

We Who Work with Words: Towards a Theology of Writing

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Abstract: This article works toward a “theology of writing” in order to inform and encourage Christian writers, helping them to consider not just *what* they write but *why* they write, and *in whose image* they write. The author lays a theological foundation for language and writing in the Trinity, then applies this to human writing. The aim is to show that writing is a Trinitarian, image-bearing craft by which we mark the world with our presence.

We have a theology for almost everything: science, language, sociology, mathematics—the list goes on.¹ In light of the prevalence and ease of publishing on the web, which has given many pastors and theology students a voice in the broader Christian community, it seems apropos to work out a *theology of writing* as well. We should, in other words, be conscious of what we are doing when we write and how the craft of writing fits into our biblical worldview. In this article, I hope to address these questions and suggest some of the contours of a theology of writing.

We can start by noting that the call for a theology of writing comes not simply from a lacuna.² Just because we perceive a theological gap does not mean it should be filled. We *can* have a theology of writing, just as we can have a theology of almost anything. But *must* we have one? What is it about the craft of writing that demands a theology? The answer seems to lie in a single word: faith. As Lucretia Yaghjian reminds us, writing is an act of faith: “Faith in yourself as a writer; faith in the importance of what you are writing; faith that there will be an audience for what you will write; faith that your writing

¹ For clear examples by one author in the Reformed tradition, see Vern S. Poythress’s work, which often addresses a God-centered approach to various disciplines, including science, philosophy, language, sociology, and mathematics. Also see Jeremy R. Treat’s recent article, “More than a Game: A Theology of Sport,” *Them* 40 (2015): 392–403, as well as Jeff Pollard and Scott T. Brown, eds., *A Theology of the Family: Five Centuries of Biblical Wisdom for Family Life* (Wake Forest, NC: NCFIC, 2014).

² Note, however, some recent work on the craft of writing within theology, in Eric D. Barreto, ed., *Writing Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); Jonathan Roach and Grisel Dominguez, *Expressing Theology: A Guide to Writing Theology that Readers Want to Read* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015). Works such as these deal more with how we can write effectively as theologians, rather than with what our theology of writing should be.

will contribute ultimately to the flourishing of those who read it; and finally, faith in the source of your desire to write.”³ What’s more, faith always rests upon a theology—a system of interdependent beliefs—whether that theology is asserted or assumed. So, we might turn the question around: if faith is integral to craft of writing, why should we *not* articulate the theology beneath it?

Now, let me be the first to say that working out a theology of writing is ambitious. I do not hope to have the definitive word on this, nor could I, in light of the tradition of Christian work that has addressed the importance of language and communication.⁴ However, I do hope to pick up the conversation once again and get it moving in a new direction. In what follows, my aim is to offer a theological underpinning for the craft of writing and to encourage Christian writers to consider not just *what* they write but *why* they write and *in whose image* they write. To begin the conversation, we need to revisit our theological foundation for language and writing in the Trinity. Then we can properly apply this to the craft of writing, answering the question, “What is it we are doing when we write, and what, theologically, propels us to do it well?” In light of the answers to these questions, I argue that writing is a Trinitarian, image-bearing craft by which we mark the world with our presence, and this calls us to image the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with our ideas and expressions, being conscious of the effect that those expressions have upon the reader.⁵

1. A Theological Foundation for Language

Before articulating a theology of writing, we must define language, since an understanding of the latter always lies beneath the former. So, what is language? Answers to such questions always end up introducing reductionism of one sort or another, but that does not mean the question should be cast aside.⁶ It simply means we need to realize the depth of the water we tread when we provide an answer.

³ Lucretia B. Yaghjian, *Writing Theology Well: A Rhetoric for Theological and Biblical Writers*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2015), 17. Yaghjian rightly notes that this source of our desire to write is the Holy Spirit. Philip Eubanks presents a non-Christian understanding of this desire and inspiration to write as “a feeling of being guided by an unconscious force or an inner voice for which the writer is merely a transcriber.” Philip Eubanks, *Metaphor and Writing: Figurative Thought in the Discourse of Written Communication* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 83–84.

⁴ See, for example, Paul A. Soukup, *Communication and Theology: An Introduction and Review of the Literature* (London: World Association for Christian Communication, 1983); George H. Tavard, *The Vision of the Trinity* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 119–43; William M. Schweitzer, *God Is a Communicative Being: Divine Communicativeness and Harmony in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology 14 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 11–30; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge, 1995), 75–94; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998). The final two sources in this list, in my opinion, rely too heavily on speech-act theory, which tends to oversimplify communicative behavior. See Vern S. Poythress, “Canon and Speech Act: Limitations in Speech-Act Theory, with Implications for a Putative Theory of Canonical Speech Acts,” *WTJ* 70 (2008): 337–54.

⁵ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 369–70.

⁶ See Vern S. Poythress, *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1976), 48–49. I am not claiming to have the only answer to the question “What is language?” I am, however, suggesting that we need to account for the Trinity in our understanding of language, and that answers to this question that ignore the Trinity are missing something quite basic to communication. For a brief exposition of my own definition of language, see “Words for Communion,” *Modern Reformation* 25.4 (2016): 5–8.

It is also critical that Christians be methodologically self-conscious when answering such questions. In other words, *how* we arrive at our answer is as telling as *what* we end up concluding. In this sense, it would be a mistake to offer a hodgepodge definition of language, pasting together pieces of secular linguistic, psychological, and social theories. Such theories undoubtedly have much to offer, but their adherents are prone to begin by assuming that a definition of language must focus exclusively on humanity. This assumption gets our theology of writing off on the wrong foot by ignoring our creaturely context.⁷ Rather than beginning with humanity, we should begin with the Creator God himself, since all coherent and effective human behavior is analogous to and rooted in that of the Trinity, in whose image we are made.⁸ That is our starting point for everything, especially for articulating a definition of language.

