CLOSING THE GAPS:
PERICHORESIS AND THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

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> "Language bends us, moves us, drives us—or blocks us, holds us, binds us in a word-made mold."
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> —Kenneth L. Pike, *Tagmemics, Discourse, and Verbal Art*

Marshall McLuhan wrote years ago that the western world is "intensely individualist and fragmented."[1] His words still hold water four decades later. The sad follow-up is that though we are scattered and maimed by sin far more pervasively than McLuhan could have imagined as a media theorist, we still think we are better off if we have our own space.[2] The individualism of contemporary western culture has, among other things, sown the seed of this thought and then watered it so routinely that it has broken through the soil of speculation, sprouted leaves, and blossomed into an axiom. Gaps, we *think*, are good. We need space between one another, space to contemplate, space to grow spiritually in our relationship with God.

Yet, in another, ironic sense, the space we claim as necessary to social, cognitive, and spiritual fruition has also bored caverns beneath the soul. These caverns are ever collapsing, opening fissures and ravines between us and those we love, and so we use language to build bridges and reconnect. The paradoxical allegory of western humanity in the twenty-first century is that we create canyons between ourselves even as we build bridges, through language, to cross them. Gaps, we *know*, are not good.

Though we are content to use language as if it were only expedient to build and mend our bridges, the lasting answer to this "problem of gaps" lies in the nature of language itself, and, on the deepest level, in the Trinity. Language is a communing activity. God is a self-communing being. Looking to the tripersonal God of Scripture and his perichoretic self-communion, we find the heart of

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[1] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, ed. W. Terrence Gordon, crit. ed. (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 2003), 315.

[2] McLuhan ties our fragmentation to our uncritical use of media and our naiveté about its effects on our perception and noetic processes. Our individualism he attributes to the rise of the print medium, which, he thought, was waning at the dawn of the electronic era.

language and the real impetus for our use of words. Building bridges is not even the half of it. We were made to commune.

I. *Language, God, and Humanity*

I will be arguing in the following pages that the divine, perichoretic origin of language points to the solution to our problem of gaps. But what exactly *is* language? We could piece together a definition from a jigsaw of psychological and social theories, but that would be unwise. Secular linguists have nearly all made the same mistake in beginning a study of language with humanity. But all coherent and effective human behavior is rooted not in social patterns or evolutionary development, but in the self-contained ontological Trinity, in whose image we are made.[3] We start with the Trinity in every discussion. So that is where we begin here.

The persons of the Godhead dwell in perfect and eternal communion with one another. They "speak" to each other in the sense that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love and glorify one another without end.[4] We deduce this from Scripture, for "what God does in time reflects who and what he is in eternity."[5] At least, this holds for non-redemptive actions. We would not, for example, concur with Moltmann that, because Jesus suffers as God in history, God is a "suffering God."[6] But the actions of love and glory do not bind God to creation and redemption. These are actions that existed before time began, within the immanent Trinity.

Scripture reveals that the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Son loves the Father by obeying his commands to perfection, just as he instructs his followers to do (John 14:15, 21, 23). And Paul's ode to holy love (1 Cor 13:1–13) is inextricably bound to the third person of the Trinity as the fruit *of the Spirit* (Gal 5:22–23). In fact, "the Love-life whereby these Three mutually love each other is the Eternal Being Himself.… The entire Scripture teaches that nothing is more precious and glorious than the Love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father, and of the Holy Spirit for both."[7]

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[3] "Language originates with God, not with man" (Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009], 28).

[4] On "mutual glorification" of the persons in the Godhead, see John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2013), 480–81. See also Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Triunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London, 1650), 62.

[5] Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

[6] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 241; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 21; Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 298–305.

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

Glory lies within the Trinity in equal measure. In John 17:5 Jesus says, "Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." In the preceding chapter he proclaimed that the Spirit also glorifies him (John 16:14). So, the Son certainly receives glory from the Father and the Spirit, and yet Jesus tells us that he longs for the Father to glorify him *so that he can glorify the Father* (John 17:1). And the reason why the Son is glorified is because he gives life to all men who are dead in sins and trespasses (Rom 6:11). Our life is in Christ, but this life is none other than "the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2, 6), who is the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). Therefore, we can say that the Spirit shares in the glory of the Son as life-giver.

This divine exchange of love and glory is the highest form of communication. It is so precisely because the persons are distinct and yet united; their distinction serves their unity, and their unity complements their distinction.[8] Thus, the Father, Son, and Spirit speak to one another in a more intimate way than we can imagine. We can and must affirm that "there is—and has been from all eternity—talk, sharing and communication in the innermost life of God."[9] As distinct persons, they commune and coinhere in unending reciprocity of life, love, and light.[10] We communicate to move towards communion; their communication is their communion. For the Trinity, language is a communicative behavior that serves unbroken unity, because there are no gaps in God. In other words, "the Father does not distance Himself from the Son and Holy Spirit, and They do not think about separating Themselves from the Father. Rather, each sees Himself in the other and is more preoccupied with the other's good than with His own."[11] By the mutual love each person has for the other persons, we learn that the Trinity is a gapless God, and yet a God who chooses to communicate with himself (internally) and with his

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[8] Augustine, *Trin.* 5.8; John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, FC 37 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 182–85; John P. Egan, "Toward Trinitarian Perichoresis: Saint Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 31.41," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39 (1994): 92; Verna E. F. Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 59; 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), 494; Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 365, 369; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God*, vol. 1 of *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, ed. and trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 134; Lane G. Tipton, "The Function of Perichoresis and the Divine Incomprehensibility," *WTJ* 64 (2002): 297; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 171–72, 175, 197; Thomas F. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity according to St. Athanasius," *AThR* 714 (1989): 400; Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), 78.

[9] Kelly, *The God Who Is*, 487.

[10] "God is in three Persons who communicate being (or life), goodness, and light (or knowledge) among Themselves. This makes God a Trinity of Persons united in the greatest possible love" (Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love*, trans. Roland Clark [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012], 14).

[11] Ibid., 42.

creatures (externally). Language for the Trinity is communion par excellence, showcasing the fact that the persons of the Godhead were, are, and always will be "inextricably intertwined."[12]

Now that we have some sense of what language is for the Trinity, we can move on to consider how we understand human language. Given that humans are created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26), we must start by affirming that human language is an imaging behavior. Gaffin notes,

> 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?[13]

Gaffin is on to something with the word "especially." Human language is not an addendum to the *imago Dei*; language grounds it.[14] Our communication points to our ontology and divinely patented identity: we were spoken into being by the self-communing Trinity; we *are* creatures who speak. Language, then, is not an empty vehicle, a tool for achieving eclectic social and material ends. Rather, it is what sets us apart as conscious, engaging creatures of a communicating God. This not only underscores the importance of our understanding and use of language; it demands that we expand our definition of it to include far more than a system of graphic and phonetic signs.

