day. Indeed, the wealth of biblical texts appointed by the Revised Common Lectionary provide numerous Sundays on which the

imagery proclaimed in the scriptural readings can be seen as a hidden exultation of the Trinity.

But what happens if you are hoarse and can't sing? The classic liturgical order of service on the Lord's Day as laid out in the *Book of Common Worship* will set you solidly into the Trinity. The many appointed times for prayer provide occasion for petitions that refer to the Trinity. The Kyrie Eleison can be heard as petitioning the Trinity: the first "Lord" as the customary circumlocution for the name of God; "Christ" as the second person of the Trinity; and the final "Lord," as in the Nicene Creed, addressing the Holy Spirit. That the lectionary appoints three readings reminds us of the triune complexity in our one God: a single reading may be straightforward, but three is always an adventure into grace. The Great Thanksgiving prayed at the table of the Eucharist is Trinitarian: according to the standard outline, we first praise God for creation of the earth and preservation of the people; next we remember the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and lastly we invoke the Spirit on the meal and the world.[13] Some of the options for this Great Thanksgiving are filled with images of the Trinity. One succinct gem is #16, which names God as Creator of the cosmos, Breath of heaven, Lover of us all; Rising Sun, Soaring Spirit, Radiant Lord; Fount of mercy, Fire of justice, dearest Friend.[14] What's not to use in this profound Trinitarian thanksgiving? Perhaps some presiders will intone such prayers, thus supporting these metaphors with music. One of the options for the closing blessing is Numbers 6:24–26, in which Martin Luther recognized the Trinity, blessing us, being for us divine grace, and giving us peace.[15]

Each Lord's Day the assembly may join with centuries of Christians to chant a simple form of the "Holy, Holy, Holy" as it gathers at the table.

Each Lord's Day the assembly may join with centuries of Christians to chant a simple form of the "Holy, Holy, Holy" as it gathers at the table. In the classic Sanctus song, as the angels rejoice around the throne of God, Christians see on that throne the triune God; then we realize that the throne is on the table before us; and we witness Christ entering Jerusalem on his journey to the cross. In our time, newly marked by ecological awareness, we are delighted to encounter in the ancient song that not only heaven, but also the earth is filled with God's glory. *Glory to God* includes fourteen musical renditions of this Trinitarian praise. My favorite, and the one I trust will be sung at my funeral, is #562, from Franz Schubert's German Mass. Its exquisite simplicity has enough gravitas to accompany my casket to the grave.

There is a long tradition of Orthodox icons based on the narrative in Genesis 18 in which three mysterious beings bless Abraham at a meal. The most renowned of these icons, known as *The Holy Trinity*, is the mystical depiction by Andrei Rublev, in which the entire scene of the three at table shines with a numinous transcendence. Yet there are also more immanent depictions of Genesis 18 that are titled *The Hospitality of Abraham*.[16] In my favorite of these, the three angels, each carrying a scroll of the word, wear brightly colored robes; the table boasts an orange striped tablecloth; a roll of bread and a carrot are at each place; and on the table are a cruet of wine and a platter with meat. Both Abraham and Sarah are serving their guests, and both have their hands covered in humility. A vase of greenery adorns the stairway to their house, and all are shaded by the great oak of Mamre.

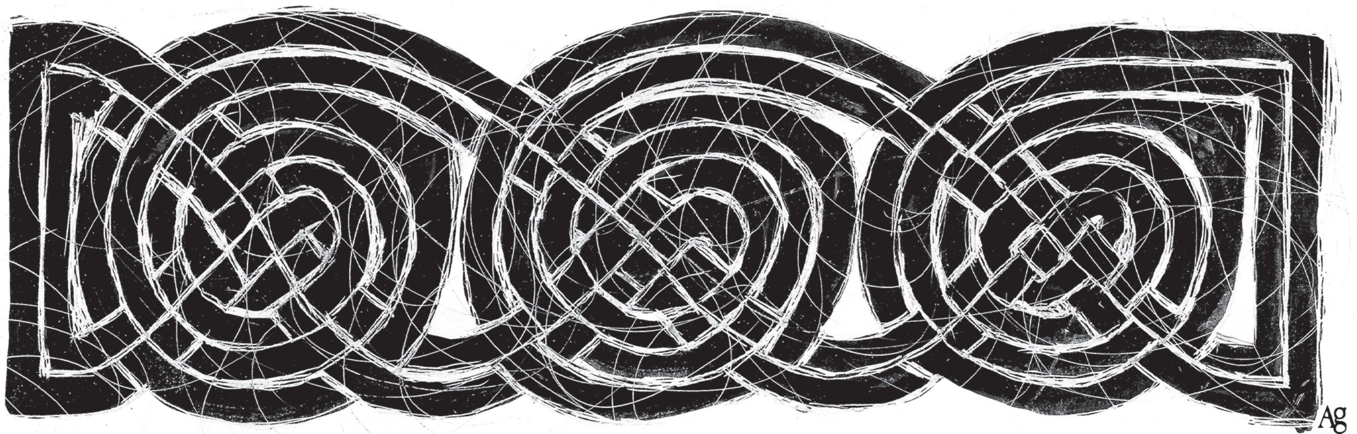
The Rublev icon reminds me of medieval monastic chant: resonant simplicity, transformative singularity at our depths. But those detailed depictions of the hallowed meal titled *The Hospitality of Abraham* make me think of hymns that are filled with images. God visits us in Trinitarian grace, and in our worship we receive the angelic word and set out our bread and wine. The Trinity is here, as host and guest. Winged beings are enjoying carrots. We are not yet transported into heavenly realms; rather, here we are, close to our homes, serving one another the food of grace, imagining, as did the author of Hebrews 13, that in showing hospitality to strangers we might, along with Sarah and Abraham, be entertaining angels.

Much has been made in our time of the freedom granted to each assembly to shape its own worship on Sunday. Yet before, during, and after such decisions, Christians of the past and believers outside of the circle of our experience have bequeathed to us a treasure chest filled with praise and petition to God, and we are impoverished if we leave the lid of this chest closed. *Glory to God* is filled with jewels to adorn our worship. Let us welcome these hymns into our assemblies, in hopes that as we sing and

sing and sing, we will be welcomed more fully into the triune God.

Notes

1. Carmen Renee Berry, *The Unauthorized Guide to Choosing a Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 56–60, 216.
2. *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).
3. See Lowell K. Handy, ed., *Psalm 29 through Time and Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).
4. *Glory to God*, 969, 974. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 212, 353.
5. For the 1988 ecumenical translation of the Apostles' Creed, see *Book of Common Worship*, 410.
6. Ibid., 1081–82.
7. For a succinct discussion of this issue, see Ruth C. Duck and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God: The Trinity in Christian Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 28–29.
8. See Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chapters 52, 58–60.
9. For a discussion of Sophia, see Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 98–113.
10. *Book of Common Worship*, 295–296.
11. Ibid., 165.
12. On perichoresis, see Duck and Wilson-Kastner, *Praising God*, 35–36.
13. *Book of Common Worship*, 10.
14. Ibid, 140–41.
15. Ibid, 30.
16. Both the Rublev icon of *The Holy Trinity* and various icons of *The Hospitality of Abraham* are readily available online.



Amy E. Gray

Worship in Purple: A Womanist Exploration of the Trinity in Worship

Khalia J. Williams

Womanist Trinitarian worship is a dance between God and humanity that is sacred, liberating, transforming, and beautiful. Womanist worship is born out of concern with the ways African American women understand and experience God in worship through their bodies and lived experiences. This worship calls for engagement with the triune God that focuses on what God is doing in the midst of God's people. It is an illustration of the dynamic movement of God in worship and life, and brings to light the bold love, grace, and healing available to all of God's creation. We will move through this womanist exploration of the Trinity in three parts: (1) God's intrinsic connection between secular and sacred experiences; (2) the power of Christ in the complex nature and necessity of community; and (3) the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in worship. As we journey through this movement, may you find the dance of God and humanity, through the lens of African American women, liberating, empowering, and inspiring for worship transformation.

God's Intrinsic Connection between Secular and Sacred Experiences

Womanist worship begins with the understanding that God meets us in every part of life. This is the reality of African American women in the Black church. The spirituality of these women does not separate between distinctions of secular and sacred, as every aspect of life is deemed sacred. When marginalized bodies fight for existence and survival every day, they come to know God even in the most mundane aspects of life and find glimpses of hope through those encounters. The worshiping bodies of African American women do not make a distinction between secular and sacred, because their faith is built on God, the Creator, who is present in all of life, secular and sacred; and God allows us to bring all of life with us into worship, thus connecting the secular and sacred of our lives. The intersection between African American women's humanity and their faith in God brings about a "creative and tensive holding of both sacred and secular, without separation or dilution."[1] The spirituality of African American women is the same wherever they function, whether it is in the institutional structures of the church or out in the world. Therefore, God invites us to bring our whole selves into worship in order to experience God in a freedom and creativity that is liberating. An inability to bring all of life into worship creates an inability for the full self-revelation of God in that community, and hinders the divine revelation of God through the bodies of marginalized persons in worship, particularly African American women.

God moves in and through the connection of secular and sacred. When worship connects our faith and lived experience, we come to know God as the God for all humanity, particularly for those on the margins—the God who is revealed in those considered the least of society in order to disrupt oppressive structures. We come to know God's liberating power firsthand.

African American women's realization of God's presence and activity in both secular and sacred allows worship to happen in all spaces. This means worship is not confined to a regulated weekly schedule and location; rather, we worship wherever we are compelled by God, even in and through the struggles of life. When the retired women gather around tea on the porch of an Atlanta home, God is there. When a neighborhood fills the community clubhouse as they sorrowfully mourn the death of a twenty-two-year-old resident who was shot by her own brother,[2] God is there. When women march in protest all across the country, God is there. When

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In worship, we are joined by our faith in Christ, recognizing Jesus as our model of faith living and as our great encourager. When we come together in worship, we come connected by Jesus Christ, as members of his united body.

the mothers of black men who have been shot by police come together to cry and to rally, God is there. When the single mother, struggling to make ends meet, sits alone in silence and isolation, God is there. When racist and misogynistic attempts to usurp her authority railroad the powerful, ambitious, first African American woman of so many accomplishments, God is there. God connects these experiences of life and faith in our worship and reveals to us the abundance of love, grace, and mercy that can only be found at this intersection. It is in this self-revelation that the community, particularly African American women, is able to witness the divine glory of being "completely me," created in the image of God.

The Power of Christ in the Complex Nature and Necessity of Community

Womanist Trinitarian worship is profoundly relational. God calls us into community with the triune God, and one another, as the body of Christ. In worship, we are joined by our faith in Christ, recognizing Jesus as our model of faith living and as our great encourager. When we come together in worship, we come connected by Jesus Christ, as members of his united body. Jesus Christ, the one who overcomes "transgressions against divine and social justice in the world,"[3] brings us courage and hope, and in worship that collective courage and hope is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This relational aspect of womanist worship, and our connection through Christ for our moral responsibility and accountability for one another's lives, is what makes us whole.

This interconnection through Christ is not without its complexities in the Black church. Black female bodies in worship have been the most marginalized in the Black church and have endured insurmountable levels of oppression and violence in this country. As a result, African American women wrestle with the complexities of being in relationship with the African American community based on the history of acceptance and rejection of them as human beings. This has been a particular struggle in Black church worship. However, in spite of the historic and present complexities of being in community, many African American women have chosen to remain connected to and invested in the Black church. Through this complexity, God's reconciling power is still very present through Christ in worshiping communities.

Community has always been a central theme for African American worship. Since the secret meetings of African slaves in North America, community has been integral to African American life and worship. What was once called "stealing the meeting,"[4] due to the secretive nature of worship, was essential to the spiritual survival of individuals to come together as a community sharing in the same religious experience. Pentecostal scholar Iain MacRobert writes:

> The primal religious beliefs brought from Africa with the diaspora included a powerful sense of the importance of community in establishing and maintaining both the personhood of individuals and an experiential relationship with the spirit world of ancestors and divinities. They inhabited a world in which the sacred and profane were integrated and the ability to tap into the *force vitale* by means of divination and spirit possession was considered essential to the welfare of the community, the wholeness of the individual, and the success of any major undertaking in the material world.[5]

In a communal experience, individuals could release all of their sufferings, they could remind others of the trials during the past week and find solidarity, and they could feel a shared sense of belonging. For the Black church, worship was the opportunity to find corporate support and reconnect with the community. Albert Raboteau echoes this sentiment:

> Prayer, preaching, song, communal support, and especially "feeling the spirit" refreshed the slaves and consoled them in their times of distress. By imagining their lives in the context of a different future they gained hope in the present."[6]

What Raboteau describes here is a ritual experience in which the worshiper transcends social structures imposed by the dominant culture, thus generating hope-filled and alternative ways of relating to those of society at large. In the words of James Cone, worship is the

> eschatological invasion of God into the gathered community of victims, empowering them with the divine Spirit from on high to keep on keeping on even though the odds might appear to be against them.[7]

Worship participants find God in the togetherness—the community connected through Christ—and as a result are strengthened to transcend systems of oppression. Melva Costen describes it this way:

> When God calls the community to assemble for worship, all humanly contrived social distinctions and "isms" are to be transcended. All are equal in the sight of God, and all are equally loved by God. Therefore, the experience of a beloved community is central to worship. The extent to which the community togetherness happens depends on whether worshipers intentionally seek to transcend the things that divide us.[8]

This space of community does not only happen in worship. The sense of togetherness shows up in many places in the African American life. Thus, the womanist Trinitarian worship being described here reaches beyond particular worship moments and connects to the communal life of African American communities; it is a personal state of being fully invested in the wholeness of the entire community. This is rooted in a perception of kinship, where there is a concomitant valuing of each other, a common ground marked by trust, respect, and affection.[9]

In worship, the power of Christ in this complex nature of community also offers the transformative act of bringing marginalized persons out of obscurity and making them visible. This worship names those on the margins and restores them by moving the center of the liturgical paradigm within the community to the margins. This move shifts the power of liturgical leadership, language, and practice from those in positions of dominance to those on the margins. Through Christ, God calls African American women, and all who are marginalized, to the center of worship to be seen, heard, and to have their emotions understood and cared for.

