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DO YOU SEE HOW I SEE? THE TRINITARIAN ROOTS OF HUMAN PERCEPTION

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The Reformed tradition has made clear that the doctrine of the Trinity is a purely revealed doctrine. Only the radiance of Scripture could illuminate a truth so lofty. We cannot walk through the woods and recognize the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the venous pattern of a maple leaf—at least, not without prior knowledge of the triune God as revealed in Scripture.

Yet, the Reformed position on the place of the Trinity in general revelation seems to call for more nuanced treatment. Van Til, for instance, always affirmed that God’s triunity is the essential mark of his identity, and that all knowledge is predicated not upon a deistic god or the god of bare theism but upon the triune God of Scripture.¹ Before him, Bavinck claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is the centerpiece of Christianity and is definitive of the true God.² In other words, the bedrock of God’s being is his triunity. Scripture—both the NT and OT—eschews deism. Though the unity of God may be more prevalent in the OT and the plurality of God more prevalent in the NT, we cannot say that the God revealed in all of Scripture, and, what’s more, in all of nature, is any other than the triune God. In light of this, “if the world was made by the Holy Trinity, and it also declares the glory of God, it seems reasonable to suppose that there will be hints all around us in creation that point to the Trinity.”³ So, when Paul speaks of all men having a knowledge of God through what has

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¹ “The Trinity ... gives the most basic description possible of God as the *principium essendi* of knowledge for man” (Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007], 30). “Our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition” (p. 59). With regards to the final reference point of all interpretation, i.e., all predication of meaning, Van Til wrote, “The Protestant principle finds this in the self-contained ontological Trinity.” It is this God that “is always the most basic and therefore the ultimate or final reference point in human interpretation” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008], 100). On this doctrine taken explicitly from Scripture, see pp. 227–28, 236, and 241.

² Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 296.

³ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 435.

been made (Rom 1), he must be referencing the Trinitarian God, but in what sense?⁴ How can we say that people who have not seen or accepted the light of Scripture still have knowledge of a doctrine that the Reformed tradition has adamantly defended as revealed solely in special revelation?

In the following pages, we address this question by positing a dual knowledge of the Trinity: salvific and non-salvific. We then explore one avenue in which non-salvific knowledge of the Trinity presents itself by drawing on the philosophy of Kenneth L. Pike. Ultimately, I aim to show that the presence of particle (static), wave (dynamic), and field (relational) perspectives—considered in perichoretic relationship to one another—shows one way in which the Trinitarian God permeates human perception. Thus, Pike’s perspectives serve as an example of how people at all times and places depend on the Trinity for their coherent perception of reality, albeit none of them knows this triune God *as triune*, in a salvific sense. Non-salvific knowledge of the triune God, then, is a blind reliance that only enforces the culpability addressed by Paul in Rom 1. For Christians, from whose eyes the scales of sin have fallen away (Acts 9:18), this non-salvific knowledge serves to deepen our amazement at the ubiquity of the Trinity—for whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom 11:36).

I. *Salvific Knowledge of the Trinity*

Nearly every writer in the Reformed tradition who insists that knowledge of the Trinity only comes from Scripture is referencing *salvific* knowledge of the Trinity, that is, discrete awareness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, specifically in their redemptive roles.⁵ Salvific knowledge of the Trinity entails the *pactum*

⁴ “As Calvin says, when the word God is used indefinitely it means the Triune God, and not the Father in distinction from the Son and Spirit” (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013], 1:467).

⁵ This includes the mainstay historical Reformers, Luther and Calvin, as well as modern and contemporary Reformed theologians such as Bavinck, Hodge, Warfield, and Berkhof. David Lumppp summarizes Luther’s view on the Trinity in Scripture as follows: “Along with the parallel affirmation of the one indivisible and eternal Godhead, the internal personal distinctions can only be believed. This is what Holy Scripture teaches, Luther states casually, and to say anything less or anything else is to revert to the errors of ancient heretics, the rabbis, or the Turks.... Martin Luther understood that the being of the Triune God is known neither speculatively nor abstractly, but only in a relationship of trust, insofar as the God of the Gospel is revealed to sinners in the Son and through the Holy Spirit” (David A. Lumppp, “Returning to Wittenberg: What Luther Teaches Today’s Theologians on the Holy Trinity,” *CTQ* 67 [2003]: 232, 233–34). Mickey Mattox, following Peura, notes that “the knowledge of God for Luther is grounded first, last, and always in the humanity of Christ. This is not to say, however, that God the Father or God the Holy Spirit are not to be known, as if they could somehow be rendered superfluous by Luther’s christocentrism. To the contrary, it is the Son who in his incarnate humanity opens the way to knowing God—Father, Son, and Spirit—in a saving way.” The gospel revealed in Scripture was, for Luther, what leads to a full understanding of the triune God. See Mickey L. Mattox, “From Faith to the Text and Back Again: Martin Luther on the Trinity in the Old Testament,” *ProEccles* 15 (2006): 292.

Calvin, as well, leaves perspicuous knowledge of the triune God within the courtyard of Scripture. T. F. Torrance writes that, for Calvin, “we may know God only through sharing in the knowledge of

and *ordo salutis*—that in his triunity God has planned, executed, applied, and will one day consummate his particular scheme of salvation.