Kenneth L. Pike (1912–2000) defined human language in a way that gives more attention to its expansiveness than the theories of other linguists, so we will adopt his approach. Language, according to Pike, is communicative behavior rooted in a unique observer of reality.[15] Each person then works with

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[12] Daniel F. Stramara Jr., "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology for Trinitarian Perichoresis," *VC* 52 (1998): 263.

[13] 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. See also Kenneth L. Pike, "Morals and Metaphor," *Interchange* 12 (1972): 231; Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 29–34; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 240–41.

[14] "God did not create man in isolation from a later purpose to communicate. It is not as if he created man first, and then, as an afterthought, asked himself whether it might be good to establish communication, and on what terms communication might be possible. Rather, God created man already having in mind the purposes of communication" (Vern S. Poythress, "Rethinking Accommodation in Revelation," *WTJ* 76 [2014]: 148).

[15] "Language is not merely a set of unrelated sounds, clauses, rules, and meanings; it is a total coherent system of these integrating with each other, and with behavior, context, universe of discourse, and observer perspectives" (Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to*

hierarchical structures—phonology, grammar, and reference—to express particular perspectives or emotions. It should be clear by this point that our unique expressions presuppose others who can interpret and engage with us. So, language is what we do as creatures in community; its goal is always communal in nature. In this sense, it is what we might call *communion behavior*, for its purpose is the expression of one person towards another.[16] Language is a drawing together of conscious beings made in the image of the Trinity.

But why do we have this need to draw together? Why is the plain of our community riddled with fissures and canyons? The simple answer is sin. Some have described pride as the greatest sin, and therefore suggested that Adam and Eve's choice to follow the words of the serpent was a decision of hubris: they assumed that their glory could trump that of their divine creator. This is certainly a true interpretation, but pride can be dissected into its components, and when we do so, we find that at the heart of pride is not just a misplaced value of self-worth, but a desire for autonomy. The deadliest desideratum of humanity is the will for self-government. At base, this is nothing more than a longing for space, which gives us breathing room to submit our conscience and will to no one but ourselves. Sin is a violation of covenant, a breaking of God's commands, a performance of what God forbids—yes, yes. But at its heart sin is a disruption of communion, a breaking apart of what should be united. In this light, marriage, which is the most intimate inter-personal union, is defended in marital ceremonies with the words, "What God has joined let no man separate."

Because the Trinity is the archetype of distinct persons in perfect unity, it should come as no surprise that the doctrine of perichoresis illuminates the nature of language and provides the antidote to autonomy and isolationism. In what follows, I hope to show how perichoresis is related to our communicative behavior, and the closing of gaps between persons. In order to do this, we will first need to examine perichoresis in its historical and theological context, and then apply it to both divine and human language.

Tagmemics [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982], 44). For details on the particle, wave, and field observer perspectives, see 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; Kenneth L. Pike and Evelyn G. Pike, *Grammatical Analysis*, Publications in Linguistics 53 (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1977), 5; Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 19; Kenneth L. Pike, *Talk, Thought, and Thing: The Emic Road toward Conscious Knowledge* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1993), 47–51; Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 52–56.

[16] "One of the purposes of language—in fact, a central, predominant purpose—is to be a vehicle for personal communication and communion between God and human beings" (Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 38). As we will see, this communion also involves the expressions of the persons of the Trinity towards one another. Before creation, these expressions, as we already discussed, would have been of love and glory.

II. *Perichoresis*

Simply put, when we speak of perichoresis with reference to the Trinity, we are referring to the intimate union of the divine persons, such that "each is in each, and all are in each, and all are one."[17] How exactly is each person "in" the others? The language of "coinherence" and "indwelling" is most commonly offered for clarification. Others use more eccentric terms. Turretin, for instance, suggests "the divine persons *embrace* each other and *permeate* … each other."[18] However, no matter what terms are used, the mystery of this truth eschews rationalistic exposition. All that is clear from Scripture, particularly the Gospel of John, is that the persons of the Godhead interpenetrate one another, and yet "while indwelling one another, do not coalesce."[19] A plethora of definitions could be added as supplements,[20] but the idea is, I think, clear enough for our purposes. Once we consider the biblical roots of this teaching, we can move on to consider the historical question: how did early theologians come to understand perichoresis so that the term came to enjoy relative semantic stability?

1. *Biblical Roots*

The intimate communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be found throughout Scripture, but we will limit ourselves to a few texts here, namely, those commonly referenced for the teaching of perichoresis.

Rather than jump immediately to the Gospel of John, which is easily the most illuminating text for this teaching, we can note that the linguistic analogy introduced in John's prologue (the Son as the Word) leads us to find support for perichoresis in other places of Scripture. Genesis 1 is a prime example. If the Son is the Word of the Father, and if the Spirit of God is bound to the life and effectiveness of that Word (cf. Job 33:4; Rom 8:2), then Gen 1 is the first time we

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[17] Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century 5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 6.10.

[18] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:257; emphasis added.

[19] Paul M. Collins, *Trinitarian Theology: West and East—Karl Barth, the Cappadocian Fathers, and John Zizioulas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 211.

[20] For other definitions, see Augustine, *Trin.* 1.18; John of Damascus, *Writings,* 177; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 90–91; Collins, *Trinitarian Theology,* 209–15; Oliver D. Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis," *TynBul* 56 (2005): 135–39; Egan, "Toward Trinitarian Perichoresis," 92; Frame, *Systematic Theology,* 479–81; Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," 59–63; Kelly, *The God Who Is,* 489; Michael G. Lawler, "Perichoresis: New Theological Wine in an Old Theological Wineskin," *Hor* 22 (1995): 52–53; Letham, *Holy Trinity,* 365–66; John McClean, "Perichoresis, Theosis and Union with Christ in the Thought of John Calvin," *RTR* 68, no. 2 (2009): 134–35; Randall E. Otto, "The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology," *SJT* 54 (2001): 366; Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology," 259; Tipton, "Function of Perichoresis and the Divine Incomprehensibility," 292; Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God,* 169–73; Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology,* 78.

witness the divine persons' indwelling one another. God is portrayed in his unity for the creation account, but the Trinity is present as the divine Speaker, Speech, and Breath.[21] The Son, as the Speech of God (Word), indwells the Father by expressing the depth of his mind and will. The Spirit, as the power and life of this expression (1 Cor 2:11; Rom 8:9), indwells the Father and the Son in order to apply the expression felicitously to creation. Thus, even in the first divine fiat, "Let there be light," we have not simply God, but the *triune* God bringing about order and beauty by his perichoretic communion. This is attested later in Scripture when the psalmist writes, "By the word [Son] of the Lord [Father] the heavens were made, and by the breath [Spirit] of his mouth all their host" (Ps 33:6).[22]

However, we would be fooling ourselves to ignore the fact that John's Gospel is referenced by many theologians as the threshold to the teaching of perichoresis, and for good reasons. Here we find more explicit references to the indwelling and interpenetration of the divine persons. In John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Here, Jesus is not claiming that he and the Father are the same person, for "then the *distinction* between Jesus and God already introduced in 1:1b would be obliterated."[23] And yet, because much of John's Gospel suggests that there are "metaphysical overtones" to what Jesus is saying,[24] this is far more than a statement of Jesus' likeness to the Father or even to their union in accomplishing the salvation of God's people (Jesus already alludes to the latter in other parts of John's Gospel, such as 5:17). So, in what sense are Jesus and the Father "one"? We find the answer eight verses later.

