Multiperspectivalism and the Reformed Faith
by Vern Sheridan Poythress

What is multiperspectivalism? Multiperspectivalism appears as a characteristic aspect in virtually all the writings of John M. Frame. Recently, Frame himself has written a short piece, "A Primer on Perspectivalism," which summarizes its main features.[1] Let us focus on Frame's multiperspectivalism, but with a glance at the larger context.

Features of multiperspectivalism

Human knowledge arises in the context of human finiteness. Any particular human being always knows and experiences truth from the standpoint of who he is.[2] He has a *perspective*. He can learn from others by listening sympathetically to what they understand from their differing backgrounds or perspectives. The diversity of human beings leads to a diversity in perspectives. John Frame affirms both the limitations of any finite human perspective and the absoluteness of God's knowledge. "It [perspectivalism] presupposes absolutism [the absoluteness of God's viewpoint]."[3] The presence of God implies that truth is accessible to human beings, and that there is a difference between truth and falsehood. In this way, Frame is an "absolutist" rather than a relativist. But he invites us to take seriously the insights and the differences in emphasis that arise from viewing a particular subject-matter from more than one point of view.

Besides showing a wider interest in diverse human perspectives,[4] Frame introduces the use of perspectival triads, and affirms their relation to the Trinitarian character of God.[5]

Frame uses primarily two triads. To discuss God's Lordship, he uses the triad of authority, control, and presence. As Lord, God has authority over us, exerts control over us, and is present to us. Each of these three aspects of God's Lordship can serve as a perspective on who God is and how he relates to us. These three perspectives are involved in one another, and each helps to define and deepen our understanding of the other two. All three aspects of Lordship are involved is *all* God's relations to his

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1   Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism," http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/PrimerOnPerspectivalism.htm, dated 14 May 2008, accessed 12 Nov. 2008. A longer exposition, focusing specifically on ethics, is found in PWG. See also Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (reprint; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001). For the development of Frame's multiperspectivalism, see John Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," in this Festschrift.

2   "... because we are not God, because we are finite, not infinite, we cannot know everything at a glance, and therefore our knowledge is limited to one perspective or another" (Frame, "Primer").

3   Ibid. See also Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 6.

4   In DCL Frame argues that each of the Ten Commandments has its own distinctive focus, but each can also be used as a perspective on the whole range of our ethical obligations. This argument illustrates that Frame is aware of the possibility of other perspectives beyond the perspectival triads that are most characteristic of his writings. See also Frame, "Primer."

5   Frame, "Primer."

creatures.[6]

To discuss ethics, Frame uses another triad of perspectives, namely the normative, situational, and existential perspectives.[7] The normative perspective focuses on the *norms*, God's law and his expressions of his ethical standards for human beings. The situational perspective focuses on the situation in which a human being must act, and endeavors to discern what attitudes and actions promote the glory of God within that situation. The existential perspective focuses on persons and their motives, particularly the central motive of love.

Again, these three are involved in one another. God's norms tell us to pay attention to the situation--in particular, the needs of others around us. The norms also tell us to pay attention to our attitudes (existential). Similarly, the situation pushes us to pay attention to the norms, because God is the most important persons in our situation, and what he desires matters supremely. The situation also pushes us to pay attention to the persons in the situation. Our own attitudes must be inspected for their potential to change the situation for good or ill.

Because God is Lord of all, these perspectives harmonize in principle. God promulgates the norms; God controls the situation; God created the human persons in his image. But in a fallen situation of sin, human beings have distortions in their ethical knowledge, and the use of one perspective can help in straightening out distortions that people have introduced in the context of another perspective.

The multiperspectivalism practiced by John Frame differs decisively from relativistic views that are sometimes called "perspectivism."[8] Frame does his work self-consciously within the framework of a Christian commitment. He is a follower of Christ, and is committed to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).[9] The Bible has a central role in his multiperspectivalism, because he believes that it is the infallible word of God,[10] and that God specifically designed it as a means to instruct us and free us from sin, including intellectual sin. The Bible is the infallible guide for sorting through and separating truth from error in the process of using different perspectives.

Multiperspectivalism in relation to the Reformed faith

How does multiperspectivalism relate to the Reformed faith? John Frame is

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6 See the extensive discussion of this triad in DKG and DG.

7 The triad is introduced in PWG, and its use is developed extensively in DCL. The triad for ethics is closely related to the triad for lordship (Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 6 [NB: the page number will have to be changed to match the pagination of this article within the Festschrift]]).

8 Friedrich Nietzsche emphasized the centrality of the variety of human perspectives in the process of attaining knowledge, and for that reason his epistemological approach has been called "perspectivism." Werner Krieglstein has built a viewpoint called "transcendental perspectivism" that endeavors to combine an acknowledgment of limited human perspectives with striving towards combining viewpoints in a search for higher truth. His approach is explicitly spiritualistic, in that it sees consciousness as universal. But his is a non-Christian form of spiritualism.