Our salvific knowledge of the Trinity allows us to identify not only the redemptive work of the persons of the Godhead but also their work in creation. Thus, we come to find that each person of the triune God was involved in forging the cosmos—God the Father spoke his Word by the breath of the Holy Spirit in bringing the visible and invisible into existence.⁶ He then ordered the world through his Word and gave life to animate creatures by breathing into them (a reference to the Spirit).⁷ It was no deistic god that created all that we see and do not see (Col 1:16); it was the Trinity.

Once we have acquired salvific knowledge of the Trinity through the Word, the scratched and fractured lenses of our epistemic glasses are replaced. We look not only at all of God’s dealings with man, but also every fiber of the world around us as bearing the glorious mark of the Trinity. With Calvin, we affirm that we cannot help but see this, for “there is no part of the world, however small, in which at least some spark of God’s glory does not shine.”⁸ We must also remember, with Calvin, that in order for us to know this triune God truly, it was necessary that he open “his holy lips,” for “he saw that his face and image etched into the edifice of the world were not enough.”⁹ Had God not spoken, we would certainly have no *conscious* knowledge that he is triune. We would rely on such a truth, no doubt, but we would be blind to it. “A blind man cannot see the light of the sun but the sun is there for all that. In fact, the blind man is blind only in relation to the light of the sun.”¹⁰ It is this blind reliance that I will call *non-salvific* knowledge of the Trinity.

It is important to note here that most Reformed theologians up to this point have used the phrase “the doctrine of the Trinity” in reference only to salvific knowledge—a perspicuous and nuanced understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their eternal fellowship and redemptive action. But I argue that non-salvific knowledge of the triune God should be considered within the

the Son by the Father and in the knowledge of the Father by the Son, and the revelation he gives us of himself through his Spirit (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; 1 Cor. 2:9ff.). Practically this means that ‘we must not be minded to inquire of God anywhere than in his sacred Word, or think anything of him except under the guidance of his Word, or to say anything of him except what is taken from the same Word’ (*Inst.*, 1.13.21)” (T. F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” *CTJ* 25 [1990]: 166).

For modern and contemporary assertions in line with Luther and Calvin, see Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 279, 329; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:442.; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), 22; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 85.

⁶ See Douglas Kelly, *The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 132.

⁷ Job 33:4.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: A New Translation of the 1541 Edition*, trans. Robert White (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014), 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

¹⁰ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 214.

purview of that doctrine. With Louis Berkhof, we can affirm that “the doctrine of the Trinity is very decidedly a doctrine of revelation,” that is, special revelation. But it is also foundational in general revelation.¹¹ And Van Til, it seems, would concur:

Though we cannot tell why the Godhead should exist tri-personally, we can understand something of the fact, after we are told that God exists as a triune being, that the unity and the plurality of this world has back of it a God in whom unity and the plurality are equally ultimate. Thus we may say that this world, in some of its aspects at least, shows analogy to the Trinity. This world is made by God and, therefore, to the extent that it is capable of doing so, it may be thought of as revealing God as he exists. And God exists as a triune being.¹²

Though in the salvific sense non-Christians simply have no possible perception of the Trinity because “all is yellow to the jaundiced eye,”¹³ it is *that eye* that provides non-salvific knowledge of the Trinity.

II. *Non-Salvific Knowledge of the Trinity*

Van Til, perhaps more than any other Reformed theologian, demanded that all Christians recognize that meaning, coherence, and truth exist only as rooted in the self-contained ontological Trinity. He recurrently claimed that it is this triune God who is “the final reference point in interpretation.”¹⁴ In fact, “if we are to have *coherence* in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition.”¹⁵

When we pair this statement with Van Til’s avowal that we live in a world that is “exhaustively revelational” of the triune God,¹⁶ we cannot help but ask how the triunity of God bleeds through the fabric of general revelation—and not just the world outside of the human mind, but the human mind itself, especially as it seeks to think analogically. “Since the human mind is created by God and is therefore in itself naturally revelational of God, the mind may be sure that its system is true and corresponds on a finite scale to the system of God.”¹⁷ Is

¹¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 85.

¹² Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 364–65.

¹³ Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 59.

¹⁶ Van Til, *Common Grace*, 169. Later he notes, “the foundation of the thinking of both the Amsterdam and the Old Princeton men was that which both derived via Calvin and Paul, namely, the fact that God has unavoidably and clearly revealed himself in general and in special revelation. The whole triune God is involved in this revelation. The whole triune God testifies to man in this revelation” (p. 186). See also Van Til’s *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 266.

¹⁷ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 292.

this system not trinitarian? If we cannot escape revealing the triune God in our intellectual consciousness,¹⁸ then are we not bound to conclude that our “ectypal knowledge must inevitably show the stamp of its trinitarian archetype” and that “all human knowledge has a trinitarian structure in its source”?¹⁹

With others, including Van Til, I affirm that our knowledge rests upon the *internal* coherence of the Trinity, that is, the equal ultimacy of the one and many, and the perichoretic relationship of the persons in the Godhead.²⁰ While Van Til would certainly echo Berkhof and claim that one of the main distinctions between men and God is that “man is uni-personal, while God is tri-personal,” the fact that man’s interpretation of the world around him bears the mark of his Trinitarian maker seems unavoidable.²¹

III. Vestigia Trinitatis

The recognition of this truth leads us into the somewhat precarious terrain of Augustine’s *vestigia trinitatis*, “vestiges of the Trinity.”²² He dedicated most of one of his major works, *De trinitate*, to surveying God’s trinitarian imprints on man’s nature.²³ I say “precarious” because most theologians, especially in the Reformed tradition, see a tendency in every trinitarian analogy toward either modalism or tritheism. The fear is certainly warranted, for, when pressed, each analogy certainly does lead in one of these directions by default. But we must remember two points when it comes to vestiges of the Trinity. First, we cannot ever expect exact correspondence between an analogy and its referent. If there were exact correspondence, *it would not be an analogy!* By definition, an analogy is an “aptness of proportion” or a “resemblance of relations,” not an identity of relations.²⁴ The goal of an analogy is to draw out similarities between it and

¹⁸ Van Til, *Common Grace*, 53.