In John 10:37–38, Jesus addresses the Jewish opposition to his claim of divinity. "If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Note the reciprocal nature of Jesus' answer. The Father is in him *and* he is in the Father. The indwelling is symmetrical.[25] Carson affirms that Jesus' words here are a reference to the "mutual co-inherence" between himself and the Father, and this grounds Jesus' teaching in John 5:19, where he tells the people that he can do nothing "by" or "from" himself.[26] The joint working of the Father and the Son, then, is an implication of their prior and eternal indwelling. And the Spirit cannot be left out of this either, for "the Spirit, along with the Father, remained with/indwelled Jesus (1:32–33; 10:38; 14:10–11)."[27] Analogously, through Christ, we enjoy "a share in his filial relationship with the Father by the

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[21] Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 17–21.

[22] See also Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 19–21.

[23] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 394.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis," 139–40.

[26] Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 400.

[27] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *The Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 146.

indwelling of the Holy Spirit."[28] This is especially important for our purposes because Köstenberger and Swain helpfully point out that "identifying the Spirit's relationship to Jesus and his disciples enables us to detect the Spirit's distinctive personal activity even in places where he remains otherwise unnamed."[29] Thus, when Jesus says to Phillip, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (14:11), and when he prays to the Father on behalf of believers, "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (17:11), what we have are not statements concerned with two persons of the Trinity, but with all three of them. Jesus is in the Father, and the Spirit is in Jesus and is the Spirit of the Father; Jesus is "one" with the Father in the Spirit. This unity, referenced again in 17:21–22, is what we might call a *trinal* unity, to borrow a term from Berkhof.[30] It is a trinitarian unity, not a monistic unity.

These Johannine passages provide the basis for the doctrine of perichoresis, so we can say that the notion of perichoresis was evident long before the terminology sprouted and took root in the early church. Yet, there were, in the first several centuries AD, important explanations of this teaching that served to illuminate the already lucid teaching of Scripture. This is where we turn presently.

2. *Historical Survey*

Nearly every theologian who has written on perichoresis has provided his or her own summary of the historical use of the term, so it would be redundant to reproduce it in full yet again.[31] A summary should suffice for our purposes.

At the risk of sounding a bit juvenile, I suggest that the history of the term perichoresis can best be remembered with an acronym: GMPJ (Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Cyril, and John of Damascus).[32] Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 325–389) first used the term perichoresis in reference to the relationship between the divine and human natures in Christ, attempting to explain "the exchange of titles and hence of activities and attributes" of the two natures in the one person of Christ.[33] This teaching, which Crisp helpfully titles "nature-perichoresis" so as to distinguish it from trinitarian "person-perichoresis," is closely related to what later came to be known as the *communicatio idiomatum*.[34]

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[28] Ibid., 146–47.

[29] Ibid., 147.

[30] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 84.

[31] I recommend Harrison's historical summary, which is efficient and clear. See Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," 53–63.

[32] This is certainly a simplification, since others, such as Daniel Stramara, have shown that the concept of perichoresis, if not the actual vocabulary, was evident in the work of others in the early church. See Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology."

[33] Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," 55.

[34] Crisp notes that the perichoresis of the two natures of Christ should not be confused with the *communicatio idiomatum*, since the latter explains how allegedly contradictory properties can be

Though Christ's divine and human nature are said to "interpenetrate" one another, this interpenetration is not symmetrical. As Crisp notes,

> nature-perichoresis involves an asymmetrical relation between the two natures of Christ. The divine nature of Christ interpenetrates his human nature without confusion and without being mingled with it. But the human nature of Christ does not interpenetrate the divine nature in any way.… The divine nature of Christ interpenetrates the human nature of Christ, upholding and sustaining it at each moment of its existence.[35]

Maximus the Confessor (580–662) followed Gregory's use of the term, adding that perichoresis applies to the two natures of Christ as well as to their "energies."[36] While his understanding of perichoresis paralleled that of Gregory, Maximus extended the breadth of its meaning to include our salvation and redemption (which is linked to the Eastern teaching of deification). For Maximus, there is perichoresis of "the believer with (or toward) the object of belief," that is, Christ.[37] This, of course, should be distinguished from the nature-perichoresis of Christ, and Maximus seems to have done so by noting that we have "an identity of *energy* with God … whereas in Christ the *natures* actually coinhere in each other."[38] We should note in passing that others have already shown that perichoresis cannot be equated to our union with Christ. The two kinds of union are of different orders, despite their initial similarities.[39]

From Maximus we move to a writer known now as Pseudo-Cyril (c. 650), who was the first to use the term perichoresis in reference to the persons of the Trinity, though John of Damascus should be credited for noting that Trinitarian person-perichoresis is logically prior to the nature-perichoresis in the person of Christ.[40] For Pseudo-Cyril, the persons of the Godhead "'possess coinherence in each other,' though without confusion or division."[41] Note both parts of Pseudo-Cyril's definition: unity and distinction. While some theologians are

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predicated of the same person, while the former outlines how the divine and human natures of Christ are united without introducing a *tertium quid*, a third kind of nature in the person of Christ (Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis," 123).

[35] Ibid., 130.

[36] Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," 56–58.

[37] Ibid., 57. Gregory Nazianzen had written, in *Oration* 30, that Christ "takes on a strange form, bearing the whole of me in himself with what is mine, so as to consume the bad in himself, as fire does wax or the sun does the earth's mists, and I participate in what is his through the commingling."

[38] Ibid., 58.

[39] See McClean, "Perichoresis, Theosis and Union with Christ." See also Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:257; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 151–53, 157. Commenting on John 17:22, Carson writes, "The unity of the Father and the Son is the reality against which the unity of believers is to be measured, not the reverse. And like any analogy that generates a comparison, the analogy cannot be pushed to exhaustion" (Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 395).

[40] Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," 61.

[41] Ibid., 59.

quick to comment on how perichoresis defends God's unity, we must be equally as vigilant to defend the real distinctions of the persons, for "the idea of Father, Son, and Spirit dwelling in each other presupposes a serious and meaningful confession of their distinctness."[42] After all, it would not make much sense to affirm unity without presupposing distinction, for without distinction unity could not exist. Unity is a perfect interrelation of distinctions, so the teaching of perichoresis does not merely assert a monistic unity; rather, it supports, as we said earlier, a trinal unity.