1.1. God as a Communicative Being

To answer our question, we can first examine the Trinity as a communicative being—a being who “speaks” to himself in three persons.⁹ By “speech” here we mean the expression of content from one person to another.¹⁰

The persons of the Godhead speak to each other in the sense that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally love and glorify one another. It is in this broader sense that I consider such expressions of love and glory to be divine speech or language. The Father expresses his love toward the Son and shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Son expresses love toward the Father and obeys his commands to perfection, just as he instructs his followers to do (John 14:15, 21, 23). And the Spirit expresses love toward the Father and the Son as well. In fact, Paul calls love itself the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), for the Spirit loves the Father and the Son and is the bond of love between them.¹¹ As Abraham Kuyper once put it, “[T]he Love-life whereby these Three mutually love each other is the Eternal Being Himself. . . . The entire Scripture teaches that nothing is more precious and glorious than the Love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father, and of the Holy Spirit for both.”¹²

We see this same divine “speech” expressed with the language of glory. In John 17:5 Jesus says, “Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” In the

⁷ One thinks, for example, of Noam Chomsky’s definition of language as “a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements.” Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1962), 13. Note how this definition does not get at the roots of what language is for, i.e., what its broader purpose is within the nature of created reality, and how it is embedded within a complex system of other human behaviors, all of which are ultimately rooted in the coherence of the Triune God.

⁸ On speech as an analog of divine behavior, see Hibbs, “Imaging Communion: An Argument for God’s Existence Based on Speech,” *WTJ* 77 (2015): 35–51.

⁹ Schweitzer has helpfully reminded us that for Jonathan Edwards, God is a communicative being *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and he created reality in order to “communicate himself.” See Schweitzer, *God Is a Communicative Being*, 11–30.

¹⁰ I understand here that there is a clear difference between a divine person and a human person. The latter understanding of “person” does not apply in this Trinitarian definition of language because the Godhead is not comprised of three different beings, as the human understanding of “person” would imply. God is three distinct persons but one being.

¹¹ Matthew Levering, “The Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Communion: ‘Love’ and ‘Gift’?” *IJST* 16 (2014): 126–42.

¹² Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henry De Vries (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 1995), 542.

preceding chapter, he proclaimed that the Spirit also glorifies him (John 16:14). Yet, Jesus longs for the Father to glorify him *so that he can glorify the Father* (John 17:1). And the reason the Son is glorified is because he gives life to all men who are dead in sins and trespasses (Rom 6:11). While our life is in *Christ*, this life is none other than “the Spirit of life,” who is the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:2, 6, 9). Therefore, we can say that the Spirit shares in the glory of the Son as life-giver.

This divine, perpetual exchange of love and glory is what I call *communion behavior*, which fosters unbroken unity, and this behavior is what I have in mind when using the word “language.” What’s more, because “there is—and has been from all eternity—talk, sharing and communication in the innermost life of God,”¹³ language is a properly Trinitarian behavior.¹⁴

1.2. Humans as Communicative Beings

The same definition of language can be applied analogously to us, since we are created in the image of the self-communing Trinity (Gen 1:26).¹⁵ God is a communicative being in the sense that the persons of the Trinity hold eternal discourse of love and glory with one another in uninterrupted fellowship. We are communicative beings in the sense that we are endowed analogically not just with the ability to hold discourse with one another, but with the necessity that we do so in order to commune with other persons: we need to communicate in order to foster communion with each other. God’s communication, by comparison, simply *is* communion. In this context of communication and communion—the drawing together of persons—human language is an imaging, communion behavior.¹⁶

I say “behavior” because language is not merely a phonetic or graphic vehicle of thought. It forms and shapes all of our interactions, in addition to our thought. In this regard, Kenneth L. Pike still seems to have provided the most helpful definition of language, one that gives attention to its expansiveness and integration with all else that we do.¹⁷ Language, according to Pike, is

¹³ Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church*, vol. 1, *The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 487.

¹⁴ George H. Tavard writes, “To say, with the Gospel of John (rendered literally): ‘In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with the God, and the God was the Logos . . .’ is to place within God the structure of communicative discourse: ‘In the beginning was Discourse, and Discourse was with God, and Discourse was divine. . . .’ In the context of the Johannine Gospel, this refers to self-communication within God. . . . There is Discourse of God to and with humankind because there is in the first place Discourse within God, Discourse from and to God. God is Speaker, and Addressee, and Discourse between them.” George H. Tavard, *The Vision of the Trinity* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 122. See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 48.

¹⁵ Kallistos Ware suggests, “Without the concept of communion it is not possible to speak of the being of God: so also without the concept of communion it is not possible to speak the truth about human beings.” He also notes, rightly, that “to be human is to be dialogic.” We are not truly human in isolation from others, so it is quite fitting to refer to human language also as “communion behavior.” See Kallistos Ware, “The Holy Trinity: Paradigm of the Human Person,” in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue*, ed. Melville Y. Stewart, trans. Eugene Grushetsky and Xenia Grushetsky, SPR 24 (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2003), 236.

¹⁶ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “Speech and the Image of God: Biblical Reflections on Language and Its Uses,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 183.

¹⁷ For God, we might link this pervasiveness of language to divine simplicity. If speech is one of God’s essential attributes (as John Frame has argued in his *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013], 522–23), then that attribute permeates and runs in harmony with all of his other attributes, e.g.,

a phase of human activity which must not be treated in essence as structurally divorced from the structure of nonverbal human activity. The activity of man constitutes a structural whole, in such a way that it cannot be subdivided into neat “parts” or “levels” or “compartments” with language in a behavioral compartment insulated in character, content, and organization from other behavior. Verbal and nonverbal activity is a unified whole, and theory and methodology should be organized or created to treat it as such.¹⁸

Language, in other words, cannot be neatly compartmentalized within the fields of phonetics and phonemics, psycholinguistics, semantics, or even semiotics.

Pike also noted that language is a behavior rooted in a unique observer of reality, a person.¹⁹ Every person then works with hierarchical structures—phonology, grammar, and reference—to express particular perspectives or emotions.²⁰ Those perspectives and emotions can then be received, analyzed, interpreted, and responded to by others, thus fostering the communion that is at the heart of language.