¹⁹ Vern S. Poythress, “Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009), 191, 192. David Bentley Hart notes that we are creatures “called from nothingness to participate in the being that flows from [God], and to manifest his beauty in the depths of our nature.” If this is the case, should we not assume that human perception is indelibly marked by the Trinitarian God? See David Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*,” *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 542.

²⁰ See Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 58–59; *Defense of the Faith*, 47–50.

²¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 84. “Augustine said, that as man was made in the image of the Triune God, we have reason to expect something in the constitution of our nature answering to the Trinity in the Godhead” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:478–79).

²² Augustine, *Trin.* 12.2.6–8.

²³ “It was especially Augustine . . . who in various ways and perspectives found the clear imprints of the Trinity in human consciousness and reason.” Later in the church, this developed into the so-called psychological and sociological analogies, but it was the former that held Augustine’s attention. Within man’s consciousness, he found traces of God’s trinity in “the trinity of being, knowing, and willing; essence, knowledge, and love; [and] mind, knowledge, and love” (Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 325).

²⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. James A. H. Murray et al., 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1:432.

its referent in illuminating ways, not to define the referent itself. Second, we invariably encounter paradox and incongruity when trying to form an analogy from this world for the God who made it. A trinitarian analogy is the functional equivalent of trying to explain the light of the sun with a candle. The sun is what allows the candle (both in its material composition and in our vision of it) to exist in the first place; it gives light only because the sun exists and creates its elemental environment. By its very definition the candle is contingent and dependent on the sun, and so pales in comparison. If we try to move from the candle to the sun, we are immediately frustrated by the candle's limitation and inadequacy. Its features and relations simply *cannot* correspond sufficiently to those of the sun. Something similar might be said of our earthly analogies for the Trinity, because it is the self-contained ontological Trinity that grounds everything earthly. No analogy, then, will be adequate because we are moving from what is *ens ab alio* to what is *ens a se*.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that analogies for the Trinity are unhelpful and inappropriate. We simply need to realize the limitations outlined above. We must constantly remind ourselves, even in hyper-vigilance, that psychological analogies for the Trinity trend toward modalism, and social analogies for the Trinity trend toward tritheism. If we can do that, then we can be faithful to the revelation of Scripture as we explore the depth and breadth of God's Trinitarian lordship over all of creation, including the human mind.

Keeping this in the background, we move to examine a psychological analogy of the Trinity in human perception. We must begin by noting that all those who posit psychological analogies for the Trinity tread in Augustine's tracks. Indeed, Augustine himself outlined an analogy for the Trinity in human perception in terms of object, vision, and conscious attention.

When we see some particular body, there are three things which we can very easily remark and distinguish from each other. First of all there is the thing we see, a stone or a flame or anything else the eyes can see, which of course could exist even before it was seen. Next there is the actual sight or vision, which did not exist before we sensed that object presented to the sense. Thirdly there is what holds the sense of the eyes on the thing being seen as long as it is being seen, namely the conscious intention.²⁵

These three elements—object, vision, and conscious intention—interlock and interpenetrate one another, which brings up a critical feature of all genuine vestiges of the Trinity. A vestige of the triune God cannot simply be a triad. One of its identifying markers is the perichoretic relations between the three entities

²⁵ Augustine, *Trin.* 11.1.2. Augustine was well aware that such analogies were helpful but limited; he “did not intend by these analogies and images to offer a priori proof of the Trinity. On the contrary, he proceeds from faith in the Trinity; he accepts the teaching on the basis of the Word of God.” In short, “though everyone can discern the imprint of the Trinity in the human spirit, only believers can recognize it as the imprint of the threefold being of God” (Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 326).

of the triad, so as to reflect the coinherence or *circumcessio* of the Trinity.²⁶

While Augustine's triad highlights human perception in general, there is another triad of perception that focuses more on an observer's particular choices in perceiving reality. For this, I would turn our attention to Kenneth L. Pike (1912–2000).

IV. Pike's Triad of Observer Perspectives

Kenneth Pike stood out in the linguistic landscape of the twentieth century, in part, for his tri-structural view of language. Later in his career, he expanded his linguistic observations into an integrated philosophy—stretching concepts originally applied to language in order to explain something of the nature of reality and human perception in general. In what follows, I aim to show how Pike's triad of perception is functionally necessary for every human being. Thus, it is a helpful example of how inescapable, non-salvific knowledge of the Trinity permeates reality, not just outside the mind, but within it.