The last of the theologians usually mentioned with regards to perichoresis is John of Damascus (born c. 676), who often receives attention for popularizing the concept. As noted above, for John, "the Trinitarian perichoresis has ontological and conceptual priority, and he understands the Christological perichoresis as following the same pattern."[43] The Trinity is "known in three perfect Persons and adored with one adoration, believed in and worshiped by every rational creature, united without confusion and distinct without separation, which is beyond understanding."[44] In John, we find the basic understanding of Trinitarian perichoresis virtually unchanged from the time of Pseudo-Cyril.[45] John did, however, bring the concept into more prominence, perhaps by eliminating earlier subordinationism from the pen of Gregory Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor. The latter had suggested that the Father is the Monarchy of the Trinity, and thus the cause and source of deity for the Son and the Spirit.[46] But for John, the Son "was always with the Father, being begotten of Him eternally and without beginning. For the Father never was when the Son was not, but the Father and the Son begotten of Him exist together simultaneously, because the Father could not be so called without a Son."[47] The Spirit also, as eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, cannot be relegated to a lower seat at the Trinitarian table. If there is a "monarchy," for John it is the Trinity itself. This emphasis complements the reciprocity of the divine persons in their interpenetration, and thus led the way for future theologians to have a firm foundation when claiming that Trinitarian perichoresis was perfectly symmetrical.

That, in brief, is how the term perichoresis entered the drama of theological history, though, as noted earlier, the concept was clear in John's Gospel, and terminology that eventually gave way to perichoresis can be traced to other writers of nascent Christianity, particularly Gregory of Nyssa.[48]

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 61.

[44] John of Damascus, *Writings*, 177.

[45] Lawler, "Perichoresis," 52.

[46] Christopher A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and Knowledge of God: In Your Light We Shall See Light*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 201–13.

[47] John of Damascus, *Writings*, 178.

[48] Stramara, "Gregory of Nyssa's Terminology."

There is much more to say, but perhaps we can end this section by noting that theologians, both then and now, have debated whether Trinitarian perichoresis is static or dynamic. In other words, do the persons *rest* in one another, or are they actively and ceaselessly *interpenetrating* each other? T. F. Hibb adamantly defends the latter position, claiming that perichoresis "has essentially a *dynamic* and not a static sense."[49] Others suggest that since perichoresis accents the unity of the Godhead, it is static in nature. Collins, perhaps simplistically, suggests that the dynamic view can be tied to Orthodox theologians because they begin Trinitarian discussions with the persons, whereas the static view can be tied to the Latin West, which begins Trinitarian discussions with the one divine essence.[50] That seems difficult to validate, and, as it turns out, may serve to do nothing more than draw lines in the sand. There is no reason to have one or the other when *both* seem to be represented in Scripture (John 10:38 is a prime example of the "static" sense of perichoresis). In fact, a push to take either one or the other suggests a theological agenda, either aimed at underscoring God's action (e.g., Barth's notion that God has his being "in act") or at reducing divine mystery so as to rationalistically master knowledge of the Godhead. Just as unity and plurality are equally ultimate in the Godhead, so are staticism and dynamism.[51] We do well to follow the example of John of Damascus and confess that we are dealing with a mystery here, not something neatly categorized at several levels.

3. *Perichoresis and Representation*

With an understanding of the biblical roots and the theological origin of perichoresis, we can move on to situate the concept in our discussion of language. To do that, we must revisit a Van Tillian description of this doctrine, expressed with the language of *representation*. Van Til writes,

> In the Trinity there is completely personal relationship without residue. And for that reason it may be said that man's actions are all personal too. Man's surroundings are shot through with personality because all things are related to the infinitely personal God. But when we have said that the surroundings of man are really completely personalized, we have also established the fact of the representational principle. All of man's acts must be representational of the acts of God. Even the persons of the Trinity are mutually representational. They are *exhaustively* representational of one another.[52]

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[49] Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 171.

[50] Collins, *Trinitarian Theology: West and East*, 209–10.

[51] 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), 364–65.

[52] Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 78.

Van Til is here discussing the concept of perichoresis with fresh vocabulary—vocabulary that is particularly helpful in discussions of language, as we will soon see. We can draw Van Til's meaning of Trinitarian representation from his discussion of our analogical representation.

Van Til defines our representation in the context of covenant. Sinful philosophy, he tells us, refuses to believe that our thought and action is valid if God is involved. All of our thought and action must be completely independent if it is to be authentic. So, for example, Rom 5 and Adam's representative headship must be left by the wayside if we want to affirm authentic and meaningful human behavior. Van Til calls this "unipersonal" thought and action. It suggests that all of what we do must be done autonomously, in isolation from the triune God. It suggests further that "an act can be truly personal only if the surroundings of the person be impersonal [i.e., free of God's control, authority, and presence]."[53]

The Christian, on the other hand, must claim that "all personal activity among men must be based upon the personality of the one ultimate person, namely, the person of God, if only it be understood that this ultimate personality of God is a triune personality."[54] Therefore, we are called to affirm not only that Adam's representational headship is valid and thus that inherited sin is a biblical truth, but also that all of our behaviors, if they are to be authentic and meaningful, must represent the Trinitarian God analogically. As Van Til puts it, "Because he is a creature, man must, in his thinking, his feeling, and his willing, be representative of God."[55] Anything that opposes or feigns operation in isolation from this God is actually inauthentic and void of meaning.

So, we represent the triune God when we think the Father's thoughts after him as revealed in Scripture, when we echo the words of Christ and conform to his image as we speak the truth in love (Rom 8:29; Eph 4:15), and when we act by and through the power of the Spirit who indwells us (Rom 8:9–11). That, in essence, is how our analogical representation of the triune God works. But it is quite another thing when we move from creature to Creator.

Within the Trinity, the persons are "exhaustively representational" of one another. This means that in each person of the Godhead the other two persons are perfectly represented. When we look at the Father, we see the Son and Spirit represented felicitously and in full. When we look at the Son, we see the Father and the Spirit represented felicitously and in full. It is the same when we look at the Spirit. The persons of the Trinity coinhere, indwell, interpenetrate, permeate, and make room for one another to such an extent that we have no choice but to be dumbfounded at how such unity could exist without eclipsing personal distinctions. And yet in God's incomprehensibility, somehow this is the case. Exhaustive representation, like the traditional teaching of perichoresis, is meant to bring us to our knees in adoration, to bow our hearts and our minds to the God who dwells in intimate self-communion.

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 78–79.