An example of God making visible marginalized bodies in worship is in the practice of Holy Communion. In the ritual observance of the Communion liturgy, God offers us through Christ a continuous reminder that God desires to make marginalized, invisible, abused bodies visible. Through Holy Communion, whether observed weekly, monthly, or annually, we remember Christ's body; and in remembering Christ's body through the realities of our African American women's bodies, God makes the invisible visible. Even though we can never rewrite history, nor erase its scars, through the *critical remembering* in Communion, and by the grace of God, we can undo the chains of bondage that haunt us from history's events and move toward a future of hope. Thus, this eschatological occurrence of critical remembrance in Communion counters historic and present marginalization, and brings to the forefront the experiences of those who have been made invisible. This countering of oppression and reclaiming of the body in Communion happens when there is a strong realization of our interconnectedness as a community and an embrace of our oneness in Christ.

Even though we can never rewrite history, nor erase its scars, through the *critical remembering* in Communion, and by the grace of God, we can undo the chains of bondage that haunt us from history's events and move toward a future of hope.

Holy Communion brings us into communion with Christ in his divine life, and also brings us into communion with one another. We come to the table as a community of believers, living into our call to be the body of Christ made present in the world. Thus, as a community, we must recognize that we are connected, or rather interconnected, and we must truly see one another. In the recognition of our interconnectedness, we realize that our bodies are not independent of community, but we are interdependent and exist in relation to other bodies. Coming to Communion as real bodies, we all come with a history as either an oppressed or oppressing body, and the reality of the experiences of our

bodies are shaped by our interactions with other bodies. Our bodies are interconnected. This makes us vulnerable to one another.

When we celebrate the body of Christ in Holy Communion, remembering the totality of Christ's life experienced through his body and engaging in the critical remembrance of our own bodies, we realize that we are tied to one another. M. Shawn Copeland expresses this connection by stating,

> The body is the medium through which
> the person as essential freedom achieves
> and realizes selfhood through communion
> with other embodied selves.[10]

Realizing that we are tied to each other actualizes the very *koinonia* that Christ gifts us within the grace of Holy Communion. We encounter the risen Savior in our bodies and reclaim the bodies of the broken in community. Through this act, God is actively making the invisible, marginalized, and abused bodies visible. Christ's body incorporated into our body in the community of Holy Communion recovers the objectified African American women's bodies as sites of divine revelation. God is reclaiming these bodies through the body of Christ.

In the practice of Holy Communion, we become more deeply a part of the same ecclesial body, the body of Christ. When we realize that we are connected in community, embrace this oneness through our bodies, and begin to live into the fullness of the body of Christ, those who are marginalized and invisible in our communities become more visible. In the communion of the Lord's Table, through our relations with God through Christ's body and our relations with others, we are made visible. In the remembrance of Christ's gracious gift and sacrifice of his own body, through the glory of his resurrection and our future hope at the Table of Communion, we are made visible. In the critical remembrance of our bodies, real bodies, and the historical pain and suffering that has been endured and inflicted, we are made visible. We are seen by each other. Our bodies that are marginalized and abused are made visible. At the Table of Communion, we are made visible, and through the gracious gift of Christ's body we are reclaimed as the creation of the divine, a creation that God looks upon and calls good.

In Holy Communion, Black women reclaim their bodies through communion with the divine body of Christ. They embrace their being made in the image of God, the *imago Dei,* and shatter all oppression and marginalization has done to distort this truth. These bodies learn to love themselves, and others, into an existence of wholeness through the precious body and blood of Christ. Copeland declares,

> At the table that Jesus prepares, *all* assemble:
> in his body we are made anew, a
> Community of faith—the living and the dead.
> In our presence, the Son of Man gathers
> up the remnants of our memories, the
> broken fragments of our histories, and
> judges, blesses, and transforms them. His
> Eucharistic banquet re-orders us, re-members
> us, restores us, and makes us one.[11]

At the Table of Communion, Christ calls us into community to be made visible to one another so he can restore us into the communal body that we profess to be, the Christian body. Let us gather at the Lord's Table in our real bodies—flaws and all—in order to reclaim the value of our bodies through the love and acceptance of all bodies in the grace, beauty, and power of the body of Christ.

Dynamic Presence of the Holy Spirit in African American Life and Worship

Finally, womanist Trinitarian worship deeply "loves the Spirit."[12] This is to say that engaging worship from the perspective of African American women's lived experiences must recognize the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in worship and in life. This presence of the Spirit brings about jubilation and celebration, sometimes evokes ecstatic bodily responses, and even rests gently in the midst of a worshiping community while holding and supporting them in lament. There are a variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit's presence is experienced and revealed within African American worship. For example, Costen describes shouting:

> Shouting is experienced when the Holy Spirit
> fills and empowers the worshipers.
> Shouting is one way that a person responds
> to the encounter of the and movement
> of the Holy Spirit in worship. The resulting
> physical involvement has been described
> as religious ecstasy, or uncontrollable

> physical movements involving one's whole person. The shouters may stand and dance and or jump about involuntarily, or they may remain seated and swing their arms and legs convulsively.[13]

In speaking about the Holy Spirit and African American Christian worship, Costen continues:

> The genius of black worship is its openness to the creative power of God that frees and enables people, regardless of denomination, to "turn themselves loose" and celebrate God's act in Jesus Christ.[14]

This creative power of God that Costen references here is the Holy Spirit. Karen Baker-Fletcher extends this understanding of the Holy Spirit as she explores womanist perspective on the Trinity. She writes,

> The Holy Spirit is the power of divine creativity and love, empowering and encouraging divine community into creativity and love.[15]

The Holy Spirit in worship is the power of God revealed in communal creativity and love. The Holy Spirit's presence in worship is creative, transformative, and fosters community. As the Holy Spirit works through the people's work, transformation of time, worshipers, and the world are made possible.[16]

In worship, African American women's lived experiences and physical bodies engage with the Holy Spirit and are redeemed and transformed. In the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the fullness of their brokenness, there is healing. This is possible because the Spirit, the power of life, is omnipresent, intimately related to the world and the many bodies in it, in and beyond time.[17] Because of this intimate relation between the Holy Spirit and the world, there is spiritual empowerment and an incommunicable experience of peace and comfort through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also a source of survival and triumph for marginalized bodies in worship; it is a healing Spirit. Baker-Fletcher describes it in this way:

> The sanctifying grace of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, heals wounds inflicted by evil actions and perfects the love of followers of the Word/Wisdom of God to make them whole.[18]

The dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in worship is also a liberating presence. The Spirit brings strength not only to the worshiping community, but to each individual. Even through struggles, the Holy Spirit gifts the worshiper with a real and present spiritual liberation, one that calls some to social action, others to ministerial leadership, and some to give encouraging words to the community. African American women and all those on the margins can experience themselves as beloved in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this experience, African American women are blessed in their brokenness and given to the world to impact and transform this present world into the kingdom of God.

African American women carry with them the realities of their embodied experiences into worship, while at the same time the meaning they make of their worship, the ways in which they understand the triune God's presence and activity, is a part of our lived experiences. This presence invites us into divine community through Christ with a transforming and liberating power. Womanist Trinitarian worship invites us to envision worship that is not confined to static ritual practices and spaces, and to respond to God's presence and call through worshipfully walking in justice, empowered by God's Holy Spirit. In doing so, those who are marginalized become visible, and African American women (and all who are marginalized) may experience the fullness of God in the fullness of their humanity. May our dance of faith and freedom continuously live in our worship.

Notes

1. M. Shawn Copeland, "Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse," in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader,* eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 107.
2. www.wctv.tv/content/news/Adel-police-accuse-teenager-of-shooting-killing-pregnant-half-sister-384116241.html.
3. Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 19.

4. Sadiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.
5. Iain MacRobert, "The Black Roots of Pentecostalism," in *Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion*, ed. Larry G. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 191. Also see Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Bassingstoke, Eng.: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1988).
6. Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion and the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 218.
7. James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 24.
8. Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 118.
9. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 68.
10. M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 24.
11. Ibid., 128.
12. Alice Walker's third point in her definition of womanist, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1983), xi–xii.
13. Costen, 48.
14. Ibid., 65.
15. Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 161.
16. Costen, 127–128.
17. Karen Baker-Fletcher, "More than Suffering: The Healing and Resurrecting Spirit of God," in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 155.
18. Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 161.

Amy E. Gray

Prayer in Jesus' Name

Jihyun Oh

> Q. 178. What is prayer?
> A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.
> —Westminster Larger Catechism

"Why is the pastor not praying in Jesus' name? Doesn't this American pastor know how important that is?" I was in Sunday worship with a first-generation Korean American who asked this question and expressed shock at what was viewed as a lack of theological and biblical grounding shown by the pastor in question.

At the time, I was working as a chaplain in an urban, safety-net hospital, an ecumenical and interfaith setting in which I often prayed without uttering Jesus' name. Viewed through the lens of that ministry setting, it didn't seem odd for someone to pray in the most open and inclusive way possible. I also encountered many patients and family members who would invoke the name of Jesus and repeat it over and over again like a mantra and saying, "There is power in the name of Jesus." I had been wrestling with an implied theology that the spoken name, the word itself, had some magical power, and found myself resisting prayer in Jesus' name if it somehow meant that "in Jesus' name" was the equivalent of "abracadabra" or "open sesame."

Since then, I have noticed more and more people, even in Christian settings, even Christian worship services, praying and simply ending with "Amen," and have wondered why.

Perhaps it is because it feels so repetitive to keep saying "In Jesus' name we pray . . ." when there are so many prayers in worship. Perhaps it is because some believe this is a way to be more inclusive. Perhaps it is because there are those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ who use Jesus as a bludgeon of judgment toward others, and not uttering the name of Jesus is a way of putting distance between us and those who use Christ to judge others. Perhaps it is because some are effectively Unitarian and don't see why we need to keep talking about Jesus instead of just talking about God. Whatever the reasons, it seems prayer in Jesus' name is being replaced by a short silence before the "Amen."

So why do we pray in Jesus' name?

Prayer is an invitation to conversation in relationship with God. In prayer, we are invited to be in relationship with a God who desires to be in covenant relationship with us. As we give thanks in prayer, we are called to bring God's promises to mind and to remember God's faithfulness throughout history and in our own lives. As we lift up our fears, our anxieties, our hopes for ourselves, our loved ones, and the world, and even the things for which we have no words when words will not come, we are called to trust in God's good will for us and for God's beloved world. As we confess our sin, we are called to speak the truth about ourselves, and to name the vicious cycles that harm us and the broken systems in which we live and often participate. As we speak, we are also invited to listen for God's words to us. If worship centers us and grounds us in God's presence, acknowledges God as sovereign, and reminds us that we are not God and not fully in control of the world or ourselves, then prayer, in which we truthfully name our limitations, hopes, gratitude, and trust in God to make a difference, both earthly and otherwise, is both a gift from God and an act of worship.

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When we pray, then, we receive the gift of relationship and conversation from God and we worship God. As Christians, we receive the gift from a particular God and worship this particular God, the one who was revealed in Jesus Christ through what he did and underwent. We are not praying to the "Universe" nor to whatever gods may be out there listening (or not), but to the God who became incarnate, knows what it is to be human, and acted in love and justice: the one who touched lepers and forgave those outside the bounds of society, the one who ate with the "dirty" and challenged the institutional religious leaders, the one who welcomed children and advocated for those living on the margins of society. The life and ministry of Jesus revealed the loving and just character of God and the care of this God for individual persons.

Praying in the name of the one who knew and loved particular people means we speak with and listen for this God, the one we know and come to know in Jesus Christ. It is possible to lift our own cares and concerns and the cares and concerns of our loved ones, because the stories of Jesus tell us that nobody is too small or too insignificant for God to know, love, and bring into wholeness. It is in Jesus' name that we can pray for an ailing parent, a struggling friend, a grieving child, or a broken relationship. It is in Christ Jesus that we come to know that God both knows and cares about us and our concerns in our tiny corners of the world.

