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The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything

by Pierce Taylor Hibbs

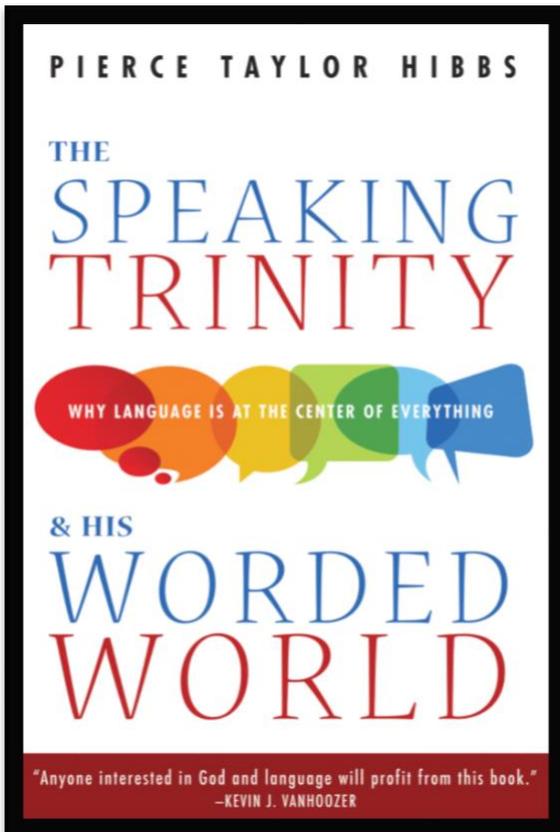
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New Title from Pierce Taylor Hibbs

The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World: Why Language Is at the Center of Everything



The Trinity is a speaking God: three divine persons who share the same essence and commune with each other in love and glory. How does this truth shape the way we view the world and our place in it? *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World* explores these questions by presenting all of life through the lens of language. Understood as *communion behavior*, language has its roots in God himself. What's more, God has used language not only to create our world, but to sustain and direct it. Because of this biblical fact, we live in a place that always and everywhere reveals the trinitarian God whose speech upholds it. All things "speak" of God by revealing aspects of his character (Romans 1). We live in a worded world, a world that was spoken and speaks of God. Thus, language is far more than a means of human communication; it is at the center of who God is, who we are, and what our world is like. Join the author as he walks through redemptive history and points out not only how all things can be perceived through the lens of language, but what this means for us practically in our use of words.

Pierce Taylor Hibbs serves as the Associate Director of the Theological English department at Westminster Theological Seminary. He is the author of *The Trinity, Language, and Human Behavior*, *Theological English; In Divine Company*; and *Finding God in the Ordinary*. He writes regularly at wordsfortheologians.org.



1. What made you want to write this book?

After studying the language theory of Kenneth Pike and reading Vern Poythress's theological applications of it, I began to take language very seriously. In fact, I began to see that Scripture placed language in the center stage. The Bible opens with a speaking God, who made humans in his speaking image and placed them in a world that speaks about him. Everything in creation seems integrally related to God's divine speech. Once I completed my ThM thesis on Kenneth Pike and published it (P&R, 2018), I began working on this book and couldn't stop writing until I got to the end! It was an invigorating and spiritually illuminating project.

2. Why is this book so important to you?

This book represents years of thought on language and the Trinity—and not just the ideas, but their application to spiritual life. The fact that language is at the center of everything means not only that we can learn much about God and the world through language, but that we can rekindle our relationship with God by using language. This book is an example of how scholarship is meant to serve the church. It's my hope that it serves many readers in their day-to-day walk with the Lord.

3. What thinkers had the greatest influence on you for this book?

The four thinkers that stand behind me on this are Cornelius Van Til, Kenneth Pike, Vern Poythress, and John Frame. Other theologians, such as Herman Bavinck and John Calvin, have been formative for me as well. But those four thinkers have had the most significant impact on my thought.

4. What do you hope this book does for readers?

My hope is that this book will ignite more conversations about God and language. I realize that not everyone will agree with all of the ideas in this book, but perhaps these ideas will still encourage them to begin thinking about these topics for themselves, with an eye on Scripture. My ultimate hope is that readers would open themselves up to how precious and potent language is, and that they would use this in prayerful reliance on the Spirit to grow in Christ-likeness.

5. Why should the average Christian reader care about this book?

Central to the book is the biblical truth that language is bound up with our understanding of God and vice versa. On a practical level, that means that our view of language has a great impact on our spiritual development. If we neglect language, for instance, in praying and reading Scripture each day, we will suffer spiritually. Or, if we feel as if the world is just cold and impersonal (i.e., that the world does not everywhere speak of God), we risk being out of touch with God and with the world he made: a world which everywhere reveals him.