Pike’s understanding of language brings two things to the fore: (1) the pervasiveness of language in reality and (2) its personal and communal nature. Language always has a communal goal. By that, we mean that any use of language is ultimately the expression of one person towards another (or towards many others).²¹ There is no such thing as a purely propositional, impersonal act of communication.

Binding together what we have seen about language from the divine and human perspectives, we can say that language is a drawing together of persons made in the image of the Trinity, as those persons express content to one another. That is the answer to our initial question, “What is language?” Language is *communion behavior* that is structured upon the Trinity’s internal and external communication and is embedded in a web of other human behaviors. What we mean by that is this: language is a behavior we undertake to commune with other persons.²²

being loving, holy, etc. Concerning God’s simplicity and the relationships of his attributes, it is helpful to remember that those attributes are “essential qualities of God, which inhere in His very Being and are co-existent with it.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 46.

¹⁸ Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 26.

¹⁹ Note again the difference here between divine and human persons. While divine persons do have distinct perspectives as such, they nevertheless exhaustively know one another, so there is no sense in which a perspective of one of the divine persons is isolated from the other two.

²⁰ On the relation of these hierarchies to the persons of the Trinity, see Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 267–68.

²¹ This, again, is rooted in the Trinity, as Vanhoozer highlights. “Whatever else it is, the life of Father, Son, and Spirit involves not only generative but communicative relations. . . . The social or conversational analogy of the Trinity suggests that the three persons relate in dialogical fashion. . . . God is the Father addressing the Son, the Son responding to the Father, and the Spirit overhearing.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 246. I am by no means here advocating for social Trinitarianism. This social analogy for the Trinity must always be balanced equally with the “consciousness model,” in which the Father is divine speaker, the Son divine speech, and the Spirit divine breath. The unity and distinctions in the Godhead are equally ultimate. We must ever guard against treating the distinctions at the expense of the unity or vice versa. See Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 348.

²² This is not an original insight by any means. Gadamer, for one, wrote long ago that “language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth*

2. A Theological Foundation for Writing

So, God uses language as a communicative being. The persons of the Godhead speak to one another in a language of love and glory, but where does writing enter the scene? Is God a writer?

We might start by reminding ourselves that speech and writing are integrally related. As David Olson suggests, “Writing systems provide the concepts and categories for thinking about the structure of spoken language.”²³ When this truth is paired with the fact that God specifically chose to use the written word to reveal his nature and will, it is not difficult to begin speculating, with biblical awareness, in what sense God is a writer. It all comes down to how precise we wish our definition of “writing” to be.

As is always the case, our definitions either expand or restrict our understanding, sometimes in good ways, other times in bad. By “bad” I mean that a narrow understanding can blind us to something that, when seen from a different perspective, is true and worthy of our attention. If we view “writing” purely as the putting of pen to paper (or fingers to keys), then God is not a writer. But if we view writing as the practice of an author who takes up an instrument and marks the world with his presence, then God has written everything.²⁴ We know, of course, that God speaks his thought in the Son—the eternal Word of the Father (John 1:1)—and in the hearing of the Spirit, so we have an obvious connection between God’s thought, his speech, and his awareness of that speech. Yet, in creation, the Son and Spirit transcribe reality with the creative thoughts of the Father so as to manifest a physical and spiritual world that is marked with the triune author’s presence. It is this definition of writing—the practice of an author who takes up an instrument and marks the world with his presence—that I would like to adopt here, first with reference to God, and then with reference to ourselves.²⁵ But we need to consider this definition in relation to a few popular models of writing, noting why we are departing from them.

For our purposes, we can briefly look at three different models of writing, as presented by Roy Harris in his work, *Signs of Writing*.²⁶ Each model focuses on the phenomenon of signification. First, there is the *surrogational model*, in which “what a sign signifies is explained in terms of its being a surrogate or substitute for something else.” For example, the word “human” substitutes or stands in for an actual human being, its real-world referent. This model is easy enough to understand, and we might think here of Plato’s *Cratylus* and other logocentric models of signification as taking this approach to writing.²⁷ Second, there is the *structural model*, which “explains signification solely in terms of relations between signs and other signs.” Sympathizers with this model would include Saussure and Derrida,

and Method, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 402.

²³ David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68. This rightfully pushes against the longstanding assumption that writing is merely transcribed speech. Writing is more than that, though certainly not less.

²⁴ As I mention later, I believe that the instrument God uses to mark the world with his presence is his very voice. God’s speech thus becomes writing when the content of that speech is actualized in time and space, thus *marking* reality.

²⁵ I realize that this is a fairly novel approach, as far as I can tell, since the leading theories of writing focus more on signification than on a broader, theological description of what we do when we write.

²⁶ The following introduction to writing models is taken from Roy Harris, *Signs of Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 50–51.

²⁷ Logocentrism, in brief, “stands for the harmonious alliance between reality, thought, and language.” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 60. For a discussion of how logocentrism has been attacked by deconstructionism and pragmatism, “undoers” and “users,” see pages 48–85. See also Wolterstorff’s critique of Derrida

among others. It was Derrida who claimed that the meaning of written text was a matter of *différance*—signs deferring to other signs in a never-ending labyrinth of signification.²⁸ If the surrogational model is in some sense vertical, allowing us to point to realities outside and above ourselves, then the structural model is strictly horizontal, precluding the possibility that we can get outside of our language system. Meaning, for this model, comes not from reality but from the systems of signs in which we find ourselves. Third, there is the *integrational model*, which “makes no assumption that the sign has any existence outside the communication situation that gives rise to it.” This is a Wittgensteinian, contextual model, in which “the spatio-temporal continuity of the object is irrelevant to its semiological role.” In other words, textual signs signify certain things in certain contexts; beyond those contexts, there is no promise that the signification will hold.

