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WHERE PERSON MEETS WORD: PART 2  
THE CONVERGENCE OF PERSONALISM AND SCRIPTURE  
IN THE LANGUAGE THEORY OF KENNETH L. PIKE

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*I. Introduction*

**B**ecause the Trinity plays a principal role in Reformed theology, we must always be asking ourselves how it shapes our understanding of human behavior in general, and of theology in particular. Knowing this, Van Til was adamant that the self-contained ontological Trinity be our interpretative principle everywhere, that it be the basis of all human experience and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

A seemingly endless queue of theologians, both inside and outside the Reformed tradition, have already outlined the implications of the importance of the Trinity for theology proper, and for anthropology—with Van Til close to the forefront. But the Reformed tradition in particular continues to benefit from studying the relationship between language and the Trinity. As such, the work of Kenneth L. Pike provides a rich reservoir of insight from which we might draw in learning more about how we image the triune God in our communicative behavior. And by studying what contributed to the development of Pike's Trinitarian thought, we not only validate Van Til's teaching on the pivotal place of the Trinity in all human experience and thought; we also learn more about how we can understand the Trinity in relation to general revelation.

In Part I of this article, after briefly discussing the Trinitarian associations of Kenneth L. Pike's language theory, we examined the personalism underlying it. We noted that Pike's brand of personalism, not to be confused with the broader personalism movement, was a response to general revelation.<sup>2</sup> In considering

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<sup>1</sup> See 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, 59; and Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), 100, 227–28, 236, 241. This means that our experience and knowledge are grounded in the equal ultimacy of the one and many, and the perichoretic relationship of the persons in the Godhead. See Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 58–59; *Defense of the Faith*, 47–50.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in Part I, Van Til was clear in articulating the theological chasm between “Boston personalism” and what he called “orthodox personalism.” Proponents of Boston personalism (Bowne

particular manifestations of personalism in Pike's work—language as a phase of human behavior, the emic and etic perspectives, and form-meaning composites—we found that he desired to leave room for the personal nature of reality as ultimately mysterious, since it is grounded in the triune person of God.

However, this in itself cannot explain Pike's Trinitarian approach to language, for general revelation, as Bavinck and Warfield remind us, does not include the Trinitarian God of redemption. Something else must have converged with Pike's personalism to lead him to his Trinitarian approach. This something was none other than the Word of God—hence the title of the article: "Where Person Meets Word."

In Part 1, we introduced the thesis that the Trinitarian structure of Pike's theory is not only prescriptive for our thinking about language (and all purposive behavior); it was a destination he was bound to arrive at because personalism (general revelation) and Scripture (special revelation) converge in the Trinity. Now in Part 2, we pick up with Pike's attention to Scripture and his accompanying theological convictions. We then link this to his understanding of the *imago Dei*, and end with implications for linguistics and applications to our current understanding of general revelation.

## II. *Steeped in the Scriptures*

From the moment of his birth, Kenneth Pike was steeped in the Scriptures and surrounded by the Christian faith. When he was a child, his mother sang hymns to him and his siblings, such as "The Ninety and Nine that Safely Lay in the Shelter of the Fold." Nearly every day, his father read a passage of Scripture to the family, discussed it with them, and then prayed.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was this upbringing that fostered his decision to serve in missions. While attending Gordon College of Theology and Missions (now Gordon College), he became zealous for the spread of the gospel in China with Hudson Taylor's Chinese Inland Mission (CIM). With considerable struggle, he began studying Mandarin with CIM after his studies at Gordon, and was convinced of God's use of him in China, which crushed him all the more when CIM told him that they could not use him.

Shortly after this disappointment, Pike returned to Gordon College to bolster his knowledge of Greek, and there he learned from a student about a newly founded program seeking to prepare students for Bible translation. It was called "Camp Wycliffe." In June of 1935, he hitch-hiked from Connecticut to Arkansas to attend the camp, paying a whopping \$6 a month for room and board.

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and Brightman) ran into serious trouble because they sought to make finite personality the "fulcrum for the operations of the laws of thought. But finite personality can be thought of intelligently only on the presupposition of the idea of the self-intelligent God. And on the basis of the idea of this God alone is it possible to avoid both rationalism and irrationalism, both determinism and pure contingency, or a combination of them" (Van Til, "Boston Personalism" [lecture delivered at Boston University School of Theology, March 6, 1956, published privately], 55–56).

<sup>3</sup> Eunice V. Pike, *Ken Pike: Scholar and Christian* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), 7.

The goal of Camp Wycliffe (which would later become the Summer Institute of Linguistics), according to its founders, W. Cameron Townsend and Leonard L. Legters, was to train students in linguistics and pioneer living in order to meet the need of Bible translation in Central and South America, a region that was home to many unknown and unwritten languages and hence unreachable by most mission efforts. The students were to be trained in linguistics, travel to a remote area, learn the language of a particular people, and translate the NT for them. This was the segue into Pike's long and vibrant relationship with the Mixtec-speaking people of Mesoamerica.

Among the Mixtecs, Pike was not simply learning a new language and growing close to the inhabitants; he was immersed in the Scriptures, telling Bible stories to natives over late-night camp fires, and eventually enlisting their help to translate those stories into Mixtec. Translation itself will bring anyone more intimate knowledge of Scripture, but for Pike, his knowledge of Scripture informed his job of translation on two fronts. On the one side, he was becoming intimately familiar with the words of Scripture by translating the emic expression of truth in first-century biblical culture to a corresponding emic expression in twentieth-century Mixtec culture, being careful that the expression maintained the integrity of the original. On the other side, his background knowledge of Scripture was informing his understanding of translation itself. In 1957, long after he had served the Mixtec people, he reflected on translation as it relates to the message of God's Word:

The evangelical does not view the Christianizing task as merely a cultural translation. He sees it in part as a cultural task plus an infusion of supernatural power in the individual life. A variety of Christianity which attempts the cultural phases of the task without reliance upon the power emanating from the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as trustworthy historical events would impress the evangelical as failing to provide the tribes people with the source of supernatural power which not only leads to present cultural values, such as kindness, but also gives eternal life.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, his knowledge of the message of Scripture—the transformative power of the resurrected Christ—was brought to bear on his approach to translation. He was not simply learning more about Scripture by translation; he was learning more about translation by studying and implementing Scripture.

