mission to "make disciples of all the nations" (28 19–20) This mission is the climax toward which Matthew's entire narrative drives forward *And this mission—"to all the nations" and "until the very consummation of the age"* (28 19–20)*—rests on the faithfulness of two women once invisible within Matthew's story and once powerless to influence its events* And such, Matthew tells us, is the impact of Jesus' resurrection

Matthew 28:16–20

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"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28 19) This text, often called "The Great Commission," has long served as a "job description" for the church The verb forms almost summarize the "practical department" of a seminary curriculum evangelism, worship, and Christian education Rarely do we pause to consider the vision of God that forms the heart of this sentence The hallmark of Christian faith is that we are baptized into the name of the triune God The purpose of this article is to reflect on what it means for us, as individuals and as the church, to take that *particular* name of God as our baptismal identity

Some, perhaps many, regard the triunity of God as an obscure remnant of the day when theologians claimed to be talking about reality rather than advancing thought constructs or expressing preferences for value systems Some would say that the Trinity is, to use Paul Tillich's notion, a symbol that has "died," or has lost its power to evoke the transcendent But there are signs to the contrary The doctrine receives concentrated attention in the work of Leonardo Boff (*Trinity and Society*) and Jurgen Moltmann (*The Trinity and the Kingdom*), both of whom find in the ancient formula a vision with vast social and political implications Although the traditional formula presents problems for feminists, Letty Russell discusses the value of the triune symbol for understanding human community Even more noticeable are the references to the Trinity in literature on prayer and spirituality (a good example is Henri Nouwen's meditation on the Rublev icon of the Holy Trinity in *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*) *The Presbyterian Hymnal* places nine hymns in the section on "Trinity Sunday," and many other hymns include trinitarian references and/or doxological stanzas

It is my conviction that the triunity of God is a symbol that is far from dead It is, in fact, a unique gift both to the life of faith and to our experience of what it means to be one human family on this planet Appreciation of this symbol will not come from theological reflection alone, although understanding the history of the development of trinitarian doctrine is very important The Trinity is a vi-

sion of God that is first of all to be worshiped and adored. The triunity of God is an experience of God that believers are invited to enter through prayer and to live out in everyday relationships.

One cannot discuss the Trinity today without addressing the problem of the traditional formula and the masculine image of God that it presents. How, if at all, does one get around the stumbling block of the triune Name? Two extremes have emerged in this debate. On one side, Donald Bloesch has argued that the triune formula cannot (ever) be altered because it is in fact God's "proper name." "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is God's own self-identification, and to change that *name* amounts to tampering with direct, divine revelation. In his zeal for orthodoxy, Bloesch appears to overlook the traditional notion that in trinitarian doctrine (even in the formula itself) we humans merely *reflect* on God's self-disclosure; we do not grasp it entirely. While affirming that the triune name was a symbol that expressed God's reality, theologians in the early church affirmed something more. The triune symbol also points beyond its own formula to the God who says, "I am who I am," whose name cannot (ever) be named. In Eastern Christianity in particular, reflection on the triunity of God leads directly to the apophatic experience.

The other side of the debate is also problematic. In affirming the truth that the God named "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is neither masculine nor male, some have suggested various substitutions. The most frequently used are "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer" and "Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit." These alternatives do remove the problem of masculine images, and they strive to retain the notion of diversity within the being of God. But they stumble on a historic principle of trinitarian understanding that remains important, namely, the triune God is not one God who plays three roles. God is a unity with real distinctions, but they are *not* functional. God is not divided into three parts, departments, time-periods, intentions, or "individuals." The threefold God is one in will, purpose, activity, and eternity.

It is difficult to resolve this dilemma without appearing to sidestep the issues. The theologians of the early church argued that the terms "Father" and "Son" were used because they grew out of the gospel tradition and referred to the bond of unity between Jesus the Christ and the one God. To this extent, the "names" disclosed God's reality. But, they also argued, the names did *not* mean what they mean among humans, namely, the male gender or masculine characteristics. The divine being is far beyond symbol and language. Some Christians today, however, argue that a masculine metaphor will always be at least that: It will always conjure up our human experiences of gender.

The problem is that both points are valid and both concerns must be honored in contemporary discussion. I choose to retain the traditional formula, in part, because it most adequately points towards what is the heart of triunity, namely, that the one God is a "being structured as a relationship" (cf. Eberhard Jüngel). The

triune name tells us that God is a real, internal relatedness, eternally related within Godself before God was ever related to us. Indeed, our own relatedness is the result of our being creatures created in the divine image and likeness.