Though this exhaustive representation belongs only to the Trinity,[56] Van Til showed, as we noted earlier, that our thought and behavior as creatures is analogically related to this divine truth. If the persons of the Godhead exhaustively represent one another, then creatures made in the image of that God analogically represent the "person" of the Godhead on a finite scale. So, "man's thought is representative of God's thought, but not exhaustively representative."[57] The same goes for the rest of coherent and meaningful human behavior, for example, language.

Now that we have settled what Van Til meant by his "representational principle," we can move on to the climax of our discussion: how perichoresis is related to and establishes the nature of language.

4. *Perichoresis and Language*

We noted earlier that our application of perichoresis would need to be applied to both divine and human language. On the divine level, we will explore how perichoresis deepens our understanding of the Trinitarian analogy of Speaker (Father), Speech (Son), and Breath (Spirit). We will then move from this level to the more specific level of God's Word, considering the interpenetration of God's meaning, control, and presence within that Word. On the human level, we will examine the creaturely analogue of speaker, speech, and breath. Then we will narrow our focus once more to look at our words and the perichoretic structure of human language in relation to grammar, phonology, and reference. Here we will draw on the linguistic theory of Kenneth Pike.

III. *Speaker, Speech, and Breath*

The linguistic analogy for the Trinity has long been celebrated by theologians of the East and West. St. Basil has a unique focus on the Father as the divine heart from which the Son as the Word is produced. In answer to the question, "why call the Son 'the Word'?" he writes,

> Why *Word*? So that it may be understood that it proceeds from the intellect. Why *Word*? Because he was begotten without passion. Why *Word*? Because he is the image of his begetter, showing in himself the whole of the begetter, not divided from him in any way and existing perfect in himself, just as our word also reflects the whole of our thought. For what we express in words is that which we think in our heart, and that which is spoken is a reflection of the thought in the heart. For *out of the abundance of the heart* [Matt 12:34; Luke 6:45] the word is expressed.[58]

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[56] "The divine persons indwell human beings in a qualitatively different way than they do one another" (Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 153).

[57] Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 79.

[58] Basil the Great, "Homily on the Beginning of the Gospel of John," in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Popular Patristics 47 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), 254–55.

But in general, it seems apropos to draw from John's prologue the conclusion that "God the Father is speaker, God the Son is the speech, and God the Spirit is the breath carrying the speech to its destination. The Spirit is also the power who brings about its effects."[59] Though the Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in the prologue, he is present through the allusion to Gen 1, where the Spirit hovered over the surface of the waters and then was given as the breath of life for animate creatures (Job 33:4).

When it comes to perichoresis of the Speaker, Speech, and Breath, we find that

> the Father's wisdom is expressed in the Word. This expression in the Word shows that the Father dwells in the Son. The Father's thought is in the Son. In addition, the Father's word is in the Father even before he expresses it to the world. That implies that the Son dwells in the Father. And the Spirit, as the breath of God, works in power in conformity with the character of the Word. The Spirit is in the Son and the Son is in the Spirit. The Spirit carries out the purpose of the Father, and manifests the power of the Father, which implies that the Father dwells in the Spirit and the Spirit in the Father.[60]

Combining this application of perichoresis with Van Til's vocabulary of "exhaustive representation," we come to an ancient truth: though there is distinction in roles within the Trinity, there is intimate communion of the highest order. As Speaker, the Father perfectly represents the Son as his Word and the Spirit as his Breath carrying that Word with unparalleled power and efficacy. As Speech, the Son perfectly represents the Father as the one who clearly and eternally articulated him, and the Spirit as the life and dynamism of that holy articulation. As Breath, the Spirit perfectly represents the Father who speaks the Word, whose divine phonemes, we might say, are formed and applied in congruence with the Speaker's intention and the Word's meaning.

All this is to say the perichoretic union of Speaker, Speech, and Breath is so concentrated that there is no gap between *who* God is, *what* he says, and the *effect* of what he says. The divine linguistic community holds perfect integrity with itself. We find no gaps in the communicative behavior of the Trinity. It is for this reason—the perfect communicative behavior of the immanent Trinity—that we can have such blissful trust in God's revelation, that is, the communicative behavior of the economic Trinity.

IV. *Meaning, Control, and Presence*

When we narrow our focus to God's Word in particular, we retain our dependence on and awareness of the Speaker, Speech, and Breath. God's Word manifests his meaning, control, and presence.[61] These three terms, as Poythress

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[59] Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 21.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 24–25; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010), 50–67.

notes, can be linked to the Father, Son, and Spirit respectively. His explanation is particularly insightful for us:

> Meaning originates from the plan of the Father. As executor of the Father's will, the Son is closely associated with control. The Father speaks specific orders in his word, which is the Word of the Son. By means of the Son, the Father carries out his will. And the Holy Spirit is closely associated with the presence of God. In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit hovering over the waters expresses the presence of God in creation. Since the persons of the Trinity are coinherent, we expect that the three perspectives on communication, namely, meaning, control, and presence, will also be derivatively coinherent.[62]

The glimmer of perichoresis catches the eye when we consider the creation account, where God's Word brings a meaningful world into existence—meaningful ultimately only in relation to the Trinity who chose to create it—a world that is controlled and upheld by the Word (Heb 1:3) and manifests the presence of the Trinity throughout. The Word manifests God's presence by manifesting the triune "person,"[63] for "the word of God is *God* speaking, not a 'something' detached and unrelated to God himself."[64]

The coinherence of meaning, control, and presence in God's word again attests to the truth that there are no gaps in God. The meaning of our linguistically derived world (for all of reality is derived from God's speech) is worked out through the meaningful communication of the Father's will for creation. That meaningful will is perfectly represented in the controlled expression of the Son, who executes the Father's will, but that expression itself exudes the presence of the triune God, and the Spirit works to carry the expression to its destination and apply its effects to us as hearers. The meaning coinheres with the control coinheres with the presence. To use Augustine's words again, "each is in each, and all are in each, and all are one." Relating all of this to God as divine Speaker, Speech, and Breath, we affirm that just as there is no gap between who God is, what he says, and the effect of what he says, so there is no gap between *what* he means (meaning), *how* he means (control) it, and *whom* (Spirit) he intends to convey as his word affects his audience.

V. *Human Speakers, Speech, and Breath*

As we are creatures made in the image of the triune God, we also are, analogously, speakers who can produce speech with our breath. Our longing to do so reflects that we are made in the image of a gapless God. As Stăniloae puts it,

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[62] Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 25.

[63] Here I use "person" to denote not the distinct Trinitarian persons, but the Godhead in its entirety, which, as is well known, Van Til did in his *Introduction to Systematic Theology*.

[64] Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 26; emphasis added.