Now, our definition of writing as *marking the world with our presence* seems quite odd in the context of these models. In fact, it may seem hopelessly vague. The truth is, however, that such a definition not only allows for the mysterious nature of communication that is rooted in the Trinity, but integrates insights from each of the above models without committing to the underlying assumptions that such models carry with them. Those assumptions are important to leave behind, since they embrace what we might call a univocal approach to reality—i.e., an approach suggesting that the world and its component parts can be mastered and controlled with scientific precision in a way that parallels God’s own abilities. But pressing each of these models a bit further reveals the mystery that is oftentimes ignored, and the fact that none of them, on its own, encapsulates the phenomenon of writing.

Take the surrogational model, for example. How do scribbles on a page come to stand for an object or idea in reality? Is it purely a matter of convention that has been built up by generations of language users, or is there more to it? Is there someone controlling the conventions and the real-world referents so as to ensure that they correspond? Christians would be quick to respond, “Yes—God is sovereign over all of reality; he controls all of signification because he controls all that is signified.” If that is true, then signification is not ultimately a matter of human convention; it is a matter of divine intention, expressed through the decisions of creatures bound in covenantal relationship to the purposeful God who spoke them into being. However, this God is incomprehensible to us, so some mystery is always present in our signification.

Or consider the structural model. Signs certainly do refer to other signs; indeed, we define words by referencing other words, using what is known to define what is new. Yet, this web of lexical-semantic relations does not place us in a labyrinth of never-ending *différance*, as Derrida claimed. The relation of signs to other signs somehow brings us deeper knowledge of the reality that those signs signify. How does this happen? Why, when someone defines a word in terms of other words, do we conclude that we have a deeper understanding of the word in question? Is it an illusion? That may be a tempting response for skeptics, but it does not hold up practically. We all make decisions and act in certain ways based on these alleged “illusions,” and when we do so, we do not find that we have been tricked—that words are *merely* signs within a system; rather, we find ourselves better equipped to interpret experiences and phenomena that were once unintelligible to us. Yet, the relations of those experiences and phenomena

in chapter 9 of *Divine Discourse*, and Clayton Libolt, “God Speech: A Conversation with Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*,” *Crux* 43.3 (2007): 24–25.

²⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of ‘Aesthetic’ Theology,” *TJ* 8 (1987): 37–39.

to one another mirror the relations of words to other words, and it is the incomprehensible Triune God that governs those phenomena, so, once again, mystery is unavoidable.

Lastly, the integrational model, which highlights the role of context in signification, can never be exhaustively or exclusively followed because contexts are not isolated from one another. The meaning of a sign in one context is not, by default, completely isolated from its meaning in other contexts. In God's redemptive plan, all contexts are semantically and purposefully related to all other contexts, and so there is some level of commonality and intelligibility between contexts.²⁹ To know this commonality and intelligibility exhaustively is something privy only to the Trinity. For creatures, knowing what a sign means within a particular context does not bleed the context of signification dry of mystery; in fact, it brings attention to the mystery that we all too often ignore. Put differently, if we were to take the integrational model to extremes, we would be like spiders standing on an intricate and extravagant web. We might focus on only a single segment of thread, but we know that this segment is interwoven with the rest of web.

What I am pressing toward here is the truth that the mystery of the Trinity as the origin for language eschews reductionistic approaches to signification, for one, but it also encourages us to see various models as perspectives, each illustrating a part of the truth. The surrogational model highlights the power of language to refer to and access reality. Just as the Son as the Word of the Father communicates the creative and salvific thought of God to us by the power of the Spirit, so, analogously, we can continue to express and promulgate the truth of the gospel with reference to our time-space environment throughout history. Our words are dependent on the Word, and this means that our thoughts and intentions can be soundly represented in language because the God who used language to create reality is upholding all things "by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). Language is the linchpin between reality and communication. That is ultimately why signs can refer to referents in the real world.

The structural model emphasizes the role of intra-linguistic relations, but such relations in the web of words draw us closer to genuine knowledge of the world and of each other. This, again, is rooted in the Trinity. The Son is the Son *of the Father* and is filled *with the Spirit of Life*.³⁰ We understand the Son in relation to the Father and the Spirit—the Word in relation to the Speaker and the Breath that produces it. By analogy, we understand our words by our use of them *within* a linguistic system, i.e., by their relation to other words.³¹

Lastly, the integrational model accents the importance of context. The ultimate context for reality is, in fact, linguistic and Trinitarian. Reality was spoken into existence by the Father, in the Son, through the power of the Spirit. It is that context that provides the stability and meaning for every human

²⁹ "A fact in this world is what it is according to the function that it has to perform in the plan of God. Every fact *is* its function, and therefore every fact contains, in conjunction with all other facts, the covenantal claims of God upon man." Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1977), 115. "All facts of nature and of history are what they are do what they do, and undergo what they undergo, in accord with the one comprehensive counsel of God." Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 127.

³⁰ For more on this, see Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love*, trans. Roland Clark (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), 65; and John of Damascus, *Writings*, The Fathers of the Church 37, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 178.

³¹ Vern S. Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 190.

linguistic context in history.³² So, each of the models that Harris presents gives us a part of the truth, but none is wholly sufficient in itself. It is for these reasons that I am advocating for the broader definition of writing as *marking the world with our presence*. This definition can include what we have just discussed, and it has the benefit of emphasizing the analogous behavior of the triune creator and his creatures, which we will see in the next section.

2.1. God as Writer

With this definition of writing in mind, we can move on to consider whether or not it applies to God himself. We tend to think of God as a speaker, and rightly so, given biblical testimony, but I see no reason why we should not also understand God as a writer in a few special ways, when we re-examine our understanding of the relationship of speech to writing. Speech is beautifully ephemeral; it enters the slipstream of air via sound waves, crests in a syllable or point of emphasis, and then crashes to completion, thinning into silence. All of this, in the moment, binds us to the presence of another. Writing, on the other hand, can appear to be less personal, for we are taken away from the face of the speaker, removed in time and space.³³ But is this the best way to view speech and writing—to bifurcate them as behaviors? I do not think so.