In Pike's last major work, sometimes dismissed as a simplistic attempt at speculative philosophy, he reaffirms the notion of *observer perspectives*, which he had carried with him through the majority of his linguistic career.²⁷ The naming of these perspectives varied over the decades, but eventually settled on the terms *particle*, *wave*, and *field*.²⁸ Each of these perspectives foregrounds

²⁶ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2013), 477–78. With regards to our knowledge of the Trinitarian persons, “each of the persons bears the whole divine nature, with all the divine attributes. Each is in each of the others. So you cannot fully know the Son without knowing the Father and Spirit, and so on. Although the three persons are distinct, our knowledge of each involves knowledge of the others, so that for us knowledge of the Father coincides with knowledge of the Son and Spirit” (John M. Frame, *Selected Shorter Writings* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2014], 1:10).

²⁷ At the beginning of Pike's career, he used the terms *feature*, *manifestation*, and *distribution mode* to describe a unit of behavior as simultaneously having (1) “identificational-contrastive components” and “internal segmentation”; (2) “physical variants”; and (3) “relational components” such as class membership and function. See Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, 2nd ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 85–92. These were sub-classifications for viewing events in reality as segments, waves, and hierarchically structured contexts.

²⁸ “The observer can look at the world as made up of ‘things’ (particles, elements, items). In some sense this is treated as the basic or normal perspective.” Or “the observer can look at a series of ‘discrete’ events and treat the whole as a single dynamic moving entity; and any single unit can be viewed dynamically, as having beginning (initial margin), middle (nucleus), and end (final margin).” Lastly, “the observer can eliminate from the center of his attention the form or content or extension of the units as such, and focus instead on relationships between them. The unit, in this case, contracts to a point in a network (or field)” (Kenneth L. Pike and Evelyn G. Pike, *Grammatical Analysis*, *Publications in Linguistics* 53 [Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1977], 5).

Pike applied these perspectives most often to human language. The particle view considers “language as made up of PARTICLES—‘things,’ pieces, or parts, with sharp borders.” The wave view considers “language as made up, not of parts which are separated from one another and added like bricks on a row, but rather as being made up of WAVES following one another.” The field view considers “language as FUNCTIONAL, as a system with parts and classes of parts so interrelated

the static, dynamic, and relational nature of reality, respectively. However, each of them is a different view of the same data, and they are all simultaneously in operation in the human mind. One might be in focus at any given time, but the other two are supporting and enriching that perspective. This is where we find the perichoretic activity analogous to that of the persons in the Godhead.²⁹

Let us consider each of the observer perspectives and their perichoretic relations before showing how each can be linked to a person of the Trinity.

1. *Particle*

Each person “can choose to focus attention on emic things or events, or on situations, or even on persons, *as if* they were semi-isolatable chunks—that is, as static particles.”³⁰ Each of Pike’s perspectives, we will see, has practical importance. In terms of the particle perspective, in order to engage with the world around us, we must view it as in some sense stable. Thus, Heraclitus’s notion that the world is in constant flux, if taken to the extreme, would prevent us from actually recognizing anything in reality. My son looks different when he wakes up each morning, but every morning he is still my son. I live in a stalwart home, even though I know that time is etiolating the elements—weakening the wooden structure, eroding the stone, splitting the plaster. In the midst of this slow and ceaseless change, it is still *a thing*; it is still my home.

The particle observer perspective is requisite to functioning in the world. If our attention were always and only on the constant changes we see in the things, events, and people around us, we would eventually become hermetic—withdrawing from a reality that is unidentifiable and thus unpredictable. Without the ability to focus on stable identity, relativity would run rampant and we would retreat into utter skepticism. So, we need the particle perspective.

that no parts occur apart from their function in the total whole, which in turn occurs only as the product of these parts in functional relation to a meaningful social environment” (Pike, “Language as Particle, Wave, and Field,” in *Kenneth L. Pike: Selected Writings to Commemorate the 60th Birthday of Kenneth Lee Pike*, ed. Ruth Brend [The Hague: Mouton, 1972], 129).

²⁹ Pike himself saw the trinitarian reflections of this theory in the contrastive-identification, variation, and distribution of behavioral units. See Kenneth L. Pike, “Language and Life 4: Tris-structural Units of Human Behavior,” *BSac* 114, no. 456 (1958): 42–43. See also Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 56–57; Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til’s Idea of Analogy,” *WTJ* 57 (1995): 191–92. Poythress’s *classificational, instantiatonal, and associational* aspects draw on Pike’s particle, wave, and field perspectives.

³⁰ Kenneth L. Pike, *Talk, Thought, and Thing: The Emic Road toward Conscious Knowledge* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1993), 47. See also Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 19; Pike, *Tagmemics, Discourse, and Verbal Art*, Michigan Studies in the Humanities 3 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 16; Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Sociology: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 59; Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 143–44, 163–64.

2. *Wave*

With the wave perspective, “a person can choose to focus attention on the same emic things, or events, or situations, or persons, as if they were in a sequence with indeterminate borders—as sequential DYNAMIC WAVES—but with attention often placed on their central, or most important, components, their nuclei.”³¹ Again, consider the practical and universal necessity of this perspective. Our lives are not ponds; they are churning oceans—wave upon wave of experience, monotony cresting into pain or pleasure, crashing and settling into reflection with a hiss. Even our calendars are marked with the nuclei and margins. As a crude example, think of how anticipation and enthusiasm build up to Christmas Day, and then fall away before rising again on New Year’s Eve. Within a single week, we often have foci that we either fear or look forward to and around which the other events and discussions seem marginal, and the moment one of these foci is reached, we are pulled by the current of time into the margin of another wave.³² Human experience is not stagnant; it is dynamic and fluent.