> In the Word people meet each other and the Word of God. John the Evangelist uses the name "the Word" to show us not only the interpersonal nature of the divinity but also the will and power of God to meet humans and help them meet each other. For God placed the power and the injunction of words in each one of us so that we might have communion with each other and with the divine Word.[65]

And we might add, "with the divine *Trinity*," for we have communion with the Father through the Son by the power of the Spirit. The point is that our desire for intimate communion with one another and with God is rooted in God's intimate communion with himself. God's communion is unbroken, but sin has broken our communion, both with God and with each other. We have a desire for the unparalleled Trinitarian love, but in Adam we traded that fulfilled desire for isolation and autonomy. Yet, even now

> each person has in his word a request that includes a declaration of his love for the other and that asks for the other's response. This exchange is based on the way that the incarnate Son declares His love for the Father even in His humanity. This declaration and response would not exist without an interpersonal relationship. And the supreme origin of the offer and response is in the Trinity.[66]

We need to adjust Stăniloae's wording a bit, though he is on to something. He seems to have left the Spirit out of the equation as the Breath of God.[67] As even he himself admits, "the Spirit is not a 'He' about whom the Father and Son speak, but each speaks of the other two inseparably. Neither the Father nor the Son speaks about the Spirit as about a third who is apart from Them, but the Father has the Spirit within Himself when He speaks with the Son, and the Son has the Spirit within Himself when He speaks with the Father, just as when He speaks with us."[68] So, our longing to communicate as speakers, by speech and with breath, is rooted in the communion of Speaker, Speech, and Breath in the Trinity.

Now, the exhaustively representational Trinity has created us in his image, and so we should expect that our ability to speak would follow in God's divine footsteps, modeling the perichoresis of speaker, speech, and breath analogically. This is indeed the case. In the Trinity, the Father is Speaker, the Son is Speech, and the Spirit is Breath; each of God's image bearers, in turn, is a speaker who utters

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[65] Stăniloae, *Holy Trinity*, 37.

[66] Ibid., 54. Elsewhere Stăniloae writes, "Humans too are unities of intelligences, or incorporated words, made to know God the Father through the Son, and, through words, to be united with the Word of the Father" (p. 34). Note again the absence of the Spirit in this statement. This is an ongoing problem in his writing.

[67] The reason for this, I surmise, is the underlying subordinationism in his approach to the Trinity and his rejection of the *filioque* clause, classic of Eastern Orthodox theologians. His subordinationism leads him to focus more on the relation of the Son and the Father, and his rejection of the *filioque* seems to make him relegate the Spirit to a sort of "third wheel" in the Trinity, though he tries to deny this. See Stăniloae, *Holy Trinity*, 25, 29–32, 36–38, 49, 54, 63–65.

[68] Ibid., 65.

discourse by the breath that is within him.[69] Poythress, once again, is helpful here:

> Speech presupposes a speaker. A speech without a speaker is virtually an impossibility.…
>
> Thus, a speech is dependent on a speaker, and can be coherently understood only on those terms. A speech must "dwell in" a speaker in order to be a speech. But, conversely, a speaker presupposes a speech. If we are to know what the speaker means, we cannot climb inside his head; we rely on his speech or on some alternate, speech-like mode of communication (like gestures). A speaker is accessible through his speech. He "dwells in" his speech.
>
> … The speech goes to its destination through breath, or through some breath-like medium of communication. Without a medium and a transfer, there is no speech at all. The speech must "dwell in" its breath or its medium. Conversely, without the meaning content, there is no speech at all. The breath must "dwell in" a speech and its medium in order to be a speech at all. The breath must issue from a speaker, and "dwell in" the speaker.[70]

Of course, unlike the persons of the Trinity, our speech and breath are not self-conscious persons. That is where the analogy breaks down. However, there is a sense in which a human speaker, speech, and breath are analogically tied to the persons of the Godhead as the archetype. In fact, that is precisely what we have been arguing. We can speak because the Father speaks.[71] We can speak words because the Son is the Word of the Father, and our speech is carried to its destination by our breath (or some other medium) because the Spirit carries the Father's word to its destination, even if that destination is within the immanent Trinity, that is, the Father or the Son, or both.

Just as humans analogically represent the Trinity as the archetypal Speaker, Speech, and Breath in perichoretic union, so also we image the Trinity in communicating meaning, control, and presence.[72] They are manifested in the substructures of human language, namely, grammar, phonology, and reference, which is where we turn presently.

VI. *Perichoresis of Grammar, Phonology, and Reference*

Just as we narrowed our focus on divine speech from Speaker, Speech, and Breath to the meaning, control, and presence of the Word, we now narrow

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[69] Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 31.

[70] Ibid., 32.

[71] Frame ties this to the fact that speech is an essential attribute of the Godhead. "God's eternal inter-Trinitarian speech is a necessary divine attribute, an attribute without which God would not be God. As such, speech, like all other necessary attributes, designates the essence of God, what God really and truly is. Ultimately, God's word is God, and God is his word" (Frame, *Doctrine of the Word*, 48).

[72] "Without meaning, speech is empty. Without control, it does not accomplish anything, and makes no difference. Without presence, the speech is disconnected from the speaker and again loses its point. We depend on the fact that we are made in the image of God" (Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 31).

our focus to the particular structure of human words. Here again we find peri-choresis in the nature of language via the hierarchies of grammar, phonology, and reference. This is the genius of Kenneth Pike, so we will be following him closely here.[73]

For Pike, language is what he calls "tristructural." A tristructural analysis of language "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."[74] Guarding against the Trinitarian heresies of tritheism and modal-ism, Pike is clear that his approach is neither tripartite nor triaspectual nor tridimensional. Once we approve of his Trinitarian approach, we immediately ask, what are the hierarchies that comprise this tristructural analysis?

For Pike, there are three structured hierarchies, each composed of a certain type of unit. First, there is the *identification-contrastive* structure, tied to mor-phemes, that is, meaningful lexical units. In the sentence, *I believe in Christ*, we find the morphemes *I, believe, in*, and *Christ.* These morphemes reveal the meaningful referents of the speaker; thus, the identification-contrastive structure is linked to reference.

Next, there is the *manifestation* structure, which can be tied to what Pike calls "gramemes." Gramemes are grammatical-functional roles in a defined con-textual matrix. For example, *I* in the example sentence would be considered the "subject-as-actor" grameme.

Lastly, there is the *distribution* or *functional* structure, which is tied to vowels, consonants, intonation, stress, and other phonemic features of a phonetic matrix. In the previous example, among other phonetic features, we find three long vowels, a shewa (*buh* in *believe*), and a short vowel (*i* for the preposition *in*). The distribution of such features is linked to the phonological system of a language.

Now, take away the units of any of these structures—identification-contrastive (reference), manifestation (grammar), and distribution (phonology)—and you are left with nothing.[75] Each structure is distinct, and yet each comprises the whole of the linguistic piece in focus. Moreover, there is interpenetration of these structures, for they are "simultaneous, overlapping, but distinct."[76] The reference to perichoresis should be evident. Pike brought this out explicitly at the end of the article that we have been referencing. He first notes that "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."[77] Then we can go on to associate the

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[73] See also ibid., ch. 32.