At the same time, if the very personal encounters of Christ Jesus reveal that the particular God to whom we pray cares for us deeply as individuals, Jesus' own cosmic statements about himself and about who God is, as well as his death and resurrection, reveal that this particular God's love, justice, and power have cosmic scope. Jesus' claims to be the "light of the world" (John 8:12) and not just the light of Jerusalem or even Judea, "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and his promise to be with the disciples to the ends of the world and to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20) all reveal that God is concerned with God's creation across space and time. Ultimately, this concern and cosmic scope was revealed in Jesus Christ as the one who loved the world unto death and the one whose death tore open the temple curtain dividing God and humanity and dividing people from one another, even those who are dead from the living (Matt. 27:51–53). As the one who, after his death, "descended into hell . . . and rose again from the dead," Christ Jesus revealed the will and power of God for redemption and reconciliation across space and time.

Praying in the name of the one who loved unto death the world beyond his immediate scope and earthly sphere invites us to enlarge our sphere of concern beyond ourselves and the cares and concerns of our loved ones to a world groaning for redemption and reconciliation. We are invited to intercede for complete strangers and those we perceive as "other." We are invited to intercede for those in the grips of powers and principalities beyond their and our control. We are invited to intercede for the safety and well-being of the world in the midst of powerful natural disasters. It is in Jesus' name that we can lift up seemingly intractable and impossible situations in the world around us. Praying in the name of the one who was raised from the dead means we trust that God can indeed redeem situations and reconcile relationships that look impossible to us.

When we pray for these situations around the world and say "In the name of Jesus Christ, may it be so" instead of simply saying "May it be so," we remind ourselves that we are not merely speaking our desires that stem from our righteousness and goodness and our ability to see the wrongs and the brokenness of the world.

When we pray for these situations around the world and say "In the name of Jesus Christ, may it be so" instead of simply saying "May it be so," we remind ourselves that we are not merely speaking our desires that stem from our righteousness and goodness and our ability to see the wrongs and the brokenness of the world. In Jesus Christ, we remind ourselves that we are praying God's righteous and good desire for justice and wholeness in the world. Saying "In the name of Jesus Christ, may it be so" instead of saying "May it be so" is also an acknowledgement that it is not our words and our power that bring forth this future and the desires we name in our prayers, but rather God's word and power. Although popular culture/religion invites us to speak things into the universe, to speak things into

reality, praying in Jesus' name acknowledges that it is the Word of the Creator God who spoke creation into being that is performative and not ours.

Indeed, it is only in light of God's revelation in Christ Jesus that we can see the brokenness of our relationships and our own need for wholeness, see the ways we participate in or are complicit in the wrongs of the world, see the ways in which we are still not free, and know how far we are from God's desire for God's creation and for us. Praying in the name of the suffering servant invites us into humility and compassion even as we pray for God's justice to be done on earth.

When we pray in Jesus' name that the injustice of an -ism be dismantled, our prayer is a recognition both that Christ Jesus broke dividing walls (Eph. 2:14) and that all people, regardless of how they are embodied, have been created, loved, and redeemed by God, and called to conform to the image of God borne fully by Christ Jesus. For those of us who are beneficiaries, and even complicit in unjust structures, in Jesus Christ we see that God's vision for a world of justice and love for all people looks different than the one we benefit from, and are called to pray and to work with God toward that vision. For those of us who are oppressed by unjust structures, in Jesus Christ we see that God's desire for us is to live abundantly into our identity as loved and redeemed children of God. Praying in Jesus' name calls us to imagine the kingdom of heaven that both John the Baptist and Jesus declared was near (Matt. 3:1–2, 4:17), and to live out our citizenship courageously in conformity to the cruciform life of Christ Jesus.

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In that sense, praying in Jesus' name can also be an expression of our openness and desire to be aligned with God's reign, with God's vision and desire for true justice and reconciliation in the world as it was revealed in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. To pray in Jesus' name, whether in words, song, action, or silence, is perhaps also to offer ourselves in service to Christ Jesus in alignment with God's reign—to enact justice and love as Christ enacted justice and love.[1] To pray in the name of the redeemer God is to imagine the possibility of a future where formation in Christ-likeness is possible, because our futures as redeemed people are open and free, unbound from and not defined by the evil we have done nor the horrible things that have happened to us.[2] As we continue to listen for and speak with God in prayer, as we continue to seek God's will, we seek to be formed in Christ's likeness, to live cruciform lives.

Just as we, as individuals, are not defined by the worst things we have done or the horrible things that have happened to us, neither are communities and systems limited by their sin or the horrible things they have undergone. To seek God's desire and vision for the world in Jesus' name means proclaiming confidently that while the kingdom of heaven has not fully been realized, we believe that it has begun in Jesus Christ and will be fully revealed in time. We proclaim that the redemption of all of creation is not only possible, but will be fully realized in the one who is to come again. We proclaim our hope in the future that is coming, because we know the shape of the future that is being birthed in the one who is the resurrection and the life. We pray in that hope trusting that our prayers are not in vain.

There is power in his name, not as a word but as a sign.

We pray trusting in the power of the God who was most fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That power is, in ways that our human (and post-Enlightenment) minds don't fully understand, in the name of Jesus; the patients I encountered were right. That power, however, is not in the name *per se*, not in the word itself. It is mystery. Human knowledge and logic are defied (1 Cor. 1:18–31), but it is not magic. As we pray in the name of Jesus, we remember and evoke the narrative of his life and ministry, his death and resurrection, his incarnation and ascension, his birth and return, his presence before time and at the end. In that remembrance and evocation, as with the remembrance in communion, time and space expands and Christ Jesus is present with us. There

is power in his name, not as a word but as a sign. There is power in the name of Jesus as the living and creative Word of God (John 1). There is also power in calling upon the name of the one who intercedes and mediates on our behalf (Rom. 8:34, 1 Tim 2:5–6) in spite of who we are and because of who we are. In ways we don't understand, we are relying on, trusting in, and even accessing that power when we pray in Jesus' name.

At the same time, the power we are accessing is not ours and not ours to control. We pray, not trying to bend the world to our will, but in Jesus' name, in the pattern of Jesus in obedience to God. Praying in Jesus' name means not controlling the outcome, but saying "not my will, but yours be done."

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One of the most enduring memories of my time as a chaplain is time shared with a patient who was wrestling with the genetic legacy of his family and seeking meaning for his life and hope for his family in the midst of that wrestling. This forty-something Catholic man, "John," was on the way home after burying a brother when he got sick on the road and came to the hospital to be treated. He called initially to ask about communion. It was the weekend and it would be hard to get in touch with the parish priest, I said as I offered him communion, wondering if he would accept it from me, a Protestant woman pastor. He accepted the offer, saying that he would let God figure it out.

That settled, our late evening conversation shifted. He knew that the same illness that took his brother's life and the life of every other male member of his family was going to take him soon, too. He worried about his young sons and what was in store for them. He reflected on being the last male of his generation left in his family. He shared the pain and acceptance that came with having known his end for decades. He got quiet and we ended that time with my promise to arrange for communion the next day.

In the morning, with a unit nurse as part of the community that shared the Table, we shared a dinner roll and grape juice from the hospital cafeteria, heard the words of Jesus, and prayed. We gave thanks for God's faithfulness and God's promises. We gave thanks for Christ's presence and his redeeming work. We gave thanks for Christ's Table and the simple meal we shared. We prayed for the rest of his journey. We prayed for his family, especially his sons. We prayed for God's redemption of this horrible thing that had befallen his family, including him. And we prayed that somehow, in ways that only God knew, God's wholeness would come to him and to all those who needed it that day. We prayed in Jesus' name.

There, near the end of his days, John and I and even the unit nurse were bound together as we prayed in Jesus' name. Three strangers came together in worship. We offered a prayer, an act of worship, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We remembered our identities as God's beloved children, not just patient, chaplain, and nurse, and parted bound together as siblings in Christ Jesus.

When I checked later, John had checked himself out of the hospital against medical advice. I imagine he had gotten back on the road to his family. I imagine and hope that the shared meal and prayer strengthened him for the journey, both physical and spiritual.

As we give thanks, as we ask for things to change in our lives and in the lives of loved ones, as we ask for things to change in the life of our communities and the life of the world, as we ask for us to be strengthened and equipped for the mission and ministry of Christ in the world, as we ask for ourselves to be conformed to the likeness of Christ as his disciples, there is a sense in which we are binding ourselves to one another in Christian community as we pray in community and speak promises and hopes to one another. In praying in Jesus' name, we both bind ourselves to one another in Christ Jesus and bind ourselves to God.[3]

And we listen. Praying in the name of the unexpected, incarnate Messiah reminds us that God has always been in the business of doing new things and calling God's people into new ways of being and doing God's mission in the world. As we pray, we listen for God's new movement and calls for us.

May it be so, in Jesus' name.

Notes

1. Praying in Jesus' name, knowing that this is how our prayer will end, and knowing the God whose reign we seek to be aligned with should also preclude us from praying for things that are in direct contradiction to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We pray for justice to be done; we don't pray for our enemies to die horrible deaths or to suffer in the fiery pits of Sheol forever.
2. David Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 61. Kelsey writes that redemption, understood in light of Jesus Christ, brings about freedom from our identities being frozen in disorientation, and we are "opened to the future and freed" to grow.
3. Ibid., 35–38. Kelsey, in discussing God's promises of redemption and J. L. Austin's idea of "perfomative utterance" as that which is said and therefore makes a change in the world, notes that one aspect of a performative utterance is the binding of the promise-maker to both person or persons to whom the promise is made and to a project. Kelsey writes that God's performative utterance is "Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching and his person" and the promise is to all humankind that changes the world through the creation of an institution, a new creation, "that includes God and embraces all human beings." Communal prayer, as conversation with God and with others, could be seen as a performative utterance that is self-involving for all those who take part, so that they are bound to God and to one another in and through Christ Jesus, as well as to the participation in Christ's transformative mission and ministry in the world.

Amy E. Gray

Preaching Trinity Sunday

Kimberly L. Clayton

What Trinity Sunday needs is a heresy. In the fourth century, a sermon on the Trinity might have drawn an Easter-sized crowd. Gregory of Nyssa complained that "one could not go into the marketplace to exchange money, buy bread, or go to the baths without getting involved in a discussion about whether God the Son is equal to or less than God the Father." The Western Church spent the fifth and sixth centuries mounting a vigorous campaign against Arianism, a heresy denying Christ's divinity. The matter was so important that the endings to prayers were changed. Rather than ending with "through Jesus Christ our Lord," a more expansive ending was appended to that phrase: "who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." Sometime before 1000 the Sunday after Pentecost was being observed as a festival of the Holy Trinity, at least in Frankish Benedictine monasteries, and then in the rest of the Western Church as well. Trinity Sunday was the culmination of the "half-year of Christ" (Advent to Pentecost), a day of special devotion offering a full expression of the mystery of God.[1]

What a difference 1000 years make. By the twentieth century, the German Jesuit priest and theologian Karl Rahner could remark that even if the doctrine of the Trinity were shown to be false, Christian literature in the main would be virtually unchanged. The Trinity has become so detached from the actual religious life and practice of most people, he noted, that if news reports suddenly announced that a fourth person of the Trinity had been discovered, it would cause little stir among us.[2] Rather than the concluding, culminating Sunday of the grand sweep from Advent through Pentecost, Trinity Sunday in the twenty-first century finds preachers exhausted by a long Easter season and the daunting task of invoking the Spirit of Pentecost with nothing more up their clerical sleeves than ribbons in red and orange or origami doves strung from the ceiling blown about by floor fans. By Trinity Sunday, we have little energy to preach a sermon explaining what seems to most in our congregations an arcane and abstract doctrine. The mysterious inner life of the triune God seems a theoretical luxury in a world laid bare from violent division and desperate need.

In her article "Preaching the Trinity," Sarah Hinlicky Wilson writes, "The common mistake is to think the most interesting or important question is: 'How can three be one?'" But the Trinity is not a math problem or a philosophical puzzle to be solved, she cautions, proposing instead: "The real question of Trinity Sunday is, 'Who do you say that God is?'"[3] An improvement, perhaps, but that question, too, keeps the matter within God's self. If preaching on Trinity Sunday is to have greater impact on our life together, disciples will benefit from a sermon exploring the question, How does God's triune life model faithful relationships for us—before God, within the church, and toward others in all creation?

Matthew 28:16–20 offers opportunity for exploring this question on Trinity Sunday, but perhaps not in the way the text is often used. Admittedly, the reading from the end of the Gospel of Matthew sounds as stirring and confident as that favorite Trinity hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" It offers explicit Trinitarian language—and this from the lips of the risen and soon-to-be-ascended Lord Jesus himself. This text is backed by "all authority in heaven and on earth" (surely given to Jesus by God the Father, for who else would have such authority to bestow?). By the text's end, we can feel the Spirit's

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Perhaps the “heresy” we propound in this text for Trinity Sunday swings between these two extremes: interpreting the end of Matthew’s Gospel as Jesus’ triumphant send-off to a church ready to take over the world, or simply using this text’s explicit Trinitarian phrase to lecture the faithful on a doctrine far removed from their experience and practice of discipleship.

first breezes brush our cheeks, the early embers of holy fire warm our hearts as Jesus promises to be with us “always, to the end of the age.” Then come the church’s marching orders. Backed by the authority of our triune God, we are sent out to “all nations.” The resurrected Christ implicates us in the “all-ness” of his authority: “Go!” he commands. “Make disciples of *all* nations, baptize them, teach them to obey *all* I have commanded you.” Our “all” is bounded by the greater authority of his “all” in heaven and on earth. Matthew’s Gospel ends and our discipleship begins with this culminating, commanding text assigned to this culminating, commanding Trinity Sunday. What a grand, triumphant text to end this grand, triumphant sweep from Advent to Pentecost!