More importantly, none of us can focus with equal attention on everything in our physical or psychological environment. That distortion was introduced with the daguerreotype, which put all images perfectly in focus simultaneously. When we look at the world, we have to focus on something at hand and let the periphery blur into the background. We need a nucleus—at every moment of every day. Otherwise, we would be overwhelmed with stimulation and paralyzed by intellectual incontinence. To function in reality, to partake in any purposive action, we need the wave perspective.

3. *Field*

From the field perspective, “life is not merely a sensing of a sequence of bits and pieces, or of things under change, but includes the perception of those items as points in a larger structured context, a FIELD. The points in such a field have RELATIONSHIP to one another, and those relationships help define the units themselves.”³³ The necessity of this perspective is brought out not only in the coherence of reality as a functionally structured network of relationships, but also in the way in which we define elements or participants of those relationships. To perform any simple task, I must presuppose an awareness of interrelated contexts. Driving to the supermarket involves many such contexts. In getting into the car, I immediately assume awareness of a complex system of transportation and communication. I am expected to drive on the right side of the road, to stay within the speed limit, to use a turn signal before

³¹ Pike, *Talk, Thought, and Thing*, 48.

³² For examples of waves in human activity, see Pike, *Language*, 73–82.

³³ Pike, *Talk, Thought, and Thing*, 51.

making a turn, to follow the commands of the traffic lights, and so forth. I am expected to know (or learn quickly) the taxonomy of items at the supermarket and to distinguish between them, but that taxonomy itself provides the means by which I distinguish one thing from another. I know the caffeinated coffee as it contrasts with decaffeinated coffee, or a pack of coffee filters, or a box of cereal, or a frozen chicken. I rely on a system of interrelated yet contrastive elements in order to make effective decisions within that system. So, I need the field perspective.

4. *Perichoresis*

What is critical to note is that these perspectives are not isolated from one another (that would be a particle-like view of the perspectives themselves); each presupposes and interlocks with the others. When I take an apple from a pile in the produce section of the supermarket, I know it is a *thing*, a stable object with defined borders and contrastive-identificational properties. At the same instant, I know that time is already breaking down the nutrients in the apple in a slow process of decomposition, and that if I do not eat it within a week, it will begin to rot. I also know that this apple cannot be the sole element of my diet; it deposits certain vitamins and minerals in my blood stream, but not others. So, as I pick it up, I am conscious of its adequacy in one area and its inadequacy in others, which marks it as holding a particular place in a nutritional field. This action itself—my picking up the apple—is tacitly understood as a discrete chunk of experience with relatively fixed borders (particle), but it is also simultaneously a marginal or nuclear element (depending on my focus) in a sequence of events (wave) and has importance relative to a network of relationships (field). In other words, “relationships interlock with stability and change. Each must be present for others to make sense.”³⁴

V. *The Necessity of the Perspectives*

Of course, some will claim that the above perspectives are selected arbitrarily. Who is to say that there are not other observer perspectives that we all rely upon? There are certainly many perspectives, and those outlined above are by no means exhaustive; but I would ask whether or not a perspective could be considered that is not particle, wave, or field, or some perichoretic manifestation of them. These perspectives reveal the static (unity), dynamic (diversity), and relational nature of reality, and the root of these perspectives is in *observers*. The ultimate observer, or the one whom Frame describes as “omniperspectival,” is the triune God himself.³⁵ It is this God who holds the ultimate concinnity

³⁴ Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy*, 145.

³⁵ John M. Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” in *The Works of John Frame and Vern Poythress*, <http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>, accessed Nov. 9, 2014.

of universals and particulars in his very being.³⁶ So, a set of perspectives that considers unity, diversity, and relationship to be equally ultimate seems not only necessary but felicitous for creatures made in the image of the triune God.

The particle, wave, and field perspectives also account for the rebellious thought of mankind in its myriad manifestations. I have been presupposing all along that these perspectives are necessary and universal for mankind. We could also say that they are part of our *innate* knowledge of God—triune revelation woven into the fabric of our consciousness, and “there can be no finite human consciousness that is not stirred to its depths by the revelational content within itself as well as about itself.”³⁷ But, like all perspicuous revelation, it is suppressed by the mind, one of the many noetic effects of sin. And suppression often takes the form of distortion.

Each of Pike’s observer perspectives can be and has been treated reductionistically throughout the history of human thought. Perhaps the most obvious distortion is the particle perspective, in which people have tried to reduce reality to a single aspect or to compartmentalized chunks that can be classified, controlled, and rung dry of mystery. Formal logic is one example of this.³⁸ Post-Enlightenment empiricism and logical positivism are other examples of particle perspectives taken too far. In this sense, “both modern science and ancient philosophy, when taken as ultimate descriptions, give us forms of reductionism. They *reduce* the world to sense experience, or to matter and motion, or to some other dimension out of the world in its totality.”³⁹ In so doing, such reductions distort or flatten reality and encourage observers to reject the God who holds the plurality of perspectives and foci to be equally ultimate with the unity of his purpose and plan.⁴⁰

We see the same phenomenon with the wave and field perspectives. We can be so focused on change and dynamicity that we relinquish stability and coherence of context. On the other side, we can be so focused on relationships and context that we fail to see particularity, contrastive identity, and development.