As he began to publish more regularly, it became apparent that his mind was steeped in Scripture and his profession was profoundly shaped by it. His explicitly theological writings ranged from finding God's direction in one's own life—a topic on which he was particularly qualified to speak, given his own disappointments with CIM—to advice for intellectuals;<sup>5</sup> from biblical exposition

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Life 3: A Training Device for Translation Theory and Practice," *BSac* 114, no. 456 (October 1957): 362.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth L. Pike: "God's Guidance and Your Life Work," *His* 7, no. 1 (1947): 19–28; "Prescription for Intellectuals," *Eternity* 8 (August 1957): 11, 44–45.

to linguistic critiques grounded in the presupposition of the truth of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> We cannot examine all of the manifestations of Pike's scriptural knowledge throughout his career, but we can focus on a few trends: the covenantal obligations of man, a rejection of autonomy, and the *imago Dei*. The latter has particular relevance for Pike's view of language, and may be the linchpin connecting his personalism to a Trinitarian philosophy of human behavior.

### 1. *The Covenantal Obligations of Man*

Pike never shied away from claiming that man was a creature in covenant with his Creator, as is evident in statements such as,

*God holds men responsible on a spiritual plane for truth which they know on a social plane. If in a particular culture people respond to values of right and wrong in respect to relationships between men, God will hold them responsible for the application of that same knowledge in the relationship between God and man. The social light which man has is spiritual light by cultural analogy.*<sup>7</sup>

Why are men held responsible to God for their interpersonal behavior? Because Rom 1:20 avers that all men know God and are in relationship with him—a covenantal relationship with implications for all of life.<sup>8</sup> This relationship is their very source of life; claiming independence is tantamount to a death wish. This, for Pike, is recorded in the early pages of Genesis. “In the garden of Eden (Gen 3:5) the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will be like God’—that is, independent.... Why shouldn't a person want to be independent? Because if a person succeeds in becoming independent, he dies ... isolation is the road to hell.”<sup>9</sup> Sure enough, Adam and Eve's decision to act independently of God led directly to their demise.

Of course, this was prefatory to a history of grace—a history in which we work out our dependence through our God-given free will, in accordance with special revelation.<sup>10</sup> In Pike's words, “we are not to be robots, incapable of—or

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Pike: “Living on Manna,” *The Sunday School Times* (May 1, 1948): 3–4; “Why I Believe in God,” *His* 18, no. 2 (November 1957): 3–7, 32–33; “Cause and Effect in the Christian Life,” *His* 20, no. 1 (1959): 32–34; “Language,” in *Christ and the Modern Mind* (ed. Robert W. Smith; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 59–67; “The Linguist and Axioms Concerning the Language of Scripture,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 26, no. 2 (June 1974): 47–51; “The Need for the Rejection of Autonomy in Linguistics,” in *The Eleventh LACUS Forum*, ed. Robert A. Hall Jr. (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam, 1985), 35–53.

<sup>7</sup> Pike, “God's Guidance and Your Life Work,” 27.

<sup>8</sup> “Because of this Scriptural statement [Rom 1:20], ... we must conclude that man is morally responsible for seeing in nature that there is a God” (Pike, “Why I Believe in God,” 7).

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, “The Sin of Independence,” *His* 18, no. 8 (May 1958): 6, 7.

<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that our will is exhaustively free, and that it trumps God's own plan for us. God is utterly sovereign, but human decisions are still significant. William Edgar calls this the “double truth.” Thus, we can affirm that God “is not the instigator of sin, nor does he violate the creatures he has made. Rather than interfering with their decision-making, he *establishes* a world

afraid of—taking initiative. We are to be free to think and act within the general orders and principles of character revealed in the Word and impressed on our consciences by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup>

Continuing in this covenantal history, man has moral obligations before his maker, not the least of which is his moral use of language. Pike was quick to point out that “there is a moral dimension to rhetoric. ‘Mere’ rhetoric can be immoral. It prostitutes form, seeks contact with elegant words for the body’s sake, instead of using words to reproduce one’s own moral image as God did in the beginning with the Word.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast to mere rhetoric and a deceptive use of metaphor is our creative use of metaphorical language in order to join in the “struggle to build bridges over which to lead someone else to truth.”<sup>13</sup> In this holy calling—the moral pursuit and use of language for the sake of truth—we image the God who speaks.

Yet, language is not the only sphere of our moral responsibility as covenantal creatures; we are called to *think* in a way that is obedient to God’s revelation. One’s choice of epistemology “is a moral choice.”<sup>14</sup> How we think, how we attain *wisdom*, is addressed directly by God’s Word: “Fear of the Lord is the beginning—and the basic assumption—of wisdom, in that it sets up the only ultimately adequate epistemological starting point.”<sup>15</sup> It is by faith that we come to know God and are truly known. It is by faith that we acquire true wisdom. Pike wrote with conviction, “By *faith*—not by argument—I know that the worlds are framed by the Word of God. By *faith*—not by apologetics—I know that these Scriptures are the Word of God. By *faith*—not by intellectual proof—I know that God, a Person who knows me by name, exists.”<sup>16</sup> This in and of itself is the greatest threat to the fortress of impersonal academia. That our morals are governed by God might be granted, but our knowledge?

To drive this point home, Pike often referred to the story of Nicodemus (John 3). Why could Nicodemus not understand Jesus’ message (“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”)? Because, to use previous terminology, he needed an emic system transplant.