Indeed, the history of Christian mission has found its confidence in this very passage—its authoritative call to proclaim the triune God, evangelizing people in every land with the gospel of Christ. The results have been a messy mix of triumph and tragedy. Too often conversion to the Christian faith has been accompanied by the colonialization of people, land, and resources. Though we like to think of ourselves as living now in a postcolonial age, a time when we are more “culturally competent” and have made impressive strides in interfaith cooperation and understanding, this text still becomes an occasion for unbridled Christian conquest. A recent search of sermon titles on this text found these examples: “The Greatness of the Great Commission”; “The Church’s Marching Orders”; “Know Jesus and Make Him Known”; “Get in the Game: Becoming a Disciple-Maker”; and, simply, “Launch!” In my Presbyterian tradition, we are decidedly uncomfortable with such bold evangelism, so we are quite content to read Matthew 28:16–20, then veer away from the text itself, preaching instead an imponderable sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity. We attempt to explain in eighteen minutes a theological concept on which Augustine wrote fifteen volumes!

Perhaps the “heresy” we propound in this text for Trinity Sunday swings between these two extremes: interpreting the end of Matthew’s Gospel as Jesus’ triumphant send-off to a church ready to take over the world, or simply using this text’s explicit Trinitarian phrase to lecture the faithful on a doctrine far removed from their experience and practice of discipleship.

Matthew 28:16–20 can be put to better use. It can be interpreted more faithfully, inviting us to consider on this Sunday how God’s triune life models for us faithful relationships: before God, within the church, and toward others.

To do so, our focal point in this text needs to shift. The usual focus for preaching centers on Matthew 28:18–20. But before the “all authority in heaven and on earth” pronouncement of verse 18, the passage begins at verse 16. This is where we, too, should begin, with the words “Now the eleven disciples . . .” “The eleven.” Just three days earlier they had been “the Twelve.” The writer of Luke/Acts will be in a hurry to restore these eleven back to “the Twelve” by replacing Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus. But Matthew is content to end his Gospel this way: “Now the eleven disciples . . .” The people called to meet the risen Jesus make up a broken community . . . missing the one who betrayed him, composed now of those who are left, and every one of them also denied him and ran away when the going got too tough.

What kind of God does this, chooses to be in relationship with those who are broken and unfaithful? The God whose very being is eternally rooted in relationship.

What kind of God does this, chooses to be in relationship with those who are broken and unfaithful? The God whose very being is eternally rooted in relationship. The God whose divine, unbroken communion and unity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reaches out to us in love, calling us back into communion again and again. Though we are human and therefore broken before God, the eternal One reaches out, sticks with us, and calls us back into relationship. In God's constant faithfulness to us, the triune God models how we, too, are to reach out to and stick with broken people and communities, initiating opportunities for communion again and again.

Verse 16 then continues: "Now the eleven went to Galilee to the mountain to which he had directed them." In all of his resurrected, authoritative glory, the risen Christ gathers his disciples, this small, broken community, not in Jerusalem, at the center of political and religious power. No, instead he calls them to an unnamed mountain in an out-of-the-way place—Galilee—where Jesus' ministry first began (4:12) and where, walking by the sea, he first called them to follow him (4:18). Galilee, with its share of foreigners (4:15)—Gentiles—in a place where Jewish and Roman cultures crossed and clashed. Divine moments often happen on mountaintops, and we can recite their names: Sinai, Horeb, Moriah, Tabor. Here no name is given, yet on this unidentified mountain at the margins of power, the risen Christ calls his disciples together. He entrusts so much to the very ones who failed him.

Where is the triune God to be found?
Over and over again,
God is found at the margins.

Where is the triune God to be found? Over and over again, God is found at the margins. In the swirling chaos, the Creator God speaks, bringing order, light, dry ground, and sea. Pharaoh can issue orders from his court, but the God of Israel speaks through two midwives who have nothing more than a birthing stool and a sense of pluck. Herod ensnares Magi while plotting death from the palace, but the Immanuel, "God-with-us," is born in a house out back. And the Magi know which king deserves their gifts. The Council at Jerusalem debates and decides who is in and who is out; meanwhile the Spirit sends Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch and Peter to baptize Gentiles against all the rules. The triune God goes out to the margins, modeling for us where we are also to be. The Spirit moves among those excluded, enslaved, threatened, and called unclean. God's Word is there turning settled structures upside down. Yet we in the church, entrusted with this Word, find it hard to go where God goes, to stand where God has taken a stand.

The next verse, 17, begins hopefully enough: "When they saw him, they worshiped him. . . ." But the semicolon forces the sentence to continue: "When they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted." It may even mean: "They all worshiped him but they all doubted, too." Note Matthew's candor here at the end of the Gospel. There is nothing to hide anymore.[4] Even this side of Easter, in the very presence of the risen Lord himself, we believe, we worship, and yes, we doubt. Maybe it is not him we doubt, but ourselves. This word for *doubt* is used only in Matthew in the whole of the New Testament. Matthew uses it twice: here, and back in chapter 14 after Peter sinks in the stormy waters. It means something like "hesitation in the face of a challenge," "being of two minds," or "standing in two places."

We worship, we doubt, we hesitate. Is my faith strong enough? Do I have courage enough to wade into this street filled with protesters and potential violence? Into places where fear has taken hold? Are my feet steady enough to stand and speak a prophetic word against the powers of injustice? To break bread yet pray for unity? Can I stand at the open grave, beside this great wound in the earth and in human hearts, and yet speak words of hope and resurrection with conviction? Do I dare go into places that are "foreign" to me, among people whose stories are not my stories?

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, and when they saw him they worshiped and they doubted. Here at the Gospel's end, there is nothing to hide. We can be candid about who we are. A broken community resisting the margins where God is at work. We are hesitant when the times call for courage and wading in. We stand in two places just when the church needs to offer steady leadership and a bold stance amid the powers.

Here at the Gospel's end, there is nothing to hide. We can be candid about who we are. A broken community resisting the margins where God is at work.

Yet, the triune God loves the church and remains in relationship with us, as the head is joined to and directs the body. God is not finished with us and neither is the text. What happens next takes my breath away.

Because the risen Lord knows they are eleven and not twelve, because he knows they are broken and even smaller in number today than they were before, and because he sees in their faces love and worship, but also doubt with its accompanying fear, the risen and authoritative Lord does one more thing.

The NRSV does not help us to see what Jesus does at the beginning of verse 18: "And Jesus came and said to them . . ." That hardly does the Greek justice, and does even less justice to Jesus, to who he is in this moment with them and in every moment with us. The Common English Bible is a little better: "Jesus came near and spoke to them . . ." Clarence Jordan's *Cotton Patch Gospel* is better still: "Jesus came over to them and said . . ."

But there is a deeper tenderness and poignancy still in Matthew's word choice at this moment. Matthew chooses the word he has used so often in healing stories. It is the word that describes the reverent approach of people who were sick as they came near to Jesus.[5] Only this time, it is Jesus who reverently comes near to his beloved disciples. His wounds and their wounds touching each other.

Anne Lamott once wrote about a miracle she saw one day in the church she attends in California. It was a long time ago when one of their newer members, Ken, was dying of AIDS, a time when there was little hope for him, unlike our time now. It was a time when people like Ken were blatantly excluded, cast out by prejudice and fear. Lamott wrote that they watched as it seemed that Ken was disintegrating before their very eyes. Shortly after Ken joined their church, his partner died of the disease. A few weeks later, Ken told the congregation that "Jesus had slid into the hole in his heart" that the loss of his partner, Brandon, had left, and Jesus "had been there ever since." A woman in the church named Ranola was jovial and devout and sang in the church choir, but she had always been standoffish toward Ken. She seemed confused by him—after all, the church of her upbringing had told her people like Ken were unworthy, and worse, an abomination. Maybe Ranola and some others were also afraid of Ken's disease.

About a year later, Ken missed a couple of Sundays coming to church. When he returned, he was even more emaciated and, Lamott said, his face more lopsided than it had been before. Still, during the prayers, Ken "talked joyously of his life and his decline, of grace and redemption, of how happy and safe he feels these days." When the congregation rose to sing "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," Ken couldn't stand, so he sat with the hymnal in his lap, singing. When they got to the part that asks, "Why should I feel discouraged? Why do the shadows fall?" Ranola's face began to melt and contort like Ken's own face. She left the choir and went to Ken's side and bent down to lift him up—"lifted up this white rag doll, this scarecrow. She held him next to her, draped over and against her like a child while they sang. . . . Then both Ken and Ranola began to cry. Tears were pouring down their faces, and their noses were running like rivers, but as she held him up, she suddenly lay her black weeping face against his feverish white one," all their tears mingling together.[6]

This God comes over to us reverently, understanding our wounds, our suffering, because the triune God also bears the wounds of human life.

The triune God reaches out to us in love. Is determined to be in communion with us because communion is at the heart of God's own being. This God comes over to us reverently, understanding our wounds, our suffering, because the triune God also bears the wounds of human life. God comes near enough to slip into the hole in our lives. Reverently lifting us up until our wounds, like our tears, mingle with God's—in this, God models for us how we are to live in relationship with people in this world. Even with those we fear or may not like.

The last scene of Matthew's Gospel hides nothing. It shows us fully who God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It shows us who and how we are to live fully before God, within the church, and toward others in the world.

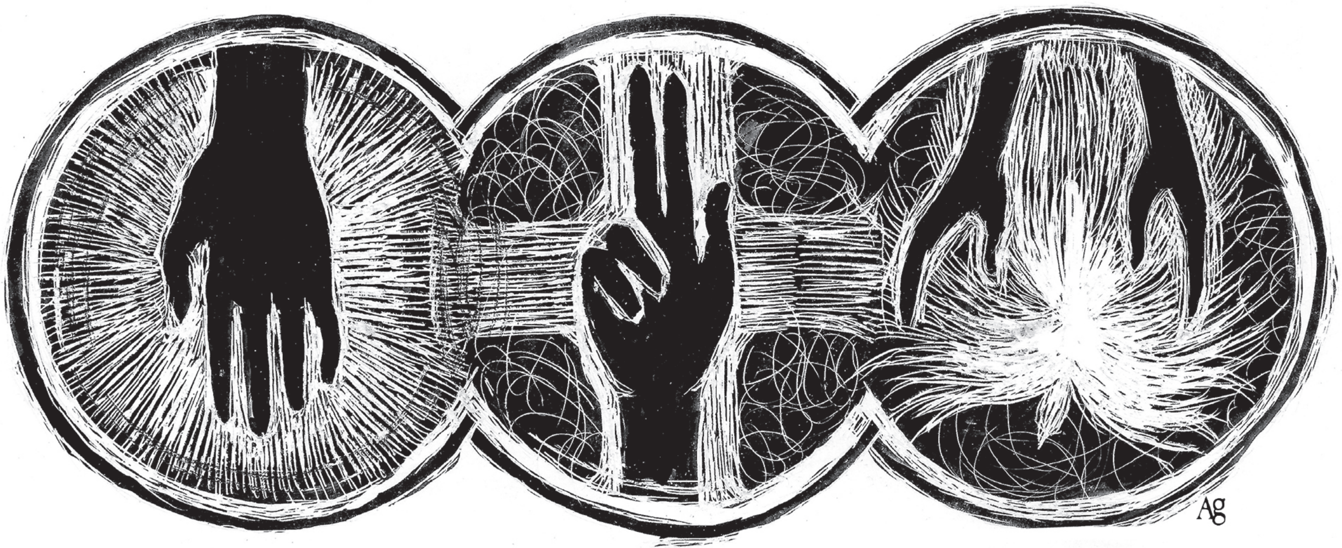
Perhaps when Jesus speaks in verses 18–20, it is not with the commanding, triumphant voice of thundering authority. And clearly he did not choose to reveal upon the mountain a lecture on the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, he speaks with a different kind of voice altogether, voiced with an authority the world does not recognize as strength and power at all.

"Go," he urges us on. "Offer good news to people who are laid bare by violence and justice, suffering, and death. Reach out to them, offering the living water of community among the baptized. Tell them the things I have tried to teach you so they have hope in another kingdom that is coming—what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness, how forgiving others sets us free, that making peace means loving your enemies, but it is precisely the meek who will inherit the earth. Go out beyond your comfort zone, to the margins, the very ends of the earth, because that's where you'll find me. You'll have to put aside your fears and prejudices and false divisions out there, but don't worry, I'll stay right beside you always, forever. Because I have made you in my image, communion and unity is what we are about. It is, in fact, who we most deeply are."

Considering the divisions and violence at work in the world, the twenty-first century, no less than the ones before us, calls for a sermon inviting us again into the relational communion of our triune God.

Notes

1. Frank C. Senn provides this historical overview in his article "Trinity Sunday, Trinitarian Worship and the Trinity in the Church's Life and Mission," *Lutheran Forum* 28, no. 2 (May 1994): 14.
2. Kieran Scott references Karl Rahner's 1970 book, *The Trinity*, in his article "Practicing the Trinity in the Local Church: The Symbol as Icon and Lure," *Review & Expositor* 99, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 429–430.
3. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Preaching the Trinity," *Lutheran Forum* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 4.
4. Stanley Hauerwas, *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 248.
5. Donald Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 346.
6. Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 63–66.