VI. *Observer Perspectives and the Persons of the Trinity*

Pike’s observer perspectives bear an analogical resemblance to the persons of the Godhead and their perichoretic relations. Keep in mind that this is an

³⁶ “Human experience of perspectives derives from an ultimate archetype, namely, the plurality of persons in the Trinity and their coinherence. This plurality of persons implies a plurality of perspectives. The indwelling of Trinitarian persons in coinherence implies the harmony and compatibility of distinct perspectives, as well as the fact that one starting point in one person opens the door to all three persons” (Poythress, “Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith,” 191).

³⁷ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 312.

³⁸ Vern S. Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 73–74.

³⁹ Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy*, 111.

⁴⁰ Poythress refers to this as “Unitarian,” rather than Trinitarian thinking (Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic,” 202).

analogical resemblance, not a direct correlation. It would be diminutive of God, not to mention solipsistic, to claim that the Trinity is simply three perspectives of one divine being.⁴¹ But if they are ever more than this, they are certainly not less.⁴² So, sketching out the analogical connections serves not to identify the Trinitarian God but to help us further understand and enjoy the richness of his interpersonal communion.

1. *Particle*

Throughout Scripture, God the Father is described as changeless and immovable. He is the unbegotten *I am* (Exod 3:14). The world is a burning wick in the wind, but God is light eternal—unthreatened and steadfast. Certainly, the transience of creation was all too clear to the psalmist when he compared humanity to the eternally unchangeable God: “They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end” (Ps 102:26–27). Berkhof addresses God’s immutability in the same vein, writing that God is

devoid of all change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, and in His purposes and promises. In virtue of this attribute He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same.... Improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.⁴³

This, of course, is a description of the essence of the Godhead, not merely the Father. But we can see how this description would be especially noticeable in the Father. After all, James describes the Father as the one “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (1:17). John Owen reaffirms the scriptural truth that even the Father’s love, a relation to his creation, is “unchangeable.”⁴⁴ Such descriptions of the Father consort well with the claim that in God “improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.” It also accords with the Father’s distinct personal property of *agennetos*, unbegotten.⁴⁵

The Father, then, can be linked to the particle perspective: the static, stable view of reality as a whole or of a constituent part of it. Whenever we view something in creation as a stable entity with relatively fixed properties, we are drawing upon remnant analogical capabilities in human consciousness that point back to the

⁴¹ “While in human nature there is unity of person and plurality of substance (body and soul), in the divine nature there is unity of substance and plurality of persons” (Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 226–27).

⁴² Frame, “Primer on Perspectivalism.”

⁴³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 58. Certainly, “there is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His being” (p. 59).

⁴⁴ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 106–7.

⁴⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:280–81.

one in whom there is no shadow due to change. In other words, the Father's eternal, absolute stability and immutability are the ontological grounds for the temporal, relative stability of anything in creation. Whatever stability the object has is derived from the ultimate stability and immutability of the unbegotten Father.

2. *Wave*

The Son is eternally and necessarily begotten or “generated” *from* the Father.⁴⁶ He is from the Father, not in terms of time or even in terms of logic, but in terms of personal subsistence. The Son has his subsistence in the “eternal *act* of the Father.”⁴⁷ Couple this with the description of the Son as the *speech* or *word* of God: “both in creation and re-creation God reveals himself by the word. By the word God creates, preserves, and governs all things, and by the word he also renews and recreates the world.”⁴⁸ The Word, as Son, is the dynamism of God.

Consider also the Son's work in the incarnation. The incarnate Son is the “servant sent to effect the work of the Father, obedient even unto death and one day delivering up his kingdom to the Father.”⁴⁹ Because the Son carries out the work of his Father, it is possible to view the salvific work of Christ as a wave: his life and teaching the *initial margin*, his crucifixion and resurrection the *nucleus*, and his following ascension the *final margin*. Even within that initial margin, we see the human nature of Christ in dynamic development within a field of relationships, as he “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

So, the wave perspective can be tied to the Son. Just as the distinct personal description of the Father as unbegotten lends itself to a static view of reality, the description of the Son as eternally begotten lends itself to a dynamic view of reality. When we view reality, or some component of it, as a dynamic development—some parts peripheral and accidental (margins) while others focal and necessary (nuclei)—we are drawing upon the eternal generation of the Son, and, in the incarnation, upon his active obedience to the Father in accomplishing the plan of salvation.

3. *Field*

The Spirit *proceeds* from the Father and the Son. He is “from the Father and the Son by spiration.”⁵⁰ Frame writes, “The Spirit is the member of the Trinity

⁴⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 93–94. This generation is “not with respect to essence and absolutely as God, but with respect to person and reduplicatively (*reduplicative*) as Son” (Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:281).

⁴⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 93; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 273.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁵⁰ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:281. Berkhof defines “spiration” as follows: “that eternal and necessary act of the first and second persons in the Trinity whereby they, within the divine Being, become the

whom the Father and Son send, over and over again, to do their business on earth.”⁵¹ Our focus, at this point, is not merely on the procession of the Holy Spirit, but on the procession *from the Father and the Son*. The Spirit “stands in the closest possible relation to both of the other persons.”⁵² Hodge affirms, “The Spirit is no more said to send or to operate through the Son, than to send or operate through the Father.”⁵³ While it is true that the Holy Spirit finds personal distinction in the triune community via “procession,” it is equally as important that the Spirit’s distinction is rooted in his procession from *both* the Father and the Son.⁵⁴ As such, the Spirit associates the Father and the Son in eternal fellowship—a communion so deep and penetrating that we can only understand a glimmer of it in the penetrating communion we have analogically with the Trinity through the Spirit’s work in us.⁵⁵ In other words, the deep association between the Father and the Son, a “mutual fellowship and indwelling,” is what “reflects the character of God the Holy Spirit, who indwells us.”⁵⁶