6. If you could say one thing to readers of this book before they began reading, what would it be?

I would tell them to read carefully, measuring what I say against the truth of Scripture, and to implement the message in their daily routine. While this book is a work of theology and sometimes gets into ideas that are abstract, it is meant to serve people where they are: in the daily routines and interactions we confront each day. Let language be a lens for life, and watch how much God teaches you about who he is, who you are, and what this world is like as a product of God's speech!

**An Excerpt from *The Speaking Trinity and His Worded World:*
*Why Language Is at the Center of Everything***

We are sons and daughters of God, called to conform to God's Son, who is the divine Word that took on flesh. As the divine Word in the flesh, Jesus Christ has divine language embedded in his very personhood. Put differently, as the Word incarnate, Jesus has language—interpersonal discourse—as the beating heart of his identity. He does not just *use* language in his earthly ministry; he *is* language: divine discourse from the Father, uttered in the power of the Holy Ghost. Because Christ never ceases to be the divine Word of the Father, language is at the foundation of everything that he does on earth.

This truth is worth re-expressing, for I have not seen it emphasized in much of the Reformed theology I have read. Recall the orthodox teaching that Christ has two natures (one divine and one human) that are both fully present in his person. That means the divine Word of the Father is simultaneously present with the fully human person born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Spirit (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). Divine discourse (the eternal Word) tabernacled among us in human flesh! Thus, all that Christ thought, said, and did was undergirded and directed by his divine identity as the Word. Let me say it again: Christ did not just use language; he *is* language, the root of all interpersonal communication—divine and human. And so language is bound up with everything in his life.

Now, because we are creatures made in the image of the Son and are products of God's Word, language is, in a derivative way, embedded in our personhood, too. All that Christ thought, said, and did was undergirded and directed by his divine identity as the Word. All that we think, say, and do is undergirded and directed by our identity as products of that Word. Language is not just something we use; it is an essential part of who we are as creatures crafted by the speech of the tri-personal God.

**Praise for *The Speaking Trinity and His Worded World:*
*Why Language Is at the Center of Everything***

“Hibbs has given us an excellent book to present in accessible form the biblical basis for the centrality of language in God’s communion with us, in God’s creation and providence, and in human living. The book combines biblical exposition, practical examples, and clear, winsome writing. There is nothing like it on the subject of language!”

—Vern S. Poythress, author of *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach*

“The last century has witnessed a major preoccupation with language among philosophers. Theologians, too, have tried often to understand the language of God—his word. . . . Hibbs stresses the centrality of language to reality and to human life, and he persuasively expounds his view that language is *communion behavior*. This thesis has huge importance, and therefore I hope that the book finds many readers.”

—John M. Frame, author of *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*

“What a bracing theology Pierce Taylor Hibbs has given those of us who have been called to preach the word! Those who read and meditate on *The Speaking Trinity & His Worded World* will find their knowledge of God and his word expanded and elevated.”

—R. Kent Hughes, author of *Disciplines of a Godly Man*

“This extraordinary book brings together themes from linguistics, biblical theology, and apologetics, arguing that human language derives from the communion behavior of the divine Trinity. . . . No one is more qualified to accomplish this task than Pierce Hibbs. His years of experience both as a theologian and a language instructor bear fruit in this profoundly edifying study. Accessible to the specialist and the non-specialist alike, the book bristles with insights. It has the makings of a classic.”

—William Edgar, author of *Created and Creating*

“In a post-post-modern age that despairs of language, meaning, and truth, Pierce Hibbs's reminder that language -- communicative and expressive behavior -- is ultimately rooted in the triune God comes as a welcome Christian relief. Of particular importance is the claim that language is always personal and covenantal, oriented to communion, and that God is a speaking, communicative being. Anyone interested in God and language will profit from this book.”

—Kevin J. Vanhoozer

“Building on the work of Van Til, Frame, and Poythress, Hibbs has written a fascinating account of the Trinity as communicative, with language integral to creation and the nature of humanity in communion with God. Superbly written, his highly accessible discussion should do much to stimulate thought about God as Trinity, creation and our place in it, indeed everything, for he mounts a credible case that the Trinity is discernible all around us.”

—**Robert Letham**

“God created the world by speaking and his own Son is identified as the eternal Word. God’s works of creation, providence, redemption and consummation are all attributed to his powerful speech. So biblical faith is bound up with words—with language—in a unique way. That’s why this is such an important book. Regardless of whether one agrees with all of the arguments, I expect it to strike up a fresh and crucial conversation about God and language.”

—**Michael Horton**