Amy E. Gray

John Calvin on the Holy Spirit and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Sue A. Rozeboom

Editor's Note: This article is adapted from a session presentation the author delivered at the Calvin Worship Symposium in 2016.

Yogi Berra, an accidental philosopher of the modern era, once mused: "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

Applying such wisdom to Christian worship, we are left with a question: What *is* the *main thing* to be kept the *main thing*? This is a *what* question, and therefore calls for a response that identifies, in fact, a *thing*. We are on solid, biblical-theological ground if we respond that the *main thing* is the redeeming work of God, being accomplished on a cosmic scale according to God's one covenant of grace.

As soon as we identify God's redeeming work accomplished according to the one covenant of grace, in our biblically informed imaginations, time and reality—and even matter—should eschatologically *collapse* in a single, singular *person*: the Son of God, the divine *Logos*, the Word that in the beginning was with God and in fact *was* God, the Word who became flesh and "tabernacled" among us and is now ascended on high, Jesus the Christ, Christ the King.

Alasdair Heron, a Scottish theologian, suggests Jesus' words "This is the new covenant in my blood" mean "something like, 'This is the covenant which I myself am, and which I shall seal by my own death.'"[1] Another Scottish theologian, James B. Torrance, puts it this way: The covenant is "concentrated in [Christ's] *person*."[2] Both of these theologians are channeling what John Calvin says about Christ and covenant and the Lord's Supper:

> [At the Lord's Table, we are] . . . bidden to take and eat the body which was once for all offered for our salvation, in order that when we see ourselves made partakers in it, we may assuredly conclude that the power of his life-giving death which be efficacious in us. Hence, Christ also calls the cup *the covenant* in his blood. For he in some measure renews, or rather continues, the covenant which he once for all ratified with his blood . . . whenever he proffers *that* sacred blood for us to taste.[3]

Regarding Christian worship, then, the *main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing*, and the main *thing* turns out to be not a *what* but a *who*, and the who is Jesus the Christ.

So, *how* is Christ kept the main thing?

Here, too, the answer is not first a thing, but a who—a pedagogical who, a teacher, who has a divinely instituted curriculum. This who is the Holy Spirit—that "inward teacher," as Calvin so often calls the Holy Spirit[4]—and the Holy Spirit's curriculum is Word and Sacrament. According to Calvin, the Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper "bear the same office." Here *office* is simply the easy cognate of the Latin word *officium*, which may be taken to mean "duty, role, or function." Calvin's point is that Word and sacraments *do* the same thing, *"namely,"* he says, *"to offer* and *set forth* Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace, [though] they avail and profit nothing unless received in faith."[5] For Calvin, then, Word and Sacrament are not two separate courses in the Holy Spirit's curriculum; they are one. So we might playfully refer to this curriculum as "Word-'n'-Sacrament." It must be noted, too, that for Calvin, *to offer* and *to set forth* do not mean simply "to show,"

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but "to give," as in "to proffer," or "to hand over." Something is happening, and the Spirit is making it happen. Something profound is truly *tran-spiring*.

So ultimately it is the Spirit who proffers Christ to us, but the Spirit uses Word-'n'-Sacrament as *means* to this end. Calvin puts it this way in one of his letters: "The Spirit's proper work of making us partakers of Christ is done *per sacramenta*, 'through the sacraments, as through instruments. . . . The Spirit is the author, the sacrament is the instrument used.'"[6] And if this seems outlandish to you, says Calvin, have a little humility and be in awe:

> When it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh penetrates to us so that it become our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how utterly foolish it is to wish to measure the Spirit's immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let *faith* conceive: that the Spirit is at work, truly uniting things separated in space.[7]

Faith is key, not only for assenting to the fact that what transpires at the Table is a mystery, but also for actually participating in the mystery of what transpires at the Table. By virtue of its divinely appointed "office," the Sacrament truly and objectively offers and sets forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace; but the Sacrament does nothing for us unless it is received in faith.[8] Let's allow Calvin to put this in his own pastorally passionate words again:

> That sacred partaking of [Christ's] flesh and blood, by which Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow, Christ testifies and seals to us in the Supper—not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises. And truly he offers and shows the reality there signified to all who sit at that spiritual banquet, although it is received with benefit by believers alone, who accept such great generosity with true faith and gratefulness of heart.[9]

And what is *faith* but *itself a gift* of the Holy Spirit? Earlier in his *Institutes*, in the middle of a cascade of Scripture references, Calvin cuts to the quick on this point: "Faith itself has no other source than the Spirit."[10] As he pursues a definition for faith, Calvin concludes we do well to "call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence to us, founded upon the truth of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."[11] Bringing this back to where we began with Calvin, it is clear that for Calvin, the Holy Spirit does this revealing and this sealing through, or by means of, "instruments," namely, the sacraments.

So let's make sure we have Calvin straight here. For Calvin, the Holy Spirit is at work not only in the offering and proffering of Christ through the sacrament, but in us, granting us faith, the very "thing"—the very *capacity* or *disposition* within us—that receives Christ in the receiving of the sacrament. This quotation from one of Calvin's letters helps to clarify:

> So that the Word may not beat your ears in vain, and that the sacraments may not strike your eyes in vain, the Spirit shows us that in them it is God speaking to us, softening the stubbornness of our heart, and composing it to that obedience which it owes the word of the Lord. Finally, the Spirit transmits those outward words and sacraments from our ears to our soul.[12]

Our communion with God in Christ during our cleansing in the baptismal font and our feasting at the Lord's Table simply would not be if not for the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit.

It seems we can do no other than to winsomely conclude that the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of sacraments are a conspiracy. Or, more to the point, a con-spiracy, *con-* meaning "with" and *-spiracy* being a derivative of *spirare*, meaning "to breathe," and being a cognate of *spiritus*, meaning "spirit," or—for us in this context—referring to *the* Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Our communion with God in Christ during our cleansing in the baptismal font and our feasting at the Lord's Table simply would

not be if not for the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. Our communion—our *common-union*—with God in Christ and *in Christ with one another* during our cleansing in the baptismal font and our feasting at the Lord's Table simply *would not be* if not for the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. Further, it is not *we* who accomplish this communion, but God. God accomplishes this profound communion *for us*, con-spiritorially—*with the Spirit*.

Interestingly, Calvin offers this bit of charismatic advice to the church: Until we—with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—"become intent upon the Spirit, Christ, so to speak, lies idle because we coldly contemplate him as outside ourselves—indeed, far from us." The reality, though, is that Christ, dwelling within us by the Spirit, is in fact closer to us than our very breath. *This*, it seems, is what Calvin would have us to know and to feel, since this is the core, the center, the "main thing" of God's benevolence toward us.

In his various writings on the Lord's Supper, Calvin is himself "intent upon the Spirit, constantly referring to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, just as we glimpsed above. Surprisingly, he rather fails to be "intent upon the Spirit" in his form for celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Calvin's liturgy is imbued with profound pastoral passion; in this sense it is arguably charismatic. But reference to the person of the Spirit is conspicuously absent.

Admittedly, Calvin uses the words *spiritual* and *spiritually* once each in his discussion of the meaning of the sacrament. But in comparing Calvin's use of *spiritual* and *spiritually* in the form for celebrating the Lord's Supper with his use of *spiritual* and *spiritually* in other of his writings on the Lord's Supper, it becomes clear that in the form for celebrating the sacrament, *spiritual* and *spiritually* refer not to the person of the Holy Spirit but to that which is spiritual, as in noncorporeal, nonphysical, intangible. But make no mistake. To say that something is *spiritual* is not to say that it is not real. It is real. It is simply not corporeal, or physical, or tangible. After all, to say that the person of the Holy Spirit is spiritual is not to confess that the Holy Spirit is not real.

So again, reference to the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit is absent in Calvin's *printed* form for celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps, though, when Calvin actually *ministered* at the Table on a Sunday morning, he was, in fact, more "intent upon the Holy Spirit." Perhaps.

In his order for worship on the Lord's Day, Calvin includes this instruction for the proclamation of the Word: before Scripture is read and then proclaimed, the minister shall offer a prayer in which the minister "*begs* God to grant the gift of the Holy Spirit, in order that God's Word may be faithfully expounded to the glory of his name and the edification of the Church, and be received with becoming submission and obedience."[13] This practice of praying for the Spirit to act in the reading and preaching, and the hearing and receiving of Scripture, is not a practice Calvin invented, but one he received from the church at worship before him.[14] Still, his emphasis is refreshing, in his day and for us today. The minister earnestly calls upon God for the work of the Holy Spirit. In offering this prayer, the minister and the worshiping community effectively profess their faith that nothing good can happen apart from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, not even in our encounter with the inspired Word of God.

The last sentence of Calvin's instruction for this prayer is key. This sentence reads: "The form [of this prayer] is *left to the discretion of the Minister*."[15] Calvin's instruction is *to pray*, but Calvin doesn't provide an *explicit* prayer. The minister, with pastoral wisdom, is to pray as Calvin describes. Regarding the intercessory prayers and the communion prayer, Calvin indicates similar freedom. His instructions indicate that a minister is to pray "in this manner" or "in this fashion."

Since Calvin is clearly not averse to trusting the discretion of ministers, one wonders just how binding is "in this manner" and "in this fashion"? Could it be that a minister, even Calvin himself, might have improvised the insertion of even just one well-appointed prepositional phrase that names the Holy Spirit?

In his printed form for celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Calvin provides a prayer to be offered immediately before the people receive the bread and the cup in communion. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in this printed prayer, and yet specific tributes to the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit are but a charismatic slip of the tongue away:

> Heavenly Father, full of all goodness and mercy, as our Lord Jesus Christ has not only offered His body and blood once on the Cross for the remission of our sins, but also

> desires to impart them to us *by the Holy Spirit* as our nourishment unto everlasting life, we *beg you* to grant us this grace *of the Holy Spirit*: that we may receive at His hands such a great gift and benefit with true sincerity of heart and with ardent zeal. In steadfast faith, *itself a gift to us from the Holy Spirit*—in steadfast faith may we receive His body and blood, yea Christ Himself entire, who, being true God and true man, is verily the holy bread of heaven which gives us life.[16]

The distribution of the bread and the cup is another moment where reference to the Holy Spirit may be worked in, charismatically, if you will. Calvin instructs that the people should come forward to receive the bread from the minister. In his form for celebrating the sacrament, Calvin does not provide words for the minister to speak when placing the bread in a communicant's hands. Other liturgies known to be familiar to Calvin do provide such words. The most striking of these is attributed to William Farel, Calvin's co-pastor in Geneva for a few years. Calvin is understood to have contributed to Farel's liturgy, so maybe Calvin himself is the one who prepared these pastorally and pnuematologically rich words to be spoken to each communicant in turn, when the bread was given to them:

> Jesus, the true Saviour of the world, who died for us and is seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, dwell in your hearts through His Holy Spirit, that you may be wholly alive in Him, through living faith and perfect love.[17]

It is time—time to take Calvin at his word and "become intent upon the Spirit"; time to take Calvin at his word with a playfully sincere adaptation of a communion prayer; time to take Calvin at his word and set before ourselves a parody—a serious, theologically dense, Holy Spirit effusive, rhapsodic parody[18]—of a Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. In this way, may we apprehend all the more the mysterious working of the person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit, without whom nothing good *transpires*, not in the Word, not in the sacrament, not in our hearts.

Sisters and brothers, beloved siblings in Christ
adopted by God in Christ through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit,
sealed in your adoption by the Holy Spirit with the life-giving waters of Baptism:
The Lord, by his Spirit, be with you.
And also with you.
In faith, with faith, by faith,
the good gift given you by the Spirit,
lift up your hearts, to where Christ is!
We lift them up to the Lord.
As one in the Spirit and inspired by the Spirit,
let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right for us to give thanks and praise.
Holy and right it is and our joyful, Spirit-inspired duty
to give you thanks at all times and in all places,
Almighty and everlasting God!
In the beginning, when your Spirit swept over the face of the waters,
you created the heavens with all its hosts and the earth with all its plenty.
You breathed into us *ruach*, spirit, the breath of life,
and you have preserved us and all creation
by your providential care, the work of your Spirit.[19]
You have shown the fullness of your love
in sending into the world your Son, Jesus Christ,
the eternal Word made flesh for us and for the world's salvation,
made flesh for us by the Holy Spirit
whom you sent to come upon a lowly serving girl.
Mantled with your Spirit,
he was anointed to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim the year of your favor.
For the precious gift of this most mighty Savior who, by the Spirit,
has reconciled us and all things to you,
we praise and bless you, O God.
With the strength of the Spirit,
we praise and bless you, O God.
As one in the Spirit,
with your whole church on earth and with all the company of heaven,
we worship and adore your glorious name:
Holy, holy, holy are you God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
By your Spirit, the inward Teacher whom you have sent
to bring all these things to our remembrance[20]
that we might apprehend, yea, even *feel*,[21] afresh,
that Christ's dying is our dying and Christ's rising is our rising.
By your Spirit, the inward Teacher whom you have sent
to bring all these things to our remembrance,
we remember in this supper
the perfect sacrifice offered once on the cross by your Son,
our Lord, Jesus Christ.
In the joy of his resurrection—attained for him by the power of the Spirit—
and in the hope of his coming again—a hope stirred within us by the grace of the Spirit—
at the urging of this same Spirit,
we offer ourselves to you as holy and living sacrifices.
Because the Spirit has put the mystery of the faith on our hearts,
together as one in Christ in the Spirit, we proclaim this mystery:
Christ has died. Christ is risen! Christ will come again!
Send your Spirit, we pray, send your Holy Spirit, here and now,
upon us and upon these good gifts,
that by the incomprehensible power of the Holy Spirit,[22]
the bread which we break and the cup which we bless,
might be—*for us*—the communion of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
By your Spirit, grant that, being joined together in Christ by your Spirit,
we may attain to the unity of the faith,
and grow up in all things into Christ our Lord.
And as grain has been gathered from many fields into this one loaf,
and grapes from many hills into this one cup,
grant, O Lord, that by your Spirit,
your whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth
into your kingdom, the new creation in all its fullness.
In the meanwhile, by the Spirit, with the Spirit,
we agonize[23] with all creation,[24] crying out:
Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!
Amen.