[74] Kenneth L. Pike, "Language and Life 4: Tristructural Units of Human Behavior," *BSac* 115, no. 457 (1958): 37.

[75] Ibid., 37–38.

[76] Ibid., 38.

[77] Ibid., 39.

identification-contrastive structure (reference) with the Father, the manifestation structure (grammar) with the Son, and the distribution structure (phonology) to the Spirit.[78]

Thus, grammar, phonology, and reference in every linguistic unit of human language is a creaturely analogue of the self-communicating Trinity, summarized in the figure below.
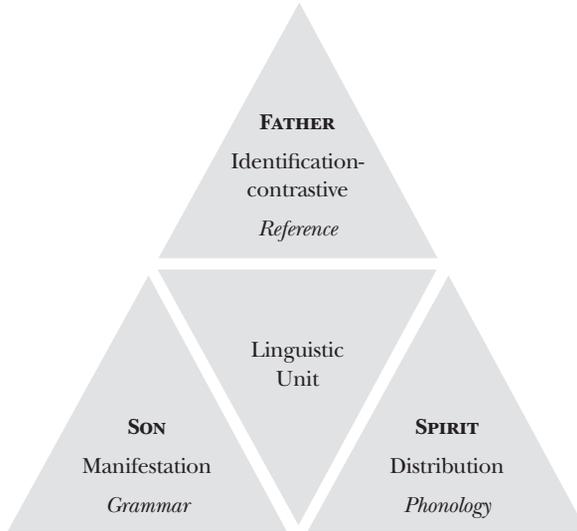

FATHER
Identification-
contrastive
Reference

Linguistic
Unit

SON
Manifestation
Grammar

SPIRIT
Distribution
Phonology

Figure 1: Perichoresis with Human Linguistic Units

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[78] Pike and Poythress differ slightly on the relation of these hierarchies to the persons of the Trinity. Pike writes, "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).… 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).… Similarly, as the distributional-functional structure in the sentence forms the matrix within which the words of the sentence occur…, 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' (Rom 5:5)" ("Language and Life 4, " 42–43). Thus, it would seem that Pike could relate the identificational-contrastive structure with reference and the Father, as Poythress does (see Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 267–68). However, the above quotation by Pike makes it seem likely that he would associate the Son with phonology, rather than the Spirit. Poythress does the opposite, which seems more fitting since the Spirit is the breath of God; he is the medium that carries the Word. Still, one must remember that in the context of perichoresis, grammar, phonology, and reference can be viewed perspectivally, so we should expect to see elements of grammar associated with the Father or the Spirit, or elements of phonology associated with the Father, and so on. We would, on the other hand, say that each person of the Trinity has a fitting, central tie to one of these subsystems. I would concur that the Father is linked with reference, the Son with grammar, and the Spirit with phonology.

In summary, we find the concept of perichoresis in divine language via Speaker (Father), Speech (Son), and Breath (Spirit), as well as in the meaning, control, and presence of the Word. We also find it in human speakers, speech, and breath and in the grammatical, phonological, and referential hierarchies. All of this is well and good, but we have not yet solved "the problem of gaps" that we introduced at the start; we have not yet shown how perichoresis reveals the nature of language to that end.

VII. *Misrepresentation and the Disruption of Analogical Perichoresis*

I mentioned earlier that Van Til's language of *representation* would be particularly useful in our understanding of language. Here, in brief, is why.

The persons of the Trinity are, as Van Til puts it, "exhaustively representational" of one another. Because the persons of the Godhead are exhaustively representational of one another, creatures made in the image of the Trinity are analogically representational of God in all that they do.[79]

Language, then, must also be representational. By this we mean that all of our communicative behavior represents on a finite, analogical scale the communicative behavior of the Trinity. In their communicative behavior, the persons of the Trinity exhaustively represent one another; in our communicative behavior, we image the Trinity by analogically representing ourselves. Perhaps it is for this reason that we see Scripture constantly identifying a *person* with his or her *words*, both communally and individually. The human race was a unified whole prior to Gen 11, when "the whole earth had one language and the same words." The diffusion of language brought about not just confusion, but the separation of people groups (Gen 11:8). Ever since that time, people groups have been identified primarily by their native language, or at least their dialect. Hence, Peter stuck out like a sore thumb among the scribes and elders of Jerusalem because his speech was phonetically different; he was a Galilean (Matt 23:73) and spoke as one. Every utterance marked him as a member of a specific geographic community.

Our words also represent us individually, ultimately because the Word of the Father is the "exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). The Father is perfectly represented by the Son, who is the Word. Because we are creatures made in the image of the Trinitarian God, our words are fitting representations of who we are. Just as God's Word reveals his personal presence, so our words express our personality, and in that sense we are present with our words.[80] Because we ourselves are present with our words, there is a sense in which our words are inextricably bound up with our person. For this reason, the psalmist writes,

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[79] Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 78.

[80] "Man's speech shows meaning, control, and presence. In this respect it images the meaning, control, and presence of God's speech" (Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, 30). See also ch. 11 of Frame, *Doctrine of the Word*.

"Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit" (Ps 34:13). *People* commit evil acts; *people* are deceptive, but our words are so deeply rooted in our personhood that the psalmist can exhort our tongues and lips as if they were *we*. Indeed, we can certainly assume this much if Christ himself says, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:37). Language determines our destination as people.

Language, then, is representational of both communities and individual persons. However, language is also representational in another sense, probably more in line with what Van Til might have considered. Language is representational in the sense that we should represent the Trinitarian God in our use of words to love and honor others. For all eternity, God comprises his own linguistic community of self-love and glorification.[81] While we are not called to glorify others with our words, we are called to build one another up and encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11). This is related to glorification in that it is an uplifting behavior. When we encourage others, we lift them up so that they understand how much they are loved.

This means that all of our sinful communication comes from a lack of representation in speaker, speech, and breath—a *misrepresentation*. With God, there is no gap between *who* he is, *what* he says, and the *effect* his speech has on his hearers. This is not the case with us. Oftentimes who we are in Christ is not represented by what we say or how we say it. Conversely, those who are not in Christ sometimes act in ways that accord with God's law even though who they presently are, as those still "in Adam," is not represented by what they say or how they say it (Rom 2:14). Our communication, as sinners, is riddled with misrepresentation, that is, with gaps. Why is this the case?

Earlier, we discussed how sin disrupts communion and asserts futile self-government and autonomy. Sin is also present in marring the image of God. That image, we now know, is related to speaker, speech, and breath, as well as grammar, phonology, and reference. If human sin is a disruption or severing of communion—rather, the disruption of *our* communion with the gapless, exhaustively representational triune God—then perichoresis may reflect this disruption and be especially useful in helping us close the gaps between us. To put it differently, perichoresis may be the treatment for our diagnosis of communicative misrepresentation.