This discussion of the challenge to trinitarian language has already brought to the fore several ideas that comprise this vision of God. It now remains to state more explicitly what is at stake in this way of experiencing God and what the implications of that experience might be for the life of faith today.

The doctrine of the Trinity occupied the attention of the church for much of the first five centuries of its life. During this time, the parameters of "orthodoxy" emerged as a result of reflection on the language of scripture, on the liturgical practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and on the life of prayer. Much of what is said positively about the triunity is the result of rejecting various alternatives. We say that the Persons of the Godhead are "co-eternal" because we reject the notion that any One (notably the Father) was prior in being to the Others. In the same way, we say that they are co-equal because no One of them is "more God" than the Others.

Historically and in contemporary reflection, theologians suggest that confessing God's triunity is the heart confessing that God *is* love. Divine love is not simply God's stance towards the creation. Love, or more accurately *loving*, is who God is within God's own being. The love that is Godself is not cosmic narcissism, however. The God disclosed by the history of Jesus is revealed as a relatedness, a divine community in one Being. This vision arises in large part from reflecting on the language of John's Gospel. Here we see Father and Son who each give all that they are to the other, who are bound in the unity of mutual love, and who reach out to draw humans into that community by the outpouring of the Spirit. This divine love is eternally active, not static, and it is the overflow from this loving activity that produces the creation.

Karl Barth stresses that God's unity "is not to be confused with singularity or isolation" (*Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 354). God is not an abstract monad or a singular individual (modeled after human individuals). Rather, he argues, the history of revelation suggests that God is a being in correspondence or confrontation, in relationship or community within Godself.

Divine triunity reveals a Being who is community, a relatedness shaped by the activity of loving. From this vision we learn some very important things about identity. This vision of God suggests a life in which unity does not demand uniformity and difference does not frustrate oneness. Real unity and real diversity are completely harmonized. We are led to this vision, so far beyond our own experiences in relationships, by rejecting the alternatives. God is not a unity made up of three Gods who form the perfect political alliance: God is really and only one God. But neither is God one Being who simply plays three different roles: The Persons are really different. They are *not* the same, and they *are* one.

Psalm 115 reminds us that we become like what we worship, and Genesis 1:27 tells us that we humans are formed in the divine likeness. If divine triunity is our Creator and the One whom we worship, we are correct to look for the implications of this vision of God for our human condition. Boff and Moltmann have made significant contributions in suggesting that divine community has vast implications for how we structure society. Living as reflections of the triune God puts us firmly in opposition to super- and subordination, whether political or ecclesiastical, between races, genders, or economic classes. Yet it does not seek to submerge persons into uniform mass. To the contrary, this vision sets the stage on which the celebration of true diversity is both valued and cultivated.

The implications of triunity for life in community and life in the church have found intriguing expression in two new hymns. Brian Wren writes:

> God is One, unique and holy,
> Endless dance of love and light. . . .
>
> God is Oneness by communion,
> Never single or alone;
> All togetherness, including
> Friendship, family, and home (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, No. 135).

Here, he picks up both the themes of dynamism and relatedness within God's being, suggesting that our most intimate experiences of relationship are included in God's own. In a hymn about ministry, Carl Daw states that our diversity of service reflects God's diversity and is held together in God's unity:

> Triune God, mysterious Being,
> Undivided and diverse,
> Deeper than our minds can fathom,
> Greater than our creeds rehearse.
> Help us in our varied callings
> Your full image to proclaim,
> That our ministries uniting
> May give glory to Your name (*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, No. 523).

The theological reasons for affirming God's triunity are numerous. But the impact of this symbol finally depends on lived experience. My own began with the Rublev icon where the three Persons are depicted as the three angels who were entertained by Abraham and Sarah under the oaks at Mamre (cf. Gen. 18). The faces of the Three are identical; they differ in dress and posture. Most of what has been said here about trinitarian doctrine is somehow reflected in this painting. But its significance took on a new meaning when I saw it hung in the refectory of the Communauté Grandchamps, the religious community of women similar to Taizé. I asked my hostess why they chose this icon for the dining room. She replied, "They sit at three sides of the table, and we are invited to join them. This is where we are in life: invited into the circle of holy love."