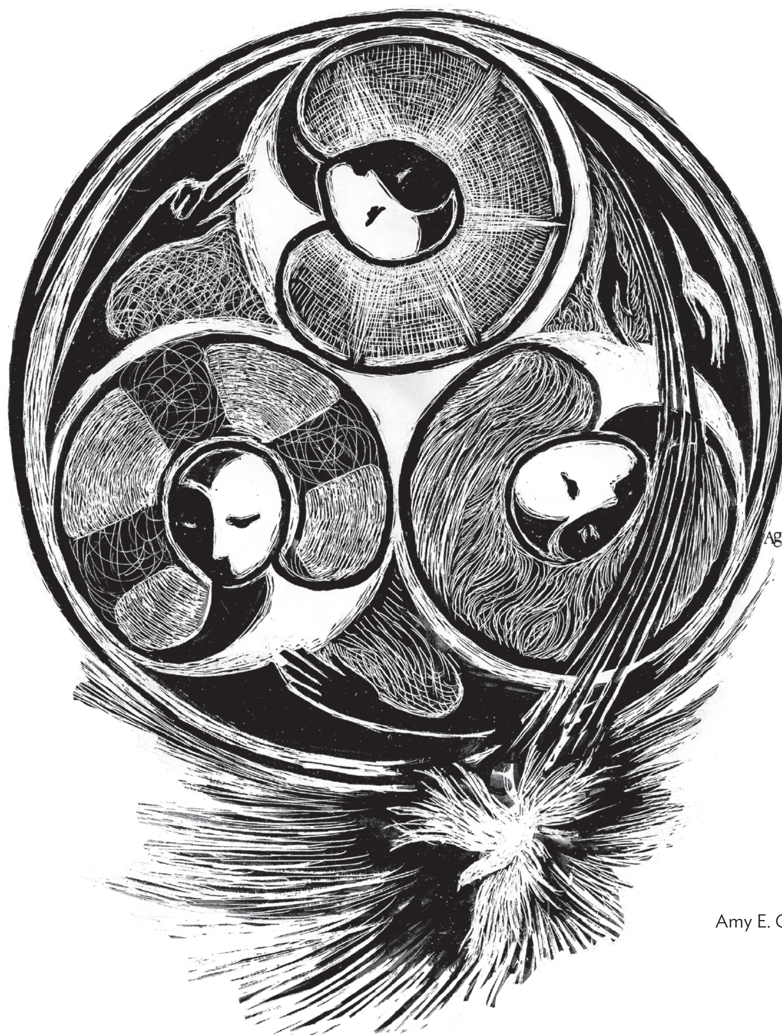
Notes

1. Alasdair Heron, *Table and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 13.
2. James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 50, emphasis added.
3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.1, emphasis added.
4. See, for example, *Institutes* 3.1.4. In referring to the Holy Spirit as a teacher or an "inward teacher," Calvin is speaking of the Spirit in a way that the Christian tradition had spoken of the Spirit for centuries before him. Yves Congar, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, wrote a masterful, three-volume exposition on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Near its end, he writes: "It is traditional to invoke the Spirit when the Holy Scriptures are read. . . . We always need the Spirit to come when we read the Scripture, Jerome declared." Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The Complete Three-Volume Work in One Volume,* trans. David Smith (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, printed 2001; originally published in English in 1983), 270.
5. *Institutes,* 4.14.17. Emphasis added.
6. Paul Rorem, *Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord's Supper* (Nottingham, United Kingdom: Grove Books, 1989), 33, quoting a letter composed by Calvin in 1549, addressed to Heinrich Bullinger. Elsewhere Calvin writes: "The bread and wine are visible signs, which represent to us the body and the blood, but that the name and title of body and blood is attributed to them, because they are as instruments by which our Lord Jesus Christ distributes them to us. It is therefore with good reason that the bread is called body, since not only does it represent it to us, but also presents it to us." (This quotation is from Calvin's *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (1541), in *Tracts and Treatises of John Calvin*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002; previously published by Edinburgh Printing Company, 1844). To summarize Calvin: By the Word, by the Spirit, the symbols (or signs) have such efficacy as to bear with them "the thing signified," namely, Christ's body and blood.
7. *Institutes*, 4.17.10, emphasis added.
8. A paraphrase of Calvin, quoted above.
9. *Institutes*, 4.17.10.
10. *Institutes*, 3.1.4. See also 3.2.1.
11. *Institutes*, 3.2.7.
12. *Institutes*, 4.14.10.

13. John Calvin, “Forms of Prayer for the Church,” in *Beveridge, Tracts and Treatises*, v. 2, emphasis added.
14. See footnote 4 above.
15. In Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland: Meridian Press, 1961), 198–199, emphasis added.
16. The Strasbourg liturgy’s version, as in Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 204.
17. The original French reads: “Jesus le vray sauveur du monde, qui est mort pour nous, estant assis en gloire a la dextre dup ere, habite en voz cueurs par son sainct espreit, faisant que du tout soyez vivans en luy par vifve foy et parfaicte charite. Amen.” Bruno Bürki, 17 Kapitel: “La Sainte Cène selon L’Ordre de Guillaume Farel,” in *Coena Domini I: Die Abendmahlsliturgie der Reformationskirche im 16./17.* Jahrhundert, ed. Irmgard Pahl. Spicilegium Friburgense: Texte zur Geschichte des kirchenlichen Lebens 29 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1983), 345.
18. The referent for this parody is the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving found in the service book of the Reformed Church in America. Found in New Amsterdam in the 1620s, the RCA is the oldest Christian denomination planted in North American soil.
19. In the *Institutes*, Calvin offers this remarkable observation, implying the Spirit’s sustenance of *all* life: the Spirit “not only quickens and nourishes us by a general power that is visible both in the human race and in *the rest of the living creatures*, but he is also the root and seed of heavenly life in us.” *Institutes*, 3.1.2, emphasis added.
20. See John 14:26.
21. This is Calvin—the very use of the word *feel*—in the *Institutes* on the Lord’s Supper. See, e.g., *Institutes*, 4.17.5.
22. This phrase, or others very like it, is a favorite of Calvin’s. Read *Institutes*, 4.17.
23. An interpolation here from Matthew Myer Boulton, “The Adversary,” in *The Spirit in Worship—Worship in the Spirit*, ed. Teresa Berger and Bryan Spinks (Collegeville, MD: Liturgical Press, Pueblo Book, 2009).
24. An interpolation here reminiscent of Romans 8.

Call to Worship

Columns



Amy E. Gray

On Liturgy: Getting Got by the Triune God

Christopher Q. James

On Sunday, June 16, 2019, I stood before my congregation and preached a poor sermon with as much conviction as I could muster. It was, of course, that one day each year that preachers dread—Trinity Sunday. Each of the lectionary passages for the day seeks to reveal something of the nature of the one-in-three-ness and the three-in-one-ness of the triune God. For my part, I attempted to add to all this using merely words buttressed by a good amount of hope and assurance. My congregation seemed to appreciate the effort and I left church that day relieved that it would be another year before I would be presented with the "opportunity" again.

Richard Rohr notes that the church has used a lot of analogies in its effort to explain the Trinity: the shamrock; the three faces on one person; water as ice, liquid, and steam.[1] I might also add the three interconnecting circles, the points on a triangle, and the three-legged stool. Of course, not one of these does the trick. Rohr goes on to summarize the work of the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory Nazianzen) and other mystics who believed they were on to something in explaining how we conceive of God as triune. "In effect, they said, *Don't start with the One and try to make it into Three, but start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One*."[2] I shared this quote in my Trinity Sunday sermon, paused, and then said, "There, see how helpful that is?" Translated, the congregation's laughter meant, "No, not at all."

Truth be told, Rohr's quote is one of the more helpful pieces of advice I have come across when struggling to understand God as triune. Perhaps the truth of Rohr's advice can be seen in the structure and language of so much of our worship.

The *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) incorporates a familiar conclusion, with only slight variations, to every single Prayer of the Day for each Sunday in the church year, along with each of its feast and festival days.[3] Each prayer is addressed to God the Father, and each is offered in or through "Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

Indeed, the Eucharistic Prayer at the Lord's Table takes a Trinitarian form.[4] The first part is devoted to the creative work and call of God the Father, the second to the saving work of Christ, and the third to the empowering and sustaining mission of the Holy Spirit. And each concludes with the following, or similar, ascription of praise to the triune God: "Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen."

The Prayers of Thanksgiving for Baptism all address or name each member of the Godhead or include an ascription of praise to the triune God.[5] Regular worshipers may also know the familiar Pauline greeting/blessing, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14).

The *Book of Common Worship* is steeped in Trinitarian language, yet there remain at least two challenges to worshiping the triune God. First, Presbyterians are not required to order worship according to the *Book of Common Worship* or use the prayers it provides. At most, the *Book of Common Worship* is a gift, guide, and resource for Presbyterian worshipers. The second challenge to worshiping the triune God is that even those who order worship according to the forms and prayers provided, the forms and prayers themselves are not worship, but merely words, ink on the page.

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Educators know that the real curriculum is not the lesson plan for the day but what actually happens in the classroom, the interaction between teacher and student. Musicians know that music is not the score but what actually happens on stage when notes emerge from instruments and blend together as one. Liturgists know that worship is not found in a book or worship bulletin handed out at the church door but rather is what actually happens in the sanctuary when thanks and praise emerge from the heart and mind and blend together in holy awe of the triune God.

The first step to worshiping the triune God seems to be submitting ourselves to worship that employs the fullness of Trinitarian language. Even when we do, it takes time and practice, repeated effort, and the discipline of making this language available until it becomes a part of us. I had been using Trinitarian language in worship explicitly for many years when one Monday evening at a stated session meeting the ruling elder assigned to open the meeting with prayer suddenly ended his prayer to God by affirming that we were praying "in Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen." I had not provided a prayer for him to pray. This was his own. I was not used to elders using this language in the prayers they offered outside of worship, and I was struck by such an unexpected proclamation at a session meeting. Clearly, this ruling elder had been formed over time by Trinitarian language that had broken through and found its place in his heart and mind, which then came to worshipful expression in his own vocabulary and prayer life.

The second step toward worshiping the triune God is much more a part of the mystery that is the Trinity. Despite all the descriptions and analogies we use to try and pin down the Trinity so that we might examine it more closely and understand it more clearly, the triune God will have none of it. As others have suggested,[6] the triune God is not a static "thing," an object apart from us to be studied and explored. Rather, the Trinity is elusive and dynamic, first and foremost an event of relationship between all three members of the Godhead.

Just as the Trinity, by its very nature, is relational, so are worshipers. We never worship as solitary individuals, certainly not as the gathered community on the Lord's Day. Even if we are alone and by ourselves enacting the office of Daily Prayer, as Christians our worship still connects us to that of the larger Christian community throughout the world. So, in our worship, whether as the gathered assembly or alone in daily prayer, we are always united as the covenant community and, as such, we are persons-in-relation with other persons-in-relation to a relational God.[7] In this sense, our worship is uniquely Trinitarian. Only sometimes do we become aware of it.

Thankfully, my congregation need not rely on my annual Trinity Sunday sermon to worship the triune God. We do so every week we gather, not primarily because of the words we use, but rather because of the nature of the God it is we worship. Try as we sometimes might, the triune God will not be controlled; however, through Word and Sacrament, ritual and gesture, we are able to encounter *and* understand the mystery of this God who is both one-in-three and three-in-one. As Richard Rohr assures us, "Remember, mystery isn't something that you *cannot* understand—it is something that you can *endlessly understand*! There is no point at which you can say, 'I've got it.' Always and forever, mystery gets *you*!'"[8]

May it be so. Thanks be to God! Amen!

Notes

1. Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 43.
2. Ibid., 43, italics his.
3. Office of Theology and Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 157–400.
4. Ibid., 26–28, 121–139, as well as those designated for seasons of the church year and feast/festival days, 157–400.
5. Ibid., 74–80. See also those designated for seasons of the church year and feast/festival days, 157–400, and in the section titled "Baptism and Reaffirmation," 401–454.
6. Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance;* Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); et al.
7. E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves*, Virgil Michel Series, ed. Don E. Saliers (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 114. Building upon the earlier work of Catherine Mowry LaCugna in *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), Anderson calls each of us in this relationship a *theonomous* self.
8. Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 27, italics his.