As a leading scholar of his culture, he already had available and had absorbed the understanding of a total view of the world [his emic system]. He was elaborately structured in the intellectual sphere. He had a total world view—a view which included a pigeon hole for the possibility of help from God—with adequate illustrations of the manner, reason, and source from which help came. His intellectual

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in which secondary causes are significant” (William Edgar, *A Transforming Vision: The Lord’s Prayer as a Lens for Life* [Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014], 300). See also WCF 3.1.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, “Man or Robot,” *Eternity* 15, no. 2 (February 1964): 46.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, “Morals and Metaphor,” *Interchange* 12 (1972): 228.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>14</sup> Pike, “Why I Believe in God,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

system was so tightly and coherently structured, furthermore, that it could not easily bend to accommodate contradictory or inconsistent elements [such as Jesus' claim to divinity, which flew in the face of his rigid, monotheistic assumptions].<sup>17</sup>

Nicodemus's perceptual grid needed to be built from scratch. Jesus told him, in effect,

You will have to abandon your total thought system and begin to build it all over again. You will have to accept my goodness and power as primary data, and start from there. Like a baby coming into the new world, you will have to learn to live with these facts before you can understand their source or reason. You must learn to accept the revolution this makes in your whole spiritual life without being able at the moment to understand its source any more than the sailor understands the source of the wind that moves his sails.<sup>18</sup>

The point, however, is not that Nicodemus had made the wrong *intellectual* decision in developing his current emic system—his Jewish scholarly view of the world; the problem was that he made the wrong *moral* decision in adopting an emic system that was not prescribed by God's Word. What he needed was a view of the world upheld by the Word of God's power (Heb 1:3). It was only within this emic system that Nicodemus could understand Jesus' words. Pike concluded here and elsewhere that "the intellectual needs to be told that his system as a whole must be replaced—that he must be born again. Christianity is not an accretion; it is not something added. It is a *new* total outlook which is satisfied with nothing less than penetration to the farthest corners of the mind and the understanding."<sup>19</sup>

This is but a sampling of the work that shows Pike's writing is riddled with our covenantal obligations to God—both linguistic and non-linguistic.

## 2. *A Rejection of Autonomy.*

In the middle of his career, Pike seems to have grown more acutely aware of the prevalence of autonomous thought in linguistics—a problem tied to man's futile claim of independence.<sup>20</sup> This awareness was drawn from the text

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Life 1: A Stereoscopic Window on the World," *BSac* 114, no. 454 (April 1957): 155.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>19</sup> Pike, "Prescription for Intellectuals," 45.

<sup>20</sup> We should note at the outset that Pike's rejection of autonomy, though mostly in line with Van Til's concept, does not carry the presuppositional weight of that concept as far as it must go. Presuppositions affect *all* of life, so we find ourselves in disagreement with him when he says, "an excessive commitment to a theological presupposition that demands that the nature of God always be explicitly present in every scientific model (that is, which denies to the non-Christian or to the non-theist the capacity to make any statement of true fact) would deny to science, in this extreme instance, the possibility of recognizing any truth" (Pike, "Language," 66). With Van Til, we would

of Scripture. Reflecting on Jer 17:7–8, he remarks, “The only tree which can bear fruit is one that seeks with its roots for water and sustenance outside itself. Similarly the only man who can bear fruit is one who trusts in God and looks to Him for character.”<sup>21</sup> We have already discussed man’s moral obligations in covenant with God, and here we encounter the very foundation for morally good actions: it is not ritualistic vigilance or elitism; it is faith and trust in the God of Scripture—abandoning all hope in self-attained goals and recognizing that at every point in his behavior man is leaning on God, and he would shatter on the existential ground if God took a step to the side.

Perhaps the most poignant expression of Pike’s rejection of autonomy is, aptly titled, “The Need for the Rejection of Autonomy in Linguistics.”<sup>22</sup> Here Pike is programmatic in his rejection, beginning with a Van Tillian affirmation: “all items in the universe are eventually related by being inside that universe.”<sup>23</sup> The interrelation of all things in the universe exposes the audacity of claiming that we have exhaustive knowledge in any one area, for to know *anything* exhaustively in such a universe is to know *everything* exhaustively. The independence or self-sufficiency of any discipline, therefore, is a pretension. Even in the attempt to comprehensively describe a linguistic unit, we fall short because we are required to isolate it in order to pretend that we can arrive at holistic description.<sup>24</sup> This isolation, though serving our desire to be independent (which, as Pike said before, is a death wish), distorts the data because not only does it ignore its variation, but it also ignores the larger pattern in which the linguistic unit appears. “Explanation without pattern is eventually not explanation, as I see it. And description, at its best, is successive embedding patterns of something.”<sup>25</sup>

An example might serve us well here. The sentence “Christ walked across the sea to his disciples” is a simple one. What if we were to pick out a linguistic unit such as the verb *walked* and attempt to describe it exhaustively? There would

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affirm that there are no brute facts and even those things which the non-Christian thinks he knows to be true are false if the God who stands behind them is rejected.

<sup>21</sup> Pike, “Sin of Independence,” 6.

<sup>22</sup> Pike, “Need for Rejection of Autonomy,” 35–53.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. Cf. Van Til’s statement: “Unless the plan and therewith the interpretation of thought of God be back of all facts in their relations to all other facts, no idea, no hypothesis that the human mind could make with respect to them, would have any application to them” (Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 279). Attacking non-Christian epistemology, Van Til writes, “All the facts of the phenomenal world are incomprehensible to me precisely because they are what they are by virtue of the voluntary action of the will of God with respect to them. They are what they are, they occupy place in the scheme of things spatio-temporal, because God by his plan and by the execution of his plan in the works of creation and providence makes them what they are” (Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 293). Capturing the idea eloquently for those who would isolate facts from their function in a comprehensive system, he writes in *Common Grace and the Gospel*, “a fact is its function” (Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995], 115).