Consider the disruption more precisely in our discussion of a speaker, speech, and breath. A problem in any of them affects all of them. There are, of course, physical effects of the fall that have led to problems with speakers.

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[81] "The divine essence is only divine when hypostasized in three Persons, because these three have a value and a relationship between Them that deserves and is capable of absolute love" (Stăniloae, *Holy Trinity*, 17). He later writes, "The highest form of love is revealed to us in the unending love between the one and only Father of a unique Son. Yet throughout eternity the love between the Father and the Son has also been directed toward a third Person who takes joy in the love that each has for the other" (ibid., 55).

Not many are direct causes, mind you, but rather unexplainable brokenness that longs for restoration. Children and adults with lower cognitive abilities and those struggling with various forms of autism, for example, have a great deal of difficultly *as speakers.*[82] That is, they have great difficulty with, or even lack awareness of, verbal expressions and signals of nonverbal communicative behavior (gestures and body language). The challenges they encounter as speakers in turn affect their speech, or, in the absence of speech, their intended message. Likewise, the breath they long to use to send their words to a parent or loved one is frustrated and thus channeled into other expressive behaviors. Air that might have been used to articulate a request to turn off the television instead fuels anxious or methodical stimulations (sometimes referred to in the field as "stimming"). The action of the speaker is still expressing something—perhaps irritation at the sounds of the television—but many of these behaviors are difficult, if not impossible, to interpret for those unacquainted with the person affected by autism. Thus, a cognitive challenge in the speaker can and often does lead to hindrance in forming or producing an expression, in addition to impeding the reception of the message by another person. Thus, gaps open up—heart-wrenchingly painful gaps—between those who struggle to communicate and those who long to commune with them. And once those gaps open, the indwelling speech and breath meant to express the speaker's thoughts and intentions is broken.

This is only the physical side of our "speaker problems." There is also the spiritual side, and it runs even deeper. A speaker who has been redeemed in Christ by the power of the Spirit (the Speech and Breath of the divine Speaker) may be able to form communicable thoughts into verbal language and use his breath to send it to its destination in order to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15), but what about those who are not united to Christ, and those still dealing with sin on the long road to sanctification? What happens when our speech seems nothing more than "irreverent babble" (2 Tim 2:16), when our words mainly tear down those around us (cf. Eph 4:29) or even express indifference to the struggles and joys of others?

When we fall into this category, as even the most faithful Christians do, we sow dissension and confusion with the words we articulate, and the breath that should be used to build up others in the body of Christ ends up contributing to the corrosion of communion. Our sin as speakers opens ravines that no speech or breath can bridge, save the continual intercession of the Word and the Breath of life we receive in his name. Still, on the existential level, perichoresis of speaker, speech, and breath for sinners is often disrupted.

When it comes to our speech, we often encounter problems related to the perichoretic ties between grammar, phonology, and reference. When one of

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[82] It has been reported that a third of children and adults with autism encounter this staggering challenge. See "10 Years of Progress: What We've Learned About Autism," Autism Speaks, http://www.autismspeaks.org/news/news-item/10-years-progress-what-we039ve-learned-about-autism.

these is disturbed, because of their mutual indwelling, it affects the other two. Consider the sentence, *Paul did not want committing sin.* Even if this sentence is pronounced with accents on the correct syllables and appropriate intonation within context, the grammatical problem is disruptive. According to the structure of English, some verbs can be followed by gerunds, some by infinitives, and some by both. Here the gerund *committing* should be replaced with the infinitive *to commit.* If not, there is semantic ambiguity, which affects the reference of the utterance. Is *committing sin* a certain type of sin that Paul did not want, or are we saying that the act of committing sin is not what Paul wanted? The referential ambiguity leads hearers of this sentence to question whether the speaker knows precisely what he wants to say; and, if he really intended to say something else, they might wonder if that might slightly change the pronunciation. For instance, perhaps the speaker originally accented the word *committing.* Sometimes English speakers accent the adjective preceding a noun to emphasize the quality (e.g., *He memorized several <u>long</u> passages of Scripture*). But this is probably not the speaker's intention—it would lead us to believe that Paul does not want to carry out a certain kind of sin, which, at least, is not what is implied in Rom 7:15. If, however, the gerund is replaced by the infinitive, the stress might naturally shift to the main verb: *Paul did not <u>want</u> to commit sin.* With a grammatical change, the pronunciation falls into place and the referential meaning becomes clear.

We encounter problems with phonology as well. The sentence *Why did you do that?* can be pronounced in a way that suggests either sharp criticism or simply an innocent inquiry. The pronunciation affects the meaning, and this affects how the recipient of the question views the one who asked it, the speaker. As with the grammatical problem, a problem related to pronunciation (a subsystem of phonology) introduces discord into the perichoretic relations between grammar, phonology, and reference, which in turn affects the relations of speaker, speech, and breath.

Finally, with reference to our breath, we encounter problems that are essentially related to medium. The breath we use in speech is felicitous with a certain medium, namely, spoken language. But we use other media besides our breath to communicate. For example, we can type words on a page and use the medium of written language. The breath we used to produce sounds and send them to a destination now becomes the graphic symbols we type in a word processing document, or email. But the shift in medium introduces a whole new set of potential problems. We could use the medium inappropriately, such as when we send an email or text to someone who would have preferred that we call or meet to discuss the issue in person. The choice of medium affects the message (as McLuhan pointed out decades ago), and this in turn affects how the speaker (or writer) is perceived by the recipient of the message.

All of these disruptions in analogical perichoresis for human language—disruptions caused by misrepresentation—serve to introduce gaps in our communion with one another. Some gaps are larger than others. Some are

small and can be closed if we make the effort to revise our communication, or apologize for poor communication, or simply for hurtful words.

VIII. *Conclusion*

In closing, we have learned that the doctrine of perichoresis shows we are bound to a God who dwells in self-communion, a God who speaks to himself and to his creatures. God's perfect self-communion is the archetype for our creaturely communion. And this is especially important to remember in a world where communion is the goal, but rarely the norm.

The nature of our language, imprinted by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is thus communal. It serves to close the gaps that exist between persons as well as the gap that exists between ourselves and the tripersonal God. In God, there are no gaps. And one day, when we dwell with him in glory, gaps will be foreign to us as well. But for now, we continue speaking, leaning upon the divine Speaker, Speech, and Breath for our daily communication. The closer we come to embracing the perichoretic nature of language, the closer we will be to practicing harmony between who we are, what we say, and how we say it. The more integral that harmony becomes, the closer we will draw to the God whose personality, expression, and efficacy have brought the world into being and will one day bring all of the pieces back together so that we are one, even as he is one (John 17:21).