As the Spirit brings out the communion of the Father and the Son, so he also brings out the communion between members of the body of Christ. In Christ, we are all “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).⁵⁷

The field perspective, then, can be linked to the Holy Spirit. We sometimes view components of reality as units in a network of functional relationships—a context. In fact, we must view *every* unit that way because “no item by itself has significance. A unit becomes relevant only in relation to a context. Outside such a relationship the item will be necessarily uninterpretable by the observer.”⁵⁸ This is the case even with sensory data, which are not facts in themselves, but

ground of the personal subsistence of the Holy Spirit and put the third person in possession of the whole divine essence, without any division, alienation or change” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 97).

⁵¹ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 497.

⁵² Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 97.

⁵³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 478.

⁵⁴ The Spirit “is related to the Son as the latter is to the Father and imparts to us both the Son and the Father. He is coinherent in the Son as the Son is coinherent in him” (Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 312). Here we enter into the debate of the *filioque* clause, which has separated eastern and western Trinitarian views for centuries. Suffice it to say at this point that, with Gregory of Nazianzen, we affirm that the Spirit’s procession from the Father and the Son does not infringe on the personal distinction of the Father as the “monarchy” of the Trinity, because the entire Trinity is the monarchy, the “sole principle, source, and cause” of itself (see Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 204, 366). Only this position safeguards us from subordinationism of one kind or another.

⁵⁵ Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic,” 191.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 192. “No communion with God is possible except by the Spirit.... By the Spirit we have communion—direct and immediate communion—with no one less than the Son and the Father themselves” (Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 278).

⁵⁷ “The Holy Spirit is in himself the *enhyposstatic* Love and the Communion of Love in the perichoretic relations between the Father and the Son, and as such is in himself the ground of our communion with God in the Love of the Father and the Son” (T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996], 171).

⁵⁸ Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 30.

only become facts when processed and interpreted by *someone*.⁵⁹ Such a relational view of reality is an analogical capability drawn from the Holy Spirit, who provides the relational context for the Father and the Son as he proceeds from both, and also provides the relational context for individual members of the body of Christ.

4. *Perichoresis*

The mutual indwelling of the persons in the Godhead is the archetype that provides for the ectypal perichoresis of observer perspectives. The particle, wave, and field observer perspectives interlock and presuppose one another ultimately because each of the persons of the Trinity has intimate communion and interpenetration with the others without threatening or eclipsing the personal distinctions.⁶⁰

So, while only the Father is unbegotten and only the Son is begotten, they are each described as immutable in certain senses. We noted that in Ps 102, the psalmist seems to be referring to God the Father when writing, “you are the same, and your years have no end” (Ps 102:27). Yet the writer of Hebrews attributes the same description to the Son (Heb 1:12). Later in Heb 13:8, he writes, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”⁶¹ We see the immutability in the Holy Spirit as we witness him being given (or revoked), as a changeless gift, to those who accept and follow the redeeming Word of God (Ps 51:11; Ezek 36:26; Luke 11:13; John 20:22; Acts 2:33, 38; 5:32; 8:17, 19; 10:45; 15:8; Rom 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8).

While the Son is described as the dynamic Word of the Father, we find in Scripture that the Holy Spirit not only *speaks* through Christ’s disciples (Mark 13:11), but also speaks directly (Acts 21:11). And though Christ is said to be the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), the Holy Spirit is said to teach (Luke 12:12; John 14:26), and Paul prays that those in Rome would be filled with hope by the *power* of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13). The dynamic wisdom and power of the Word is extended not just to the Spirit, but also to the Father, who defeats Israel’s enemies (2 Chr 13:15), and silences Job with an overwhelming

⁵⁹ With Van Til, we affirm that you cannot separate a fact from its function in a system, for “a fact is its function” (Van Til, *Common Grace*, 115). And “the most important fact about anything in the world is its relation to God’s Lordship” (Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 32). Moreover, we cannot separate facts from their interpreters. See Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 32; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 70–72.

⁶⁰ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 479–81. Hodge notes that “this fact—intimate union, communion, and inhabitation of the persons of the Trinity—is the reason why everywhere in Scripture, and instinctively by all Christians, God as God is addressed as a person, in perfect consistency with the Tripersonality of the Godhead” (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:462). Bavinck suggests that “the divine being is tripersonal; precisely because it is the absolute, divine personality” (Bavinck, *God and Creation*, 302; emphasis added). See also Kelly, *Holy Trinity*, 489–93.

⁶¹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:287.

queue of his divine actions: laying the foundations of the world (Job 38:4), building “bars and doors for the sea” (38:10), walking in the recesses of the deep (38:16), and cleaving channels for torrents of the rain (38:15), to name a few. And among God’s acts of power is his implanting wisdom in his creatures. It is he who “has put wisdom in the inward parts” and “given understanding to the mind” (38:36). The Father, Son, and Spirit are each intimately involved in divine actions that are, on the surface, easily attributable to the Son as the dynamic Word and wisdom of God.