<sup>24</sup> This means that we treat the linguistic unit apart from its variation and its distribution (its instantiations and associations) in order to manage it with a finite mind.

<sup>25</sup> Pike, “Need for Rejection of Autonomy,” 37.

be at least two layers to this task: (1) we would need to discuss the unit “on its own,” in terms of its semantic identity, variation, and distribution, and also its lexical components (root and verbal suffix), and its phonological components (tone and stress). “Easy enough,” we might think. (2) We would need to look at its relation in each of those areas to the phrase in which it occurred (“Jesus walked”), then the total clause, then the paragraph, then the larger discourse, then the book as a whole, John’s other writings in the NT, the NT as a whole, the entire Bible, which was written by men of the first century, other literature of the first century, related socio-cultural behaviors of the time, related socio-cultural behaviors of our time, the relation of the physical environment to those behaviors, the nature of the physical environment, and on and on. For those who want to use language in dependence on a God who knows all of these contexts and relationships exhaustively, there is little problem. We can focus on a particular context and trust that God will work through us (particulars) to establish and proclaim his truth (universal). But for those who seek to master a linguistic unit, who pretend that exhaustive description is possible, language is a labyrinth.

Given that exhaustive description of linguistic units, semantics, syntax, and any other aspect of verbal or non-verbal communication is an exercise in futility, how are we to function in the world of language? Do we throw our hands up and resign ourselves to not know anything at all—a defeated relativism? Certainly not! Linguistic inquiry must simply be carried out in awareness of the interrelation of linguistic units with the rest of human behavior, and with that human behavior finding coherence and meaning in God himself. Autonomy at every level, then, must be rejected. We must, instead, search for a method of linguistic inquiry that allows for the interrelation of every aspect of communicative behavior—and it is in tagmemics that Pike believes the foundation can be laid.

Each area of tagmemic theory accommodates this search for interrelation. For example, in relation to the observer perspectives (particle, wave, and field),

we need particles for rules to apply to; patterns for particles and rules to fit into; patterns of patterns for a field view which can encompass all three complementary perspectives.

We need, then, to reject the autonomy of any single perspective of particle, wave, or field (or any autonomous static, dynamic, or relational views. We reject, too, the autonomy of mere lists, mere rules, or mere features in a system). Instead we seek a set of simultaneous or complementary approaches. I attempt to maintain such complementarity, here, by applying particle, wave, and field perspectives, rather than approaching language or behavior through any one exclusive point of view.... Tagmemics insists that no unit can be understood outside of several different kinds of simultaneous contexts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 39.

Pike's comments do not stop at the need for complementary observer perspectives in the goal of avoiding autonomous linguistic methodology. He probes more deeply, to the level of hierarchy, affirming that "inclusion in a part-whole hierarchy does not allow the autonomy of included parts";<sup>27</sup> nor do any of the linguistic hierarchies (grammar, phonology, and reference) function in isolation.

An attempt to give autonomy to phonology ... disintegrates into undefinable noises—since the relevance and boundaries of sounds depend on their occurrence, also, in lexical and grammatical hierarchical units.... There are phonological prerequisites to grammatical analysis or to the referential analysis of data. Words do not exist, as relevant to speech communication, except as parts of conversations, monologues, sentences, clauses, phrases.... Paraphrases allow the same basic content to be told in various ways. The series of events of a story, for example, can be told, in English, in reverse order, without destroying the report of the chronological sequence of those events. (One can say, for example, either 'John came home and ate supper' or 'John ate supper after he came home.' The changes of clause order, and from one to two sentences, do not alter the facts of the event. The differences in focus or emphasis which are thereby attained—themselves a kind of meaning—are in tagmemics attributed to the grammatical form; the retained content is attributed to the referential structure). On the other hand, two words may be homophonous, but referentially distinct (as are 'sea' and 'see').<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the rejection of the autonomy of units within hierarchies, Pike rejects the autonomy of form or meaning, a background principle for his *form-meaning composites*.<sup>29</sup> He rejects, narrowly, the autonomy of a constituent in a particular structure, and, broadly, the autonomy of a unit of cultural behavior.<sup>30</sup> In fact, he rejects the autonomy of everything except for God: "I am not autonomous. Things are not autonomous. Ideas are not autonomous. The universe is not autonomous. Linguistics is not autonomous. We are hooked—together."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 41–42.

<sup>29</sup> "If matter is separated from meaning (or from relevance to an observer) an autonomy is postulated which tagmemics rejects.... As distinct from any analytical approach which wishes first to find and describe meanings, and then to find and describe their physical forms (with 'form' used in a physical sense), tagmemics requires that both in empirical research in natural languages and in theorizing about them, the discovery of language structures and the description of their meanings must be in part simultaneous. Word forms are relevant because of their emic relation to meanings. Meanings are emically present only if they are manifested in physical forms" (ibid., 44).

<sup>30</sup> "Any item occurs within a slot, or position, in a larger unit which acts as part of some hierarchical context of that smaller unit, and which is of immediate relevance to it. This includes the relation of a part to the next highest layer of the immediate whole which contains it. A subject is part of a clause. A clause is part of a sentence. A sentence is part of a conversation, or narrative, or pattern of thought" (ibid., 46). "Any unit in culture will have some purpose in that culture, or relevance to it. Any object under observation, or in imagination, will be relevant—from the viewpoint of the observer—to his understanding of the pattern of the world of things or thought" (ibid., 47).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 49.

### 3. *The imago Dei*

The last trend manifesting Pike's scriptural knowledge is perhaps the linchpin binding his personalism to the Trinity. The image of God in man, for the Christian, sets up a logical series of connections—a breadcrumb trail to the Trinity.