On Music: Stirring Our Souls to Be Better Instruments in Worship

Chi Yi Chen Wolbrink

One of the theological visions of the hymnal *Glory to God* affirms that "the overarching theme of this collection will be God's powerful acts of creation, redemption, and final transformation."[1] Reflecting this view is the creed-like song "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty," which is often the *de rigueur* opening hymn in the Trinity Sunday service. From my childhood days growing up in the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, I would sing this song in its Taiwanese translated form. Having relocated to the United States, I am still singing this song but now in English. Today, I continue to seek a better understanding of the mystery of our triune God and how this important element of Christianity can be expressed in my music making.

The Trinity teaches us to live in loving communion with those different from us, loving our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30–31). Clearly, this understanding is socially radical since our neighbors, and by extension other people, are not like us. How might this be expressed musically? Perhaps reading phrases of the Apostles' Creed and singing stanzas of the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" to embody this declaration musically make both the hymn and creed, which is a core doctrine of Christianity, come alive for the congregation. Canonic singing might also mirror the concept of Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. "Come into God's Presence" (*Glory to God*, #413) is a very good example of this.

A few years ago, at the hymn festival of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians' Montreat conference, the conference children's choir was invited to sing "Sound a Mystic Bamboo Song" (*Glory to God*, #323). During the rehearsal the composer, Rev. Dr. I-to Loh, explained to the young singers how the song was constructed, and where he used a combination of several traditional music styles from different ethnic groups in Asia to create the song. Principally speaking, two melodies were featured with non-lexical syllabic singing—a common practice in many indigenous cultures (see p. 57).

After hearing Dr. Loh's explanation, it seemed that the children readily embodied the song in their singing.

Perhaps these young singers caught glimpses of the message in this hymn, whose words are by New Zealander and retired Presbyterian minister Bill Wallace. Wallace's text embraces God as creator and depicts the incarnation of the Divine in Asia, describing Christ as one who lives in poverty, bending to plant rice and sleeping on the sidewalk. Finally, the song sings of the liberative presence of the Holy Spirit who "blows through this ravished earth and renews all creation."

Typically, composers tend to work from existing texts in crafting new tunes. Yet Singapore composer Dr. Swee Hong Lim once departed from this practice, sending a newly composed tune to his New Zealander friend, Shirley Murray, without any theme or text. What resulted was a new hymn in which the text gives a glimpse of the Holy Spirit's gentleness and power, "As the Wind Song" (*Glory to God*, #292). In this hymn, "wind" is the primary image, though several other provocative images enhance the text; the Spirit is a rainbow, signifying hope, and "rising yeast," a sign of God's Spirit bringing love to all the world. It is "as the green in the spring, as a kite on a string." Overall, Murray's images show a wide and broad view of the triune God engaging in a mystical dance that engages all worshipers in a lifelong process of being and becoming.

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White Americans will become a minority group in the United States by 2042.[2] The songs we sing in worship give us an opportunity to celebrate this cultural transformation as God's gift to future generations, enabling all to gather as a people of God regardless of race. The apostle Paul gives us a timely reminder: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26–28).

Notes

1. "The Theological Vision Statement," in *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 926.
2. Sam Roberts, "Minorities in U.S. Set to Become Majority by 2042," *New York Times*, August 14, 2008.

Part 1

Part 2

On Preaching: Beauty and Chaos

Kaci Clark-Porter and Holly Clark-Porter

For in God, we live and move
and have our being.
—Acts 17:28

Ah, yes, worshiping the triune God—easy enough for the pastor who after three years of seminary passed ordination exams, was ordained, served in called ministries for several years, and who continues to read her copy (okay, copies) of Calvin's *Institutes*. Yes indeed, it is easy enough to sing hymns that speak to the three persons of the Trinity. Easy enough to explore the expansiveness of God the Father/Parent/Mother, to introduce images of Jesus, a man of color, and to artfully pin origami doves around the sanctuary representing the Holy Spirit.

As Reformed worship leaders we constantly tend to the Holy One, Holy Three, hoping to cultivate a deeper connection between worshiper and the persons of the Trinity. But, how do we as preachers preach Trinity? This has been the topic of late in our household, a family of two pastors.

As well as waxing poetic about the Trinity, my wife and I have also been in the process of moving from Wilmington, Delaware, to El Paso, Texas, to serve as co-pastors. And our emotions have been as varied as the landscape changes from the Mid-Atlantic to the desert Southwest. We have lived between grief and excitement, moved through gratitude and emptiness and back to gratitude, and had our being amidst boxes of our stuff and boxes of cookies baked by our former and our future churches. It has been harder than we imagined to feel such love and such loss.

On our six-day drive with three cats and a dog, we listened to a million podcasts, one of which told a story of a man and his wife who went kayaking. Their simple river trip turned tragic and she died. To cope with his loss, the man turned to the outdoors, exploring nature and digging deeper into the complexity of wildlife. During his healing journey, he met a Paiute American Indian man who told him, "On any given day, there is both beauty and chaos standing together."

This wisdom gave him a chancel (so to speak) on which to stand, allowing him to live into that immense sense of love and loss. After hearing his story, we didn't move to another podcast or turn to the glorious consistency of SiriusSXM The Coffee House; instead, we spoke at length of our own beauty and chaos. Not until we were sitting in a car, unable to do anything but talk and drive were we able to articulate just how intensely beautiful and intensely chaotic our lives had become the last few months. Until then, we hadn't been truly open or honest to the full spectrum of our lives.

But, that's just it, isn't it? Isn't life often intensely beautiful and intensely chaotic, especially in the churches we serve? On Sunday morning, we are always preaching to people who are experiencing the fullness of life—the happiness of a newly engaged couple, the mourning family who lost a young parent, the guy who can't keep a job, and the birth of a new baby. Not to mention the mundane. It would be fine if all the people were experiencing one emotion at one time. Alas.

It is so hard to climb in the pulpit each Sunday and speak to *all of that* in one twelve–to–fifteen–minute sermon. Yet, if we see the Trinity not just as a marker to tick off—evoke the Holy Spirit, check; pray to Jesus, check; give praise and thanksgiving to the Godhead, check—then we find we have a model to live into the fullness of any given day.

Kaci Clark-Porter and Holly Clark-Porter are co-pastors of Grace Presbyterian Church in El Paso, Texas.

The Trinity after all, is *the* paradigm of how we live and move and have our being—a constant flux, never one without the other, always already. I know you know this, but it's helpful to remind oneself that the Trinity isn't just three different words to give our worship variation. No, the dynamic nature of the Trinity offers us a chance to be dynamic ourselves.

We are best at worship and preaching when we are honest and when our honesty captures the beauty and the chaos. To preach and to structure worship that gives real insight into the Trinity is to give heed to the incongruence of life and yet to find hope in the rainbows cast by the Prism.

So, the next time you're putting together your worship service and sermon, let your imagination wander past names of the Trinity and allow the Trinity to simply represent themselves by the complexity of stories you tell or perhaps by letting the good, the bad, and the ugly all work together in one worship service. The Trinity teaches us that we are constantly in motion, never just one thing. Let that be okay.

As for our household, we are exhausted, we are in awe of our new surroundings and new people, and we are in gratitude and in grief for our life in Delaware. And, in this, we live and move and have our being.

On the Arts: Depicting the Trinity

Deborah Sokolove

The Trinitarian nature of God is one of the central doctrines of Christianity. It is also very difficult to explain how God can be both one and three without falling into one or another of the ancient heresies. Theologians use words like *homoousios* or *consubstantial* to explain how each of the three Persons can be different from one another yet somehow all are one God. And as difficult as all of this is when speaking or writing, depicting the Trinity as a visual image is even more difficult.

That difficulty has not stopped artists from trying. At first, Christian artists were generally restrained in their attempts to show God. Following contemporary Jewish models, they often would use a hand coming out of a cloud to indicate the presence of the Divine. One of the earliest examples of this is a wall painting of Moses and the burning bush in the synagogue at Dura-Europos, which was destroyed in 257. In this image, Moses, dressed in a Roman toga with blue stripes, points with his open hand towards a tall plant on his right. Above him, a slightly larger hand descends from above with a virtually identical gesture, inviting the viewer to look at Moses.[1]

Three centuries later, in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, the rightmost section of a sixth-century mosaic portrays Abraham with one hand on the head of Isaac, who is seated on an altar, and the other raised and holding a sword, while a small lamb crouches at his feet. The intended sacrifice is arrested, however, as Abraham turns his head away from his son, looking instead towards the hand of God, descending from above.

At the opposite end of this mosaic, Sarah stands inside the doorway of a small structure. In the center, Abraham presents a platter to three nearly identical haloed figures who are seated in the shade of a tree at a table on which there are three round loaves, each scored with a large X. As in the scriptural story of the Three Visitors, there is a certain ambiguity as to whether these figures are simply humans carrying a divine message, angelic beings, or, perhaps, the Holy One, made visible in the breaking of bread.[2]

This third possibility is made more explicit in Andrei Rublev's *Holy Trinity*, which is also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham*. This fifteenth–century Russian icon continues the tradition of identifying Abraham's three visitors as the Holy One. While some commentators have tried to identify each of Rublev's figures according to the colors of the robes they are wearing and the gestures they make with their hands, others have emphasized the gentle way that they incline their heads in mutual submission, the loving gaze with which they communicate with one another, and the openness of their circle that leaves room for the viewer to join them at the table.

Around the same time that Rublev was working on the icon of the Holy Trinity, artists in the West were taking a more literal approach to depicting the Holy One as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in paintings like Masaccio's 1425 *Holy Trinity*, with the Virgin and Saint John and donors fresco[3]; the 1479 altarpiece *The Trinity with the Virgin, Saints John the Evangelist, Stephen and Lawrence and a Donor*, from the Strasbourg workshop of Peter Hemmel von Andlau[4]; and Albrecht Dürer's 1511 *Adoration of the Trinity*.[5] In each of these, the First Person of the Trinity is represented as an old man supporting the younger crucified Christ, with a dove representing the Holy Spirit fluttering nearby. Later works, like Velázquez's 1635 *The Coronation of the Virgin*, often depicted God the Father and God the Son seated beside one another, with the dove-like Holy Spirit flying above or between them.[6]

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Today, artists are trying new ways to depict the triune God, taking into account critiques that remind us that God is neither male nor white, as so many of these paintings seem to assert. One example is Kelly Latimore's modern icon *The Trinity*,[7] which restates the ancient image of the Trinity as three winged beings sitting around a table. Here, rather than the faces being virtually indistinguishable from one another, each one exhibits features that are associated with very specific, non-Western European origins. In Latimore's imagination, the three Persons of the Trinity do not merely raise their hands in blessing and look at one another, but rather lovingly grasp one another's hands while inviting the viewer to join the circle. As in the Rublev icon and the San Vitale mosaic, one cannot definitively say which figure represents which Person of the Godhead. What is, however, undeniable is that these figures look like human women, rather than men. While it is one thing to assert in words that the God who created the universe contains within the divine self both male and female and that all persons are created in the image of God, it is another to depict the feminine aspect of the Trinity with the assurance and confidence of images that have been asserting the maleness of God for over two thousand years. This remarkable painting invites a new understanding of what it means to worship the triune God.

Notes

1. See www.christiancentury.org/article/moses-and-burning-bush-mural-dura-europos-syria for a discussion and digital image of this and other wall paintings in the synagogue at Dura-Europos.
2. See a digital image of Sarah, the *Three Visitors, and the Binding of Isaac* in San Vitale at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binding_of_Isaac#/media/File:Sacrifice_of_Isaac_mosaic_-_Basilica_San_Vitale_(Ravenna).jpg.
3. Digital images and information about Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* may be found at https://courses.lumenlearning.com/zeliart102/chapter/masaccios-holy-trinity/.
4. A digital image and information about *The Trinity with the Virgin, Saints John the Evangelist, Stephen and Lawrence and a Donor* may be found at http://museumpublicity.com/2012/02/08/j-paul-getty-museum-acquires-a-rare-fragonard-drawing-and-a-german-painting-of-the-holy-trinity-from-the-late-middle-ages/.
5. A digital image and information about Dürer's *Adoration of the Holy Trinity* (also sometimes called *Throne of Mercy*) may be found at www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/1/07/landaue.html.
6. A digital image and information about Velázquez's *Coronation of the Virgin* may be found at www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-coronation-of-the-virgin/5f39f2cc-0197-4522-aecf-1d8e3b2e4ae7.
7. Kelly Latimore is a self-taught iconographer who uses many of the conventions of traditional iconography as an art and meditation that brings about new self knowledge for the viewer and the artist. See a digital image of Latimore's *The Trinity* at https://kellylatimoreicons.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/img_2737.jpg and more about the artist at https://kellylatimoreicons.com/about-2/.