What if we consider the relationship between speech and writing to be much closer, in terms of their “marking” of reality? Speech marks time but fades just as quickly as it impresses, living on in the memory of the hearer. Writing, as symbolic speech, marks space and lives on in physicality. In this sense, when we consider what God has spoken, namely, creation and special revelation (Scripture), we can still see the effects of that speech in a symbolic form around us, i.e., in creation and in the words of Scripture. In this sense, since we are dealing not just with the temporal effects of God’s speech, but with its spatial manifestation, we can say that God has written reality.³⁴ God’s instrument for doing so is his own voice. In the communicative power of the Trinity, sound brought substance, a reality that is exhaustively revelational of God’s presence. As the psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Ps 19:1–3).

As a result of this truth, we must be careful not to conclude that God *only* writes, per se, in instances such as the giving of the Ten Commandments, when he used his finger to inscribe the law on tablets of stone (Exod 31:18),³⁵ or when he wrote on the plaster wall of the king’s palace in Daniel 5. This is true in a narrow sense, but, as we noted earlier, such a view betrays a definition of writing that can restrict our understanding. With the broader definition we have adopted—writing as marking the world with

³² Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 39–41, 251–58.

³³ This has been noted by many authors throughout history. Gadamer, to offer an example from someone whom we’ve already referenced, suggested that “writing is self-alienation.” Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 409.

³⁴ This wording is not meant to oppose the biblically explicit teaching that God “spoke” reality into existence, which I affirm elsewhere. Here, we are merely looking at another facet of how God’s creative activity can be articulated anthropomorphically.

³⁵ See Arthur W. Hunt III, *The Vanishing Word: The Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 29–52.

personal presence—we can say that all of physical reality has been written by God because it bears his presence and continues to exist for his purposes.³⁶

Put differently, because all things are essentially linguistic products of the Trinitarian God and mark his presence in the world, there is a sense in which God has written himself in everything. In the words of Dorothy Sayers, we might say that in God’s general revelation, he has written his “autobiography,” i.e., he has clearly revealed who he is (Rom 1:19–20).³⁷ There is nothing that exists in the world that does not in some sense testify to who God is, and nothing that is not written into his personal plan for history.³⁸ Creation and history are steeped in his presence because he has written them.

God has also written redemption in his special revelation. The repetition of the Greek word γέγραπται, “it is written,” both in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, lends warrant to this conclusion.³⁹ The term (along with the participial form γεγραμμένα) is often used to express that what God has declared in Scripture must be followed for the redemption of his people (Josh 1:8; 8:31; 23:6; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Chr 23:18; Ezra 3:2, 4; Ps 40:7; Matt 2:5; 4:6, 7, 10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mark 14:21; and others). Such a usage implies the fixity that we commonly associate with the craft of writing.⁴⁰ Triune writing, we noted, brands an object of reality with its author’s presence (i.e., God himself).⁴¹ And that presence does not evaporate. It holds. God is always present with his words, bringing them to fulfillment.⁴²

³⁶ For example, see passages such as Psalm 96:12; 98:8; Isaiah 55:12; and Luke 19:40. Reading such passages as being “purely metaphorical” treats the text as rather shallow. We must go further and explore what such anthropomorphisms indicate. I argue here that they reflect the presence of God and, in a covenantal sense, bear witness to what he has done and is doing.

³⁷ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: HarperOne, 1987), 89. For more on God as autobiographer, see pages 87–92. Here we are referring to general revelation, which does not bring saving knowledge of God through a Spirit-wrought relationship with Christ. The clarity of God’s revelation in nature and in the human conscience convicts us; it does not offer us salvation. The latter is the work of God’s special revelation in Scripture.

³⁸ Oliphint reminds us that “history can be properly defined only in light of what the second person of the Trinity has condescended to do—both in creation generally and for his people more specifically.” K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 64. Sayers notes that in the incarnation, God wrote himself into history as the central character. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 88.

³⁹ There are over 90 occurrences of this form, many of which are meant to support an authoritative statement, such as Jesus’s use of the phrase in his responses to Satan during the wilderness temptation (Matt 4:4, 6, 7, 10).

⁴⁰ Hunt, supported by a great number of others in the Reformed tradition, notes that “the very notion of divine revelation, the communication of truth that cannot otherwise be known, demands a method of documentation and preservation that goes beyond orality, pictorial representation, dance, or smoke signals. . . . [only writing] possesses the objectivity and permanency needed to tell the old, old story.” Hunt, *The Vanishing Word*, 35.

⁴¹ This approach runs directly against Derrida’s view of writing as “dead.” For Derrida, since all written words endlessly defer to other words, they do not really signify the author’s presence. They only keep us running ever through a semantic gauntlet of *différance*. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 65–66. Vanhoozer opposes Derrida by affirming that “the linguistic elements mediate the author’s presence to participants in the covenant of discourse—to those with the faith that seeks textual understanding” (p. 240).

⁴² See also Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 26, where he explains how “the word of God manifests the *presence* of God.” Both Frame and Poythress are discussing God’s speech. But that speech in time has been written down in space, so the principle still applies.

Going further in the connection between speech and writing, we cannot forget that speech is still present when we read written words. We speak when we read.⁴³ Western civilization has been so long removed from its aural roots that we often forget that reading used to be a primarily external and communal event, rather than an internal and individualistic activity.⁴⁴ We now think of reading in the latter sense, but the former sense is what undergirds it. When we read, we speak the words in our head. Recall the famous incident in book VI of *Confessions* when Augustine walked in on St. Ambrose staring at a book in silence.⁴⁵ Augustine was awestruck because he was mostly familiar with reading as a verbal practice. Today we might be awestruck by the opposite.

The point is that God is present with his written words when we read them because he still speaks through them. In writing, authorial presence lives on through time and space, and that is the beauty, the gift, of the craft.

In both creation and special revelation, then, we encounter God as the writer who marks the world with his personal presence.