The first in that series of connections is the truth that man is made in God's image. Pike was aware of this on multiple levels—intellectually, emotionally, and linguistically. Intellectually, man is made in the image of God in terms of his scholarly pursuits and “taxonomic” tendencies (Adam's naming of the animals is an analog of God's naming other parts of creation). “God was also a ‘taxonomist’ (one who names things and makes scientific classifications), the Model for one to become a scholar-linguist! Did God fail to pass on this characteristic, in spite of his Eden-orders for man to name things? Certainly not. We are called to be—amongst other things—scholars.”<sup>32</sup> However, Pike is also quick to caution us about intellectual autonomy, stating that “the chief contamination of mental activity ... comes ... from a pervasive wish to be epistemologically ‘independent’—without dependence on the Creator to spell out the limits of independence in belief, or in morals, or in academic premises.”<sup>33</sup> So while part of the image of God in man is his intellectual pursuits, he often mars that image in trying to think and reason apart from reliance on God and his revelation in Scripture.

We are also made in the image of God emotionally. If Jesus' character included his emotional life, and his emotional life was reflective of his heavenly Father, then it makes sense to conclude that,

God created us, including our emotional life ... in his own image; and that, therefore, we need to take the emotional life of God seriously. God is *not* an unchanged unchanging Person in the sense of being a stolid, placid, untouched, non-sad, non-joyful, non-angry type unaffected by what He sees, hears, knows, anticipates, or experiences.<sup>34</sup>

We may be tempted to think at times that God's immutability means that he is incapable of feeling, but “a God who is incapable of feeling is a philosophical abstraction, not the God of the Bible.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the God of the Bible feels: “From before the foundation of the earth, He was a Person; we are created in His image as persons; and we hurt as He hurt when He made us, knowing that we would hurt too.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, “Intellectual Initiative: The Image of God,” *The Banner* (November 30, 1979): 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Pike, “Emotion in God, and Its Image in Us,” *The Banner* (November 23, 1979): 4–5.

<sup>35</sup> Norman Anderson, quoted in *ibid.*, 5. Scripture is clear that God's emotional expressions are no threat to his impassibility. For a discussion of this from the Reformed perspective, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 608–11.

<sup>36</sup> Pike, “Emotion in God,” 5.

The third aspect of the image of God is most critical for our purposes: the use of language.<sup>37</sup> Man images God in his communicative behavior, as that behavior is linked to morality and to creative expression.<sup>38</sup> For example, in our use of metaphors, we image the God who chooses to use metaphors in his revelation, such as in John 1:1.

We are created in His image of creativity. We create metaphors because He created them:

In the beginning was the Word—note the linguistic metaphor from John 1. Why an inspired linguistic metaphor? Because there, perhaps, above all else directly accessible to science, we can study one characteristic in which we are in the image of God—we can *talk*. And in the beginning was *the One who could talk!* Not just a set of rays of energy ready for a big bang; not a pantheistic sum of non-focused non-personal elements; not a vague spirit of impersonal goodness; but the Personal-One-with-Language; One who spoke and said, “Let us make man in our image”—to use language with creative power, bursting forth in poem, in song, in metaphor.<sup>39</sup>

Linguistic creativity is an *imaging* behavior. But creativity is not the only aspect of language that reveals it as part of the *imago Dei*. We can also take internal counsel, a linguistic behavior analogous to that which God himself employs in Gen 1:26.<sup>40</sup> So, part of the image of God “includes the fact that man is verbal,

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<sup>37</sup> Others in the Reformed tradition, such as Richard Gaffin, have also pointed out language as part of the *imago Dei*: “As our being itself is derived from God (we exist because he exists), and as our knowledge is an analogue of his knowledge (we know because he knows), so, too, our capacity for language and other forms of communication is derivative of his. We speak because God speaks, because he is a speaking God; that is his nature and so, derivatively, it is ours. In other words, man in his linguistic functions, as in all he is and does, is to be understood as the creature who is the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). In fact, should we not say that especially in his language man reflects the divine image he is?” (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: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004], 182–83).

<sup>38</sup> Pike makes a connection between language, thought, and morality: “man through his spoken or thought language can set up alternative choices in hypotheses and choose between them. Through language much of his daily judgment operates; and because of language, a set of ideals, values, morals, and views of right and wrong can be part of him. Judgment of a high type requires such a moral base, and man’s moral base requires language” (Pike, “Man or Robot,” 9).

<sup>39</sup> Pike, “Morals and Metaphor,” 231.

<sup>40</sup> Note the use of the Hebrew cohortative. Waltke outlines the six options we have for interpreting it: (1) The plural is a remnant of an ancient Near Eastern myth in which God is addressing other gods. This is untenable given that the Pentateuch consistently opposes polytheism. (2) The plural is directed towards a host of previously made creatures, which still ends up relying on polytheistic tendencies that do not comport with the Genesis account. (3) The plural is honorific, like the form *elohim*, but Waltke notes that this form is elsewhere attested by nouns, not pronouns. (4) The plural is, in Gesenius’s language, “a plural of self-deliberation,” though no other instance supports this view. (5) The plural is a reference to the Trinity. This view would be supported by later NT texts, even though Waltke argues that this view violates the boundaries of grammatico-historical interpretation. (6) The plural refers to the heavenly court that surrounds God’s throne. See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: A Canonical and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 212–13.

and can talk to himself. His ability to talk to himself, to argue with himself, to propose lines of activity, tentatively, before embarking upon them, is a crucial part of his selfhood. Without it he would not be man."<sup>41</sup>

Yet, perhaps the kernel of our linguistic imaging is not internal counsel but external relationships—both with other humans and with the triune God.<sup>42</sup> Since man's communication system is analogous on some level with God's, and because this allows for divine-human communication, so the linguistic patchwork of the post-Babel world is not averse to unity via translation. We relate to others via communicative behavior because God relates to himself in this way—and, what's more, from the very founding of creation he committed himself to working within the strictures of creaturely communication.<sup>43</sup> What more impetus could we have, then, for working the truth of Scripture into the diction, syntax, and structure of languages foreign to us? This, of course, is what drove Pike in his work with Bible translation.