Lastly, though the Spirit binds the Father and the Son in eternal fellowship, the Father and Son also play pivotal roles in intratrinitarian and extratrinitarian communion. The Father owns the mansion with many rooms, where Christ will reunite with believers (John 14:2–3). Immediately after stating that the Father dwells in him, Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will dwell in them. In other words, “we are drawn through the Holy Spirit into the relationship that the Son has with the Father. We are raised ‘into communion with the persons of the Holy Trinity.’”⁶² So, the communion fostered by the Spirit is not isolated from work of the Father and the Son. Put simply by T. F. Torrance, the biblical doctrine of perichoresis affirms that

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinctive Persons each with his own incommunicable properties, but they dwell *in* one another, not only *with* one another, in such an intimate way ... that their individual characteristics instead of dividing them from one another unite them indivisibly together, the Father in the Son and the Spirit, the Son in the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit in the Father and the Son.⁶³

Let us remember that, far from being a speculative and irrelevant abstraction, perichoresis is a necessary truth in the life of believers, as it “expresses the soteriological truth of the identity between God himself and the content of his saving revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and thereby assures us that what God is toward us in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit he is inherently and eternally in himself.”⁶⁴

We need and rely upon the perichoretic relations of the Trinity, and, in an ectypal and analogous way, we need and rely upon the observer perspectives that are rooted in them. Again, this does *not* mean that the analogy of the observer perspectives is a perfect analogy for the Trinity. The observer perspectives, if taken too far, would lead to modalism (Sabellianism).⁶⁵ When

⁶² Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 353.

⁶³ Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 172. Torrance reveals his Barthian sympathies when he suggests that our knowledge of this triunity comes only through Christ. But, as far as his definition goes, he seems to have captured perichoresis.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* See also Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic,” 196–97.

⁶⁵ Hart helpfully reminds us, “The relationality of human persons, however essential it may be, remains a multiple reality, which must be described now in social terms, now in psychological, now in metaphysical; it is infinitely remote from that perfect indwelling, reciprocal ‘containment,’

understood within their limitations, however, Pike's observer perspectives shed light on the perichoretic vestiges of the Trinity we find in reality—all of which pale in comparison to the triune God who dwells in unapproachable light.

VII. *Observer Perspectives and the Incomprehensibility of the Trinity*

While conceptually understandable in some ways, perichoresis is ultimately mysterious and is one of the marks of God's incomprehensibility. This leads us to an important point concerning Pike's perspectives. Using all three of these perspectives harmoniously will not bring us exhaustive understanding. In fact, it should do something of the opposite: it should show us just how deep and impenetrable reality is, because it is built upon the Trinity. With Van Til, we affirm that "it is impossible for man to know himself or any of the objects of the universe about him exhaustively. For man must know himself or anything else in the created universe in relation to the self-contained God. Unless he can know God exhaustively, he cannot know anything else exhaustively."⁶⁶ The incomprehensibility of God seems to be the reason why we view the world tri-structurally. We cannot perceptually exhaust any object in reality, just as we can by no means perceptually exhaust the triune being of God.⁶⁷

It would be misguided to conclude then that we cannot know anything truly. This is merely another way in which man's knowledge is analogical of God's knowledge. God perceives his creation as a triune being; we perceive it *tri-structurally*, to use Pike's language, as creatures made in his image. Perceiving the world with particle, wave, and field perspectives and leaving room for mystery is the way to true knowledge, not a barrier to it.

VIII. *Returning to the Trinity in General Revelation*

Pike's perspectives thus serve as another branch of Augustine's *vestigia trinitatis*. They show how the Trinity permeates the human mind. Everyone, I argue, relies on the particle, wave, and field perspectives in perichoretic relationship: everyone accounts daily for stability, change, and context. Do they see these perspectives as reflective of the triune God of Scripture? No. They rely upon them, but are blind to the God who made them. Every human in history has relied on the static, dynamic, and relational perspectives of life, just as everyone has relied on the changeless plan of the Father, the manifestation of the

transparency, recurrence, and absolute 'giving way' that is the meaning of the word *perichoresis* or *circumcessio* (adopted by Trinitarian theology long after Gregory or Augustine, and yet so perfectly suited to the theology of both). For if we forget this interval, we not only risk lapsing into either a collectivistic or solipsistic reduction of human relationality—exclusively outward or inward—but we are likely to adopt either a tritheistic or a unitarian idiom when speaking of God" (Hart, "The Mirror of the Infinite," 545–46).

⁶⁶ Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 269.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 293–95.

Son in human history, and the relational harmony between the Spirit and the Father and Son.

What does all of this mean for the Reformed tradition? First, it suggests that claiming the Trinity is only to be found in Scripture is not the full truth. The Trinity is ubiquitous; it undergirds and permeates all of reality. In short, the Trinity is present in general revelation but cannot be consciously accessed or recognized by non-Christians. As mentioned in the beginning of this article, the non-believer only has non-salvific knowledge of the Trinity, a blind reliance upon the God for whom unity and diversity are equally ultimate.

With our Reformed forebears, we can continue to proclaim that salvific knowledge of the Trinity comes from nowhere but the pages of Scripture. However, once we have seen that God as revealed in his Word, we begin to see him everywhere, upholding and guiding reality and human experience as we know it. This means, at the very least, that we must be conscious of vestiges of the Trinity in reality as we work through the spiritual, intellectual, and social problems of our day. It also means that the doctrine of perichoresis needs to receive more rigorous treatment by Reformed scholars, since the perichoretic relations of the Godhead are what account for our coherent perception of reality. Perhaps in due time, the Trinity will find its proper place in the discussion not just of special revelation, but of general revelation as well.