2.2. Humans as Writers

As creatures made in the image of the Trinity, we follow suite, and so we have arrived at an answer to one of the questions from the introduction: what is it that we are doing when we write? We are marking the world with our presence. We have a God-given authority and control with written language that enables us to mark the world, in a manner analogous to God's ultimate control, authority, and presence in his word, which marks the entire cosmos.⁴⁶ God has written all of reality, including the story of redemption. We can mark that reality with our words and take our place in that story. What accounts for the uniqueness of our "marks" is our personhood. Just as the tripersonal God marks creation with his unique presence, so we mark his creation with our individual personality.⁴⁷ But more needs to be said about why, exactly, we are called to do so. This will get at another question from the introduction: what, theologically, is behind the call to write?⁴⁸

3. *Writing as a Trinitarian Craft*

Marking reality with our presence and taking our place in the story of redemption is a matter of imaging the Trinitarian God. Briefly stated, the theological impetus for writing is grounded in what John Frame calls the "linguistic model" of the Trinity, which we have already referenced. Dorothy Sayers applies this model profoundly in *The Mind of the Maker*. Her work, I believe, provides the link between what writing is (marking the world with our presence) and in whose image we write. After revisiting

⁴³ "What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can invoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound." Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

⁴⁴ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 73, 115–17.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* 6.3.3.

⁴⁶ Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 50–65; Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 30.

⁴⁷ See Yaghjian, *Writing Theology Well*, 5.

⁴⁸ Note here that "the call to write" is referring to writing more generally, not directly to God's special call that the biblical writers record his truth, as in Rev 1:11, 19. The latter is related to our call to writing, but I consider it a distinct redemptive-historical event that would require separate treatment.

the linguistic model of the Trinity with regards to writing, I will engage with Sayers to consider how, specifically, we image the Trinity when we write.

Frame's linguistic model of the Trinity is by no means exclusive to him; in fact, it has been frequently referenced throughout church history, but Frame draws particular attention to it when discussing the Trinity. Simply put, "The Father exerts his lordship through speech (Pss 29; 147:4; Isa 40:26; 43:1; 62:2; 65:15; Eph 3:14–15). The Son is the Word spoken (John 1:1; Rom 10:6–8 [cf. Deut 30:11–14]; Heb 1:1–3; 1 John 1:1–3; Rev 3:14; 19:13). The Spirit is the powerful breath that drives the word along to accomplish its purpose (Gen 1:2; Ps 33:6; 1 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21)."⁴⁹ There is a divine speaker, his divine speech, and the divine breath that carries it to the audience.⁵⁰ Given how we have defined writing, we can also say that, by the Son and in the Power of the Spirit, the Father writes reality. The Father is writer, the Son is his medium, and the Spirit is the effect of that medium.⁵¹

We can easily see how this applies analogously to human writers: every writer produces words that affect readers; every writer uses a medium that has a particular effect on the audience. We image the Trinity in this *process*. Yet, we also image the Trinity in the written *product*. How so? Sayers answered this question by introducing the concepts of *idea*, *energy*, and *power*, which we can loosely associate with content, expression, and effect. For Sayers, each of these concepts was linked to a person of the Trinity. The Father resembles the idea, for the idea is "passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning"; the Son resembles the energy, since the energy is "begotten of that idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter"; and the Spirit resembles the power, because the power is "the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul." She ends by noting that "these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without other."⁵²

While Frame's understanding of the linguistic model of the Trinity accounts for the *process* of writing, Sayers's application of this model accounts for the *product*: what the writer produces. By examining a piece of prose, we find that every writer has envisioned an idea, attempted to craft a felicitous expression for it, and predicted the corresponding effect on the reader. In prose, this is done almost constantly—not just on the level of larger discourse, but even on the sentence level. Every clause holds an idea that is expressed uniquely by the author and has specific effects on the reader. Writers and readers are often unaware of this phenomenon, but that is merely a testament to the truth that it is deeply embedded in the craft of writing. We only notice it when something goes wrong: when the idea is unclear or false, or

⁴⁹ Frame, *Doctrine of the Word of God*, 66.

⁵⁰ See also Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 19, 21, 31–33.

⁵¹ Walter Ong objects to this, and Derrida would side with him, I think, for where the linguistic model of the Trinity is seen most clearly in John's Prologue, Ong insists that it is quite fitting that God *speaks*, rather than *writes* the Son, since "the spoken word is always an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word." Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 74. He goes on to imply that the spoken word is active and living while the written word is dormant and dead (based on what seems to be poor exegesis of 2 Cor 3:6). But Ong seems to have forgotten that as he writes he is affirming and exemplifying the dynamicity of written words. And if 2 Corinthians 3:6 is telling us that written language is dead (or "kills"), then what are we to do with Hebrews 4:12—"For the word of God is living and active . . ."—which clearly references the *written* words of Scripture? The truth is that both spoken and written language depend on an audience for the "action," whether that audience is immediately present or two decades removed. Conscious engagement—that, at least in part, is what accounts for the "active" nature of communication, whether spoken or written.

⁵² Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 37–38.

the expression is ambiguous or inappropriate, or when the effect is not what the writer intended or what the reader expected.⁵³ Each of Sayers's concepts warrants further attention.

3.1. Content (Idea)

All writers are interpreters of experience.⁵⁴ That means that whatever interpretation a writer has, be it eccentric or shared by the majority, it must be clearly identified. In other words, a writer must *have* something to say, i.e., be able to articulate his or her interpretation of a particular experience or set of experiences. This often takes the form of a thesis or main point, which “strongly influences the organization of his discourse and the kind of information that he includes.”⁵⁵ The thesis is like a promise to the reader, creating expectations that, when left unfulfilled, can make readers frustrated or confused. A faulty or obscure thesis is, on the writer's part, a failure to felicitously image the Father, whose unified purpose (idea) to create and subsequently redeem creation is clearly developed throughout Scripture. The purpose of creatures, what the WSC calls our “chief end,” is “to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”⁵⁶

Having a unifying idea in a piece of prose, then, is not a hidebound maxim of dated English teachers; it is a timeless means of providing focus, and thus of imaging the Father, who has a singular focus in creating and redeeming the cosmos.