### III. *Connecting Dots*

Thus far we have established that Pike's personalism—a mark of God's general revelation—would have pointed him toward the personal God, but not the triune God. The Trinity is purely revealed through special revelation, that

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I argue for interpreting the form as an instance of God's inter-trinitarian dialogue (perhaps better, "trialogue") because, aside from the fact that a speaking God would necessitate inner plurality, the only other truly viable option is that God is addressing his heavenly court. But I find this view wanting on a number of levels. Why would God be addressing other creatures in a creative action that is attributed solely to his power? He certainly is not looking for approval or input from contingent beings. Is he simply announcing what he is doing? This would be a strange precedent, given the other grammatical structures employed to bring in other aspects of creation. Yet, it would make perfect sense if God chose to employ this particular grammatical structure exclusively in the creation of man because he was creating a being who would image himself in personal relations. This would certainly pair nicely with Gen 2:18. Adam is not "lonely." God is not working out divine psychoanalysis. Rather, God knows that it would be "good" for Adam to commune with other creatures equal with himself because that is what God does, and God is wholly good.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Self Image," in *The Scientist and Ethical Decision*, ed. Charles Hatfield (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 69.

<sup>42</sup> "As part of the result of man's being created in the image of God, the communication system of God and that of man are not disjoint. The implication here is that by creation God has made man's language sufficiently like his own internal communication system, whatever that may be, that man's is a pale reflection of his own and allows talk across the barrier in both directions" (Kenneth L. Pike, "The Linguist and Axioms Concerning the Language of Scripture," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 26, no. 2 [June 1974]: 48).

<sup>43</sup> "God, from the beginning, not only *allowed* man to develop his emic taxonomic language structure, but *Himself chose to work within man's emic language system in His relation to man*.... The incarnation of thought into man's language is not new to God; the need for it in the bodily incarnation of Christ did not catch heaven by surprise" (Kenneth L. Pike, "Christianity and Culture II: Incarnation in a Culture," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 2 [June 1979]: 95). Elsewhere he says, "God plays 'intellectual hopscotch' by man's rules" (Kenneth L. Pike, "Love God with Mind—and Bless Babylon," *The Gordon Alumna* 8, no. 4 [1979]: 6).

is, Scripture. Now that we have established Pike's life and thought as steeped in Scripture, we have some dots to connect (perhaps obvious to some, but necessary to make overt here); the resulting shape of these connected dots will suggest that Pike's Trinitarian approach to language and human behavior was bound to take the shape it did, and, in that sense, was beyond his control.<sup>44</sup>

In relation to the last manifestation of Pike's scriptural knowledge—the image of God in man—we mentioned that there was a series of logical connections leading back to the Trinity. The first was the plain proposition that man *is* made in God's image. The second conjoins with the first and blends with Pike's personalism: a constant focus on people is a constant focus on image-bearers. The third connection to make is that image-bearers obviously *image* their Creator. We noted earlier that, in Oliphint's words,

all that we are, think, do, and become is derivative, coming from or out of something else; we depend on, as well as mirror, the real, the Original, the Eimi. In classical terminology, we are “ectypal.” The kind or type of people we are, knowledge we have, thoughts we think, things we do, is always and everywhere a copy, pattern, impression, image, taking its metaphysical and epistemological cue from the only One who truly is, that is, from God himself.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth connection is that this Creator whom we image is tripersonal—the three-in-one, unity in harmony with diversity, simplicity in consonance with complexity. From the fourth connection, we jump to our next dot: God's tripersonal markings cover creation but are invisible to the non-Christian. The latter point is especially important to make since we mentioned that God's triunity is not discoverable in nature—but the caveat I would add is that it is not discoverable in nature *before special revelation has illumined and regenerated the mind of man*. Here is where Pike's thought opens the discussion for the place of the Trinity in general revelation, and this leads us to the sixth and final dot: once man has accepted the truth of God's special revelation, traces of the Trinity are ubiquitous. It is not a Unitarian God who has created and upholds all things, but a Trinitarian God; so not only should we not be surprised to see triadic reflections all around us, *but by default, we should assume that the fingerprint of the Trinitarian nature of God is everywhere*. It is not theologically permissible that reality be Trinitarian; it is theologically inescapable.

So, when did Pike see all of this? Was there a moment of divine epiphany? We cannot say for sure, but we can approximate a time at which he began to be fully conscious of what he would call the *tristuctural* nature of reality. In 1956, he wrote that he had been working for the last seven years on his theory of

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<sup>44</sup> In the path of human development, once general revelation collides with special revelation, there is only one destination left for the person to arrive at: the triune God of Scripture.

<sup>45</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006), 178–79.

the structure of human behavior, which would put us at approximately 1947.<sup>46</sup> This early version of his theory contained the concepts of particle, wave, and field perspectives as well as the simultaneous modal structuring of an event—manifestation, feature, and distribution. He does not make any claims to the tristructural nature of human behavior, but the concept is clearly evident, which is telling of the collision of general and special revelation. Trinitarian seeds had already been planted and taken root by 1947, if not years before.

It was not until 1958, however, that Pike drew attention to the tristructural nature of units of human behavior.<sup>47</sup> Most important in this article, for our purposes, was his explicit tying of these tristructural units to the Trinity. Note how chary he is when he defines his key term—markedly reminiscent of the circumspection of the early church in defining the triunity of God:<sup>48</sup>

This tristructural theory is sharply distinct from a tripartite view. In the latter, the tripartite one, a unit would be conceived as having sections like an orange, or parts; the substance of the unit could be analytically split, divided, parceled out into these sections or parts, and then the parts added together would make up the whole. If one part of a tripartite unit were removed, two parts would be left. A chain with three links might symbolize the tripartite view. In the tristructural view none of these things are true. If only one of its three structures is removed from a tristructural unit the entire unit has disappeared, since each structure includes within it all the other substance of that unit. A tristructural unit is not comprised of three parts, but of one whole, with the whole structured in three different ways at once.