Amy E. Gray

Ideas

Amy E. Gray

“Blessed Is the One / Hosanna in the Highest”

Refrain words and music: L. E. Phillips
Tune for verses: TRURO, 1789, adapted
Words: George Weised, trans: Catherine Winkworth, adapted
Arr. L. E. Phillips, 2019

♩= 150

f

6

REFRAIN
Precise rhythm!

mf O bless - ed is the one *mf* who comes in the name of the Lord. O bless - ed is the one

mf

12

mf who comes from the right hand of God. O bless - ed is the one who comes with peace and joy and love.

18

very staccato, etc.

f Let us sing Ho - san - na in the high - est! Ho - san - na in the high - est! Ho -

f

23

san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is the one!

solo, cool jazzy, ad lib over strict rhythm

Lift up your heads ye might-

Re - deem - er, come, with us

Accompaniment, ad lib. light percussion, shaker, etc.

Gmaj7

28

- ty gates; be - hold the King of glo - ry waits; the King of kings is draw - ing near; the

a - bide; our hearts to thee we o - pen wide; let us thy in - ner pre - sence feel; thy

Gmaj13 G D11 Am

33

sav - ior of the world is here! O - pen the por - tals of your heart; make it a tem - ple
grace and love in us re - veal. Thy Ho - ly Spir - it lead us on un - til our work on

Am7(add4) Dsus4 Gmaj7 Gmaj13

38

set a - part for Je - sus Christ the Son! Bless - ed is the one!
earth is done for Je - sus Christ the Son! Bless - ed is the one!

D.C.

Second time, transpose up half step.

O bless - ed is the

G

43

one who comes in the name of the Lord. O bless - ed is the one

48

who comes from the right hand of God. O bless-ed is the one who comes with

very staccato
second time, repeat ad lib with improvised solo decant over choir.

53

peace and joy and love. Let us sing Ho-san-na in the high-est! Ho-san-na in the high-

58

est! Ho-san-na in the high-est. Bless-ed is the one!

rit.

Book Review

Performing the Gospel: Exploring the Borderland of Worship, Entertainment, and the Arts

Deborah Sokolove (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2019)

Reviewed by Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk

As the first chapter of *Performing the Gospel: Exploring the Borderland of Worship, Entertainment, and the Arts* opens, Deborah Sokolove quotes Stephanie Paulsell: "We do not do these things because we know exactly what they mean. We do them in order to find out what they mean" (p. 1). Many contemporary artists talk about their practice as one of thinking through making, approaching material with curiosity in order to find new meanings and relationships previously unimagined. I find Sokolove's writing to be similar in approach. By exploring Christian worship practices from biblical times to the present through stories, historical and theological analysis, and conversations, she outlines a method for navigating what she calls a "borderland" between performance and worship, sacred and secular, and holy and entertaining. To a growing field at the intersection of worship and art, Sokolove contributes wise insights about the ambiguity between and among the many terms she explores, working to build a renewed sense of the overlaps in our practices and institutional life. Indeed, analyzing what we do helps us to learn about what it means. Approaching scholarship with this methodology helps us to see the healthy, muddy ambiguities in the spaces between what we may have thought were disparate ideas or practices.

As an artist, theologian, teacher, and liturgical scholar with both a master of fine arts and a Ph.D. in liturgical studies, Sokolove is particularly situated to speak on these issues. She brings a wealth of personal and educational experience at the intersections of art and worship, which are manifested most clearly in the conversations at the heart of her studies. Matters of definition and histories of performing arts and liturgy form important foundational and background work for her many conversations with scholars and artists whose perspectives shape her investigation. Though the book is defined by one-on-one interviews with liturgical artists, scholars, sacred musicians, and theatre practitioners, she also brings many voices into conversation by way of bibliography, including seminal voices in art criticism and performance theory, like James Elkins and Richard Schechner, ritual studies, like Catherine Bell, and homiletics, like Cleophus LaRue, Trygve Johnson, and Jana Childers, just to name a few.

In the first chapter, Sokolove recognizes a problem of categorization: "Was it a concert or worship?" she asks of a particular example about a Saturday evening Advent concert at a church, "Or was it something that exists in an intermediate space . . . exhibiting elements of both?" (p. 4). Sokolove navigates questions of categorization through particular stories, showing that many gatherings resist clear labels. Upon this foundation, she continues to build a sense of multiplicity by quoting and summarizing her conversations with scholars, practitioners, and artists as they respond to the question, "In your opinion, what is the difference between good worship and good entertainment?" (p. 9). To highlight just a few of these conversations, professor and biblical storyteller Tracy Radosevic says, "The etymology of the word 'entertain' simply means to draw in" (p. 16), while liturgical scholar Gail Ramshaw considers the dangers of performance if it means that some worship on behalf of the whole congregation. Meanwhile, choreographer and dancer Marlita Hill discusses misconceptions about the word *performance* when she says, "For those of us who have performed as artists in concert work, there is a tremendous amount of sincerity that is required, and a lot of study and dramaturgy" (p. 34).

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Leaving the loose ends of these conversations juxtaposed with one another, Sokolove further defines the ambiguities of her borderland with more conversation partners, past and present, in a historical discussion of the relationship between entertainment, the arts, and the church, beginning with ritual life in Scripture, before and after Constantine, through the Renaissance and Reformation in the Western Church until today, ending with discussions of the "Beyoncé Mass" and the royal wedding of Great Britain's Prince Harry and Megan Markle.

From there, chapter four considers important terms: art, drama, entertainment, excellence, liturgy, play, prayer, production values, ritual, and worship. Instead of providing strict definitions for these terms, Sokolove opens nuances in their reception and use, challenging readers to think beyond the stereotypes they may carry. Her analysis shows that matters of definition are crucial in conversations about opinions related to the intersection of worship and entertainment. What do we mean by art, drama, ritual, or liturgy? Much of the worship wars in American churches are impossible to navigate without situating the words we use within their broader context in multiple fields of discourse. Many carry very different assumptions depending upon their context, and our terminology often needs redefinition or clarification. Sokolove writes, "This effort to redefine the boundaries between art, drama, entertainment, excellence, liturgy, play, prayer, production values, ritual, and worship has, instead, revealed a great deal of overlap and ambiguity. Rather than giving unambiguous directions, the signposts point down twisting paths that cross and meet in unexpected places" (p. 130). In seeking definitions, Sokolove makes pathways for substantive, critical conversation about liturgical action at disciplinary junctures.

A discussion of performance theory, ritual, and worship in chapter five continues the trek through Sokolove's winding borderland. Sokolove opens the chapter with the understanding that "Christian worship depends upon performance, but anxieties arise about 'performance' when it is equated with 'entertainment'" (p. 105). Part of the anxiety about language of performance has to do with the extent to which performance is interpreted as deceit. But in conversation with ritual, performance can more accurately be described as sincere corporate action that rehearses, enacts, or embodies theological reflection. "Through ritual, people learn to live with one another by creating a temporary order through the construction of a performative, subjunctive world, an 'as if' world in which what is said and done has real effects that last beyond it" (p. 111). Performance, then, can be a very helpful way to think about the meaning of liturgy, because "all performance makes something happen" (p. 129). In a discussion of preaching as performance, Sokolove cites the work of scholars and preachers Cleophus LaRue and Trygve Johnson, who argue "that the contemporary situation calls for an additional role of the preacher as a liturgical artist" (p. 122).

> After naming contemporary artists like Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Doris Salcedo, [Cláudio Carvalhaes] says, "They are doing the work we are not doing. We desperately need them to deal with our reality and the questions that arise that our traditions have not been able to answer."

Chapter six continues Sokolove's conversations with artists and scholars about the relationship between performance and worship. To highlight just one of these conversations, activist, preacher, and liturgical scholar Cláudio Carvalhaes speaks of the role of working artists in our conversations about performance, art, and worship, saying, "Artists have this power to help us see the present and future in new ways! They will both haunt and bless our spaces with criticism of our times and possibilities for it." After naming contemporary artists like Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Doris Salcedo, he says, "They are doing the work we are not doing. We desperately need them to deal with our reality and the questions that arise that our traditions have not been able to answer" (p. 163). Carvalhaes's perspective is just one example of the rich conversations Sokolove shares throughout the book. After quoting and summarizing many more important conversations with many different voices in chapter six, Sokolove considers the terrain she has mapped in the final chapter, "Performing the Gospel."

As part of contemporary, progressive Christian conversations within the United States, *Performing the Gospel* considers mostly Western histories and understandings of performance, the performing arts, and entertainment, as well as liturgical theology

and ritual studies. To address such a borderland in this time in church and cultural life in the United States is significant and relevant given the suspicion and anxiety that words like performance and entertainment have faced in Christian contexts in the United States. Sokolove's consideration of Egeria's accounts of fifth-century, church-sponsored performative pilgrimage events in Jerusalem shows that these are not new issues. The borderland has been well traversed, with tracks going in all different directions. Perhaps though, she suggests, to attempt clear categorization of any practice or gathering is to ask the wrong question. The right ones? For Sokolove and many she interviews, these will include questions of intention, love, and care in planning and participating in worship.

By forming a network of conversations, Sokolove models how we are to continue nuanced dialogue as these issues become increasingly important and difficult to define. As she maps a borderland, she invites us into its questions that are both particular and broad-minded. In her introduction, Sokolove writes that "this book is written for my students," but the book makes all of us students of the borderland between worship, entertainment, and the arts. As readers, we learn to hold ideas in tension, and in doing so, recognize new relationships and resonances. For those "who spend their personal and professional lives in the borderland of worship, entertainment, and the arts," Sokolove's work helps to affirm the live questions of our days. As she avoids any easy answers, Sokolove invites artists, theologians, pastors, preachers, dancers, performers, liturgists, and actors to embrace the spaces of disciplinary overlap in their vocational journeys. Rather than a cause for anxiety, this is a landscape ripe for conversation, one that can help the contemporary church continue making spaces where the good news is proclaimed and art communities continue making spaces where imaginations are formed and transformed. In both spaces, people gather for challenge, healing, and welcome. "It is an example of how what seems at first glance to be a sharp, bright line can easily blur into a confusing landscape where the boundaries are never quite clear" (p. 134).

Deborah Sokolove's work and research bring forth several important questions, particularly for those of us in the church in the United States today, in a time of cultural, political, ecological, and social turmoil. As the church and the world continue to turn and change, what is the gospel God calls us to proclaim, and how do we perform it? These questions offer space for us to re-imagine worship on theological grounds, building inclusive, relevant, sincere corporate practices rooted in our understanding of God and ourselves. Post-modern artists and scholars often turn to ambiguity to give language to contemporary experience. I find Sokolove's work in *Performing the Gospel: Exploring the Borderland of Worship, Entertainment, and the Arts* to provide a helpful way to think about the role of ambiguity in the contemporary church as well. Perhaps the vast borderland between worship, entertainment, and the arts teaches us to listen. What can contemporary churches learn from art communities seeking to make meaning in a broken world? What can artists learn from the material, ritual life of a gathered community of faith? Where can we listen for good news? In more places than we may have expected.

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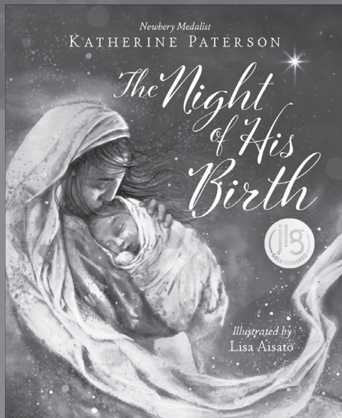

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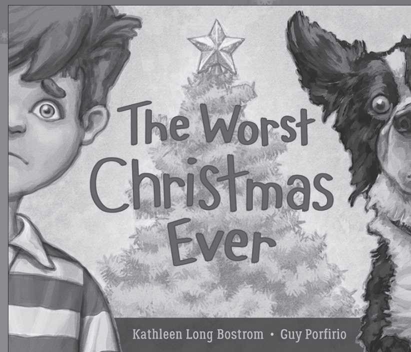

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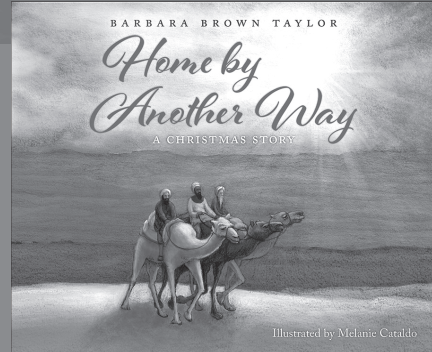

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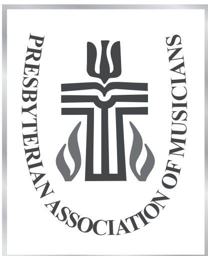

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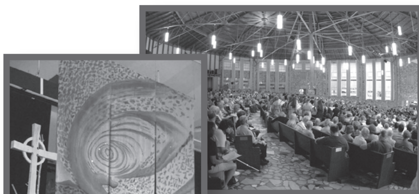

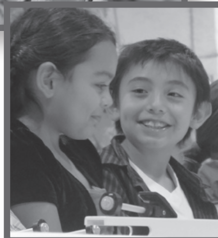

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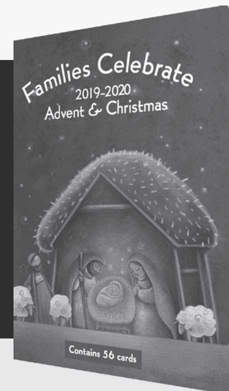

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