3.2. Expression (Energy)

Once that unity has been clearly established in the writer's mind, he or she truly enters the richness of language, which is ultimately rooted in the Son. “The Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the standard for the analogically related word of God to us. The word to us is the standard for the analogically related words of human beings to one another.”⁵⁷ Put differently, the eternal Word is the basis of God's special revelation, and God's special revelation—his speech to us—is the basis for our use of words with each other. The Word who is eternally spoken by the Father manifests the Father's thought, just as our language manifests our thought.⁵⁸ And just as the Father eternally chooses to speak the Word, and through him to create and uphold reality, we, analogously, choose words that should create and uphold the thoughts and sentiments we wish to convey to the reader. In our use of words and expressions, we seek to image the Son as the Word of the Father.

Yet, what does this look like practically? Every language is both broad and deep, not merely in terms of lexical choice but also in terms of literary devices, organizational patterns, tone of voice, and so on. Writers will never encounter the problem of not having an option for expression; writers always have

⁵³ These are instances of what Sayers calls “scalene trinities.”

⁵⁴ Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁶ Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 1.

⁵⁷ Vern S. Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy,” *WTJ* 57 (1995): 188.

⁵⁸ Geerhardus Vos suggests that the Son as the Word signifies the Son's rationale “inherent in the speaker,” as being the “imprint of [the speaker's] personal existence,” and as tied to the speaker by living on in the speaker's consciousness. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, *Theology Proper*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 57.

choices. What separates an ordinary writer from an extraordinary one—a writer who does not image the Son from a writer who does—is the ability to choose well. By “well,” I do not mean that a writer’s diction is so elevated that the reader must hold a dictionary in one hand and the author’s essay in the other. Christopher Hitchens was a very gifted writer, but his word choice too often got the better of him in this regard. For example, the point of a description is to bring to the reader’s attention certain cutting details or features of whatever or whomever is being described. Descriptions offer a clear, concrete image, in a manner ultimately analogous to the way in which the Son is offered to us as the exact imprint of the Father’s nature (Heb 1:3). But what image does the reader get from Hitchens’s description of Saul Bellow: “a somewhat rakish fellow, sharply dressed and evidently fizzing with moxie, who meets the world with a cool and level gaze that belies the slight impression of a pool shark or racetrack con artist”?⁵⁹ One is not quite sure which word to look up first, and putting them all together does not exactly offer a concrete portrayal of the person. The image, in other words, is still fuzzy. Sayers might classify this as a “Son-ridden” problem, a case in which the expression is embellished to the point where the content is hurt and the power of the message is lost.⁶⁰ In other words, the writer is not faithfully imaging the Son.

This might be one of the many reasons why people still rank George Orwell among the greatest English prose writers of all time. He knew when to dress up his prose and when to leave it casual attire, and he often left the reader with concrete imagery. Consider his description of himself among the poor and homeless of northern England during the early 1930s: “Littered on the grass, we seemed dingy, urban riff-raff. We defiled the scene, like sardine-tins and paper bags on the seashore.”⁶¹ “Sardine-tins and paper bags” is concrete enough to give readers something to grasp, and we can easily understand what he is saying: the poor and homeless were seen as social trash on the landscape of the city. Such imagery evokes our sympathy as readers by giving us an image to work with, and thus effectively shaping our perspective.⁶² Just as we see the Father through the Son, we can see Orwell’s idea through the words.

3.3. Effect (Power)

Orwell’s words also have an effect on us in several ways, and we may not be conscious of some of them. We can draw on language theory in order to notice and better understand these effects. Speech-act theory, for example, would draw our attention to the effect that Orwell’s description (illocution) has on us (perlocution). His comparisons between people and garbage, for instance, may evoke in the reader a sense of sympathy or injustice.⁶³

However, if we are to truly appreciate the rich effect that Orwell’s words have on us, we must go deeper; we must pay attention to the immediate and broader context of the sentences we have quoted:

⁵⁹ Christopher Hitchens, *Arguably: Essays* (New York: Twelve, 2011), 62.

⁶⁰ Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 164.

⁶¹ George Orwell, “The Spike,” in *George Orwell: Essays* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2002), 8.

⁶² Note here the close bond between expression and effect, which is rooted in the bond between the Son and the Spirit.

⁶³ I am deliberately choosing here to engage with the language theory of Kenneth Pike rather than with speech-act theory. While the latter can be helpful in bringing our attention to the perlocutions of a writer’s illocutionary acts, it does not sufficiently account for the rich context of language in terms of grammar, phonology, and reference. For an introduction to speech-act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975). For a contemporary use of speech-act theory in a theological setting, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*.

“Littered on the grass, we seemed dingy, urban riff-raff. We defiled the scene, like sardine-tins and paper bags on the seashore.” These sentences can be considered a unit of language, their general purpose being to describe Orwell and his company through a comparison. Yet, like all sentences, this group of sentences is part of a larger unit of discourse—a paragraph.⁶⁴ Specifically, they end the first paragraph of Orwell’s essay, and that context is important in affecting us as readers. Immediately before the sentences just quoted, we read, “Overhead the chestnut branches were covered with blossom, and beyond that great woolly clouds floated almost motionless in a clear sky.” Such a contrast between descriptions! That contrast affects the way in which his final sentences in the paragraph strike us.

More broadly, we know that there are many paragraphs in this essay, and each is interconnected with the others. The effect that this unit of language has on us is connected to the effect that his other descriptions have on us. For example, in the second paragraph of the essay, he describes one of the officers as “a tartar, a tyrant, a bawling, blasphemous, uncharitable dog.” Later in the essay, he describes another character: “Old ‘Daddy,’ aged seventy-four, with his truss, and his red, watering eyes: a herring-gutted starveling, with sparse beard and sunken cheeks, looking like the corpse of Lazarus in some primitive picture.” The effect of Orwell’s description in the first paragraph is related to the effect that these other descriptions have on us. Each of them brings us closer to him, drawing us in to the sullied scene of Britain’s down-and-out crowd of the 1930s. The broader effects of each of his descriptions are related to more specific effects that are tied to each description, such as sympathy or revilement or compassion.