A tristructural analysis is crucially different, also from a triaspectual or tridimensional view of a unit. A triaspectual approach may look at a single unit from three different angles, see it from three different vantage points, study it in relation to three different functions, even though the unit is treated as having a single set of structural parts. A tridimensional view of an object may consider it as having three dimensions at the very time that it is assumed to be solid and with no internal macroscopic parts. A cube may be viewed as having height, length, and breadth, for example, but this says nothing about the internal structure of the cube. A tristructural analysis does not look at the same set of parts from different viewpoints or in different dimensions as such, but sees a single large unit divided into three sets of hierarchically arranged subunits such that each hierarchical set comprises the whole, just as the layers of a cake and the slices of that cake each include all of the substance of the cake.<sup>49</sup>

Notice, as well, that Pike is not making a direct correlation to the Trinity. There is, I believe, no direct correspondence between a physical object and God's

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, "Towards a Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior (1956)," in *Kenneth L. Pike: Selected Writings to Commemorate the 60th Birthday of Kenneth Lee Pike*, ed. Ruth Brend (Paris: Mouton, 1972), 106.

<sup>47</sup> Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Life 4: Tristructural Units of Human Behavior," *BSac* 114, no. 456 (January 1958): 36–43.

<sup>48</sup> Take, e.g., the language of the Nicene Creed: "[I believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father..."

<sup>49</sup> Pike, "Language and Life 4," 37.

triune nature that does not tend to heresy on one end or the other (usually modalism or tritheism). Pike knows that the Trinity is incomprehensible, so he knows that he must use analogous language when relating human behavior to the Trinity. The finite cannot contain the infinite, nor a piece of creation the Creator. So, he is careful to talk about the “tristructural” nature of units of human behavior. We may say more broadly, however, that his tristructural approach is Trinitarian in that it dimly resembles a key feature of the Trinity: perichoresis—threeness in oneness, and the interlocking and overlapping of hierarchies.

On the other hand, this caution did not keep Pike from associating his theory with the Trinity.<sup>50</sup> For instance, “in the Christian understanding of God’s nature there are three persons which, in order to show the analogy, might be called personal ‘structures.’ Each has its own personal individuality and function without constituting a new part of God or an additional God; each is the whole.”<sup>51</sup> Christian readers might have guessed this analogy based on the description of “tristructural” alone. But he does go a bit further in his analogy:

If one seeks for linguistic analogies for some facts of the Christian Trinity, the identificational-contrastive structure with its basic priority of meaning and purpose and communication from individual to individual would be suggested as illustrative of the relationship of the person of God the Father to the Trinity as a whole—inasmuch as ultimate purpose seems to reside in Him (Eph 1:9, 11), He has taken the initiative to communicate and to reveal Himself to us (Heb 1:1–2), and the Sonship of Christ implies the Father’s priority of rank in some sense (John 14:28; Col 1:15). On the other hand, as the manifestation structure of linguistic units is the audible, concrete form which can be directly apprehended by us, and is the medium through which all linguistic meaning is communicated, so the second person of the Trinity, the Son, was made concretely available to the senses of man, to be seen, heard, touched (Col 1:15; 1 John 1:1) and it was through the manifested Word become flesh (John 1:1, 14) that the purposes of God were effected (John 1:3). Similarly, as the distributional-functional structure in the sentence forms the matrix within which the words of the sentence occur, in formal units that are obscure and hard to find of themselves because of their function in making vividly present before us the more concrete sounds and lexical units, so the third person of the Trinity may perhaps be viewed as the structured distributional personal matrix for the work of God (as the Spirit works in us with the love of God which “is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “For the Christian theologian the postulation of tristructural features in human behavior may well prove to be one of the most interesting of all linguistic phenomena. If this analysis can be sustained in some detail ... there would be available a number of illustrations of a Trinitarian type which could be used to help students grasp with more intellectual clarity some restricted components of the doctrine of a Trinitarian God (note that we *do not* say ‘proofs’ of the nature of deity. The knowledge of the structure of deity must come from revelation grasped by faith or it cannot come at all” (ibid., 39).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 42–43.

Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in his corpus of work, Pike was unabashed about the connections he saw between his theory of human behavior and the Trinity.

#### IV. *Conclusion and Implications for Linguistic Methodology*

The convergence of Pike's personalism and his knowledge of Scripture provided him with two theological locales, yet neither of these was an end in itself in terms of Pike's tristructural approach to language. Personalism and Scripture converged in the Trinity. A focus on God's image bearers will eventually lead one back to God, and God's tripersonal nature is revealed only in Scripture. *The Trinity is where person meets Word.* And so, the relationship between general and special revelation—the former being the arena of the latter—is wondrously portrayed in Pike's own career.

However, Pike's arrival at a Trinitarian approach to language and human behavior suggests something important for our understanding of general revelation as it relates to the Trinity. If all of reality is truly tristructural and reflective of the coinherence of the Trinity, then we may need to nuance our treatment of the Trinity in the context of general revelation. It seems that we can no longer say that the Trinity is not to be found in nature.<sup>53</sup> While we affirm with Warfield, Bavinck, and a host of other Reformed theologians that the doctrine of the Trinity "embodies a truth which has never been discovered, and is undiscoverable, by natural reason," we cannot say it is not ubiquitous in reality as a whole. It most definitely is, *yet no mind but the regenerate can see it.* Warfield spoke the truth, but perhaps there is more truth to speak. Those whose minds have been illuminated by the words of Scripture have no choice but to observe the gloriously ubiquitous Trinitarian structure of human behavior—of language, thought, and even of being. If they do not see it, this is not necessarily evidence of its absence or imperceptibility; it may be residual blindness to God's triune nature and the corresponding structure of reality. Pike's work suggests that the special revelation of the Trinity seems to be embedded in the general revelation surrounding us and indwelling us. But if we do not have eyes to see or ears to hear it, then it remains cloaked and cloistered. Pike's work has certainly opened the floor for this discussion in Reformed circles. While the Trinity remains a specifically revealed doctrine, more attention needs to be given to its functional place in the structure of reality and human behavior since, as Van Til affirmed, the ontological Trinity grounds all of human experience.