More narrowly, we can look at the effect that Orwell’s sentences have in terms of their grammar, phonology, and reference.⁶⁵ Each of these areas—or hierarchies—contributes something unique to the effect that these sentences have on us. We need not go into detail here. We can simply note an example of the phonology of his sentences, namely the rhythm and consonance he employs. We don’t often think about rhythm when we read, but the latter part of Orwell’s second sentence has a cadence to it. “Sar-dine tins and pa-per bags”: a pair of two-syllable + one-syllable word combinations. The pattern makes the prose more memorable. That is to say, the sound of the words has a mnemonic effect on us. As for consonance, note the repetition of “d” and “r” sounds in the first sentence: **LitteRed** on the **gRass**, we seemed **dingy**, **uRban Riff-Raff**. The repetition of consonant sounds complements the rhythm and impresses on the reader’s mind the sound patterns of English. These sound patterns affect us by highlighting the relations we can make between words not simply in light of their meaning, but in light of their sound.

Now, theologically, we must remember that the effects and power of Orwell’s words are grounded in the effect and power that the Spirit has in applying the work of the Word—in creation and redemption. The reality that surrounds us, written by the Word of the Father, profoundly impresses and shapes us as the Spirit works through it to reveal the omnipresence of the divine Writer. Analogously, the words and expressions a human writer crafts are empowered to reflect the writer’s presence. This empowered presence of the writer—and the power of the message itself—leads to clear and effective communication.

⁶⁴ “No [linguistic] unit relevant to human beings exists without its having a relation to a system of interlocking types of context. The units exist in a vast matrix of n-dimensional intersecting relations within which the specific unit is distributed and which comprise our universe with our cognitive frames of reference.” Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 135.

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.*, 69–106.

Yet, how do human writers know when this has happened? The true but painful answer is that writers only know this based on *how readers respond*. Readers are not an infallible measure of a writer's expressive abilities, but they are the most important critics a writer has.

Extraordinary writers are prophetic of reader responses.⁶⁶ They work ahead of the reader, gauging how a turn of phrase or idiom will sound to a reader's ear, measuring the impact of the unavoidable associations that particular words and phrases have for a particular audience.⁶⁷ While it is certainly true that no one knows a person's thoughts except that person's indwelling spirit (1 Cor 2:11), it is also true that writers are remarkably gifted by the Holy Spirit himself to empathize with the inner workings of the reader. In sum, writers faithfully image the Spirit when their words are empowered and effective within the hearts and minds of their readers.

What we have seen thus far is that writers mark the world with their presence by having a unifying idea (content/idea), embodying that idea felicitously (expression/energy), and doing so in a way that produces an intended effect on the reader (effect/power). This parallels the Father's unifying idea of creation and redemption (for his own glory), according to which he has written reality through his Son in the power of the Spirit.

Yet, there is still more to say. Up to this point, I have intentionally left one of the puzzle pieces out: the Trinitarian principle of *coinherence* or *perichoresis*, which underlies what we have just discussed. *Perichoresis* refers to the intimate union of the divine persons, such that "each is in each, and all are in each, and all are one."⁶⁸ This concept applies in a limited sense to the work of writers, as Sayers has playfully expounded.

Content, expression, and effect are bound up together, and each is equally important. We make distinctions between them, but always with a sense that they should coinhere with one another. A writer who has weighty ideas but expresses them in drab prose is not exemplifying coinherence (expression and effect are hurt in the process), and readers will suffer.⁶⁹ Likewise with a writer whose prose seems sharp but whose ideas are nebulous or disheveled. The content (idea), expression (energy), and effect (power) must be equally but distinctly present.⁷⁰ When one is lacking, the whole piece of writing suffers, resulting in a "scalene trinity."⁷¹ Thus, writing is also a matter of *perichoretic* imaging. This gives credence to what we have been saying all along: the craft of writing is thoroughly Trinitarian. It is built upon and draws its effectiveness from the relationships and work of the persons in the Godhead.

⁶⁶ Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 122.

⁶⁷ Here, Sayers helpfully reminds us that associations are not an evil, as if writers should purge their prose of any wording that might stir up associations in the reader's mind (that would be impossible anyway). Rather, "words and phrases become charged with Power acquired by passing through the minds of successive writers." *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.10.

⁶⁹ This can be seen as an "image-bearing" problem. When we do not account for coinherence in the concepts we have presented, we are not really imaging the Trinity in our communicative activity. Sayers provides an insightful and humorous discussion of the Trinitarian heresies that writers can fall into. See Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 149–78.

⁷⁰ Or, as Sayers puts it in creedal language, they must be consubstantial and coequal.

⁷¹ It seems that in our day, academics struggle most with the scalene trinity of being "Father-riden," in the sense that they push ideas onto readers without giving enough thought to expression (Son) and effect (Spirit).

4. Conclusion

We set out towards a theology of writing, and I believe we have moved in that direction. We have found that writing is a thoroughly Trinitarian, image-bearing craft with divine roots and untold human potentialities. Writers are marking the world with their presence in a manner analogous to the way in which the Trinitarian God has marked the world with his presence in physical reality.

If Christian writers are imaging such a creative and powerful communicative being whenever they put pen to paper, then we must constantly remember the gravity of our calling. Writing is not the popularly assumed “vehicle for thought” that most academics consider it to be. It is much more. In writing, we mark the world that is marked by the Trinity. This in itself should draw out not merely our enthusiasm, but also our sobriety, our attentiveness, and, perhaps above all else, our sense of service. For the Father sent his Word in the Spirit not so that he might be served, but so that he might serve and offer himself as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; cf. John 13:13–17). God gave his Word for the world; the least we can do in attendant response is give our words, ourselves, to our readers by striving to faithfully image the Triune God in our prose.