What are the implications of the tristructural and thus Trinitarian nature of reality for linguistic methodology? In the article just referenced, Pike merely

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<sup>53</sup> Indeed, when Paul tells us in Rom 1 that all men "know God," can this be any other but the Trinitarian God? It cannot be a Unitarian God—a deistic Father divorced from the Son and the Spirit. It *must* be the Trinitarian God, and yet Scripture also affirms time and again that not all men have a saving knowledge of God. So we must distinguish between salvific knowledge of the triune God and culpable knowledge of the triune God.

says that it is “interesting to speculate whether part of the character of man which is in the ‘image of God’ (Gen 1:27) might be the ‘built-in’ tendency to a tristructural patterning of man’s behavioral units.”<sup>54</sup> His own thought certainly suggests this tendency, but there are also many who find Pike’s approach arbitrary or forced. Surely, many would affirm that it has not been our default response as Christians to consider units of human behavior tristructurally—whether linguistic or non-linguistic. Our default response might be what Pike would call “particle-like,”<sup>55</sup> dividing bits of human behavior, and even the emic systems that encompass them, into discrete units, capable of being neatly defined and categorized monoperspectively.<sup>56</sup> This is residue not just of modernism but of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. It is identifiably unitarian, not Trinitarian. Indeed, if we embrace Van Til’s biblical axiom of thinking God’s thoughts after him, not just their *matter* but their *manner*, then there is something deeply disturbing about this trend.

Our linguistic methodology rests not simply upon usefulness in helping us understand and analyze the world around us, but in its effects on our perception. What, we might ask, does a unitarian approach to language and human behavior effect in us? An exclusion of diversity? A rejection of multiple perspectives, and, hence, a self-centered view of reality? Isolation leading to the morass of self-sufficiency? All seem likely.

The above conclusions may seem rash because they are centered in thought and perception and relate perhaps only secondarily to language. But linguistic methodology, we must remember, is tied to epistemology and ontology. Our language is inextricably bound up with our thought, and both our language and our thought are inextricably bound up with our being.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, our approach to language affects and informs our thought and our understanding of who we are.

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<sup>54</sup> Pike, “Language and Life 4,” 41.

<sup>55</sup> Or what Poythress might call “unitarian.”

<sup>56</sup> “Monoperspectival reductions of the truth frequently make one perspective into a godlike origin for everything else” (Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], 51).

<sup>57</sup> I refer to this as the MEL triad: metaphysics, epistemology, and language. The biblical foundation for this reasoning comes from 1 Cor 2:11–13: “For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” A person’s thoughts are inherently connected to his being, his spirit. Christians, Paul tells us, have received the Spirit of God, and we impart the spiritual truths we have been taught not with our own words, but with the words of the Spirit. The word, then, is the medium that takes the things “freely given us by God,” i.e., God’s thoughts, and communicates them to others. In sum, by God’s grace we are made new creatures in Christ (being), so that we can be spiritually instructed concerning God’s thoughts (thought), in order to communicate those thoughts through the Spirit’s words (language). This paradigm holds for unbelievers as well, but with drastically different consequences. Their spirit is lost, and so their thoughts are confused as they try to suppress the truth (Rom 1:18), which produces words that, at their best, appear to be wise but which are, in fact, foolish (Rom 1:22).

Any approach to language that has not accounted for the Trinitarian structure of reality may be prone to an ancient heresy of some kind—Arianism, modalism, Sabellianism, etc. Those heresies affected the thought and understanding of being for their adherents, and so if one aspect of our humanity—ontology, epistemology, or language—has been contaminated by a heretical view of God, it is only a matter of time before the contamination spreads. Claiming that we think analogically presupposes that we understand that our being is analogical to God's, and our language is as well, and so any approach to language that does not model itself on—or at least account for—the coinherence of the Trinity is bound to lead us astray by pointing us toward a God other than the God of the Bible.

In this light, consider, from the other side, Pike's tristructural view. What might that effect in us? Unity in diversity? An acceptance of multiple perspectives and an enriched understanding of language and life? A sense of dependency on the God who knows every emic system ever manifested in human history as well as every unit within each of those systems and its distribution to time and space? Again, all seem likely. And all seem to correspond to the biblical teaching on man's being, thought, and language.

Reality is Trinitarian. Being is Trinitarian. Thought is Trinitarian. Behavior is Trinitarian. Language is Trinitarian. These maxims stand out in Pike's theory and testify to his relationship (all facets of it) with the triune Person of Scripture, the God who is three-in-one.

Pike was a poet as much as a linguist, and he often had the boldness to end an article with a poem that encapsulated his message. The courage I take in doing the same I attribute solely to his example, though I am sure it will not have the effect that his did. Still, for the man whose focus on people and knowledge of Scripture shed biblical light on a linguistic world convinced of its own autonomy, it is worth the risk:

*Truth*

Truth is a person we join by preposition:

*In* is where we dwell,  
Not a stagnant proposition  
Or empirical spell.

Truth is God's speech:  
Father by Son through Spirit.  
Deafness is breeched  
For those who hear it.

Truth is not alone;  
It lives in community.  
Speech and thought, flesh and bone,  
Bear the mark of Trinity.