9 Second Cor. 10:5 became an important principle in the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, a tradition continued in Frame's apologetics.

10 See the Westminster Confession of Faith 1.4-5.

Reformed in his theology, and has spent his career teaching at Reformed seminaries.[11] How does Frame's multiperspectivalism fit his commitment to the truths embodied in the Reformed confessions? In the early days, some people worried about whether multiperspectivalism would lead to relativism, and whether it was compatible with traditional Reformed theology. Over time, the growing body of John Frame's writings have made it clear that Frame is building on Reformed orthodoxy and vigorously defending it, rather than flirting with the spirit of the age. Frame is indeed committed to the absolutism of God and not the relativism of non-Christian thinking.

But in theological style Frame's approach seems subtly different from some of the theological writing of past centuries. What is the relation? Do multiperspectivalism and the Reformed faith simply exist side by side, with no direct relationship? Is one dependent on the other? Do they aid one another?

We can try to answer these questions in two ways, either by looking at the origins of multiperspectivalism or by looking at its contemporary shape. Let us first look at the origins.

I. Origins of multiperspectivalism

Frame's multiperspectivalism

From an early point in his classroom teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary, John Frame deployed his key perspectival triads. When I became at student at Westminster in 1971, Frame was already using as a major pedagogical tool both the triad for Lordship (authority, control, and presence) and the triad for ethics (normative, situational, and existential).[12] Both of these triads had obvious affinities with doctrines from classic Reformed theology.

The triad for Lordship obviously linked itself to the long-standing Calvinist emphasis on the sovereignty of God. But the triad was also designed to express aspects of the way that God related to human beings, both in his words and in his deeds. The classical Reformed tradition was accustomed to speaking about God's relation to human beings as a covenant.[13] *Authority* comes into covenant because God is the authoritative maker of covenant, and we as human beings are to submit to his authority. God *controls* the covenant relation both by protecting his people and by punishing and disciplining covenant violations. God is *present* in covenant in inaugurating and sustaining a relation of personal intimacy between God and man. Thus, Frame's triad for Lordship can be seen an re-expressing some of the classic themes in covenant theology in the Reformed

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11 Frame has taught at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Westminster Seminary in California, and Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. See Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought."

12 In 1971 Frame taught introduction to theology (including theology of the word of God), the doctrine of God, and ethics. His lectures have led to his books: DKG, DG, DCL, and DWG. Frame also mentions the influence of G. Dennis O'Brien, a Catholic philosophy teacher at Princeton, who had some elements reminiscent of perspectival thinking ("Backgrounds to My Thought," 4), and George Lindbeck (ibid., 11).

13 See the Westminster Confession of Faith, 7; Westminster Larger Catechism, 30-36.

tradition.[14]

The influence of Cornelius Van Til

Frame's triad for ethics derives directly from Cornelius Van Til's work, *Christian Theistic Ethics*.[15] In all his books Van Til made clear his own vigorous commitment to Reformed theology as the foundation for his whole enterprise. In his book on ethics, he emphasized the unique character of Christian ethics in contrast to all forms of non-Christian ethics. According to Van Til, Christians, with regenerate hearts and with a commitment to follow Christ, have an approach innately *antithetical* to all kinds of autonomous thinking and autonomous ethics.[16] Autonomous thinking derives from an unregenerate heart and is unwilling to submit to God's ways. In Van Til's view, Christian ethics is distinctive in its goal, in its standard, and in its motive. Van Til showed how these three--goal, standard, and motive--fit coherently together within a Christian approach.

This work by Van Til laid the foundation for Frame's perspectivalism. Van Til himself did not take the step of saying that the three aspects, goal, standard, and motive, could serve as perspectives on one another. But he came close to perspectivalism by stressing their coherence and mutual reinforcement. It remained for Frame, as a disciple of Van Til, to develop Van Til's insights into a fully articulate perspectivalism. The goal, when used as a perspective on the whole of ethics, became Frame's situational perspective. The standard, viewed as a perspective, became the normative perspective. And the motive became the existential perspective. The existential perspective has sometimes also been called the "personal" perspective to distinguish it pointedly from French existentialism. Frame's perspectivalism thus grew up within the soil of Reformed theology and the Reformed apologetics of Cornelius Van Til.

I would suggest that Van Til's apologetics contributed in another, less direct way. Van Til's emphasis on the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thinking emboldened Van Til's followers to be willing to break fresh ground in their thinking. The antithesis implies that they should not merely adopt second-hand some non-Christian system of philosophical ethics, and then make minor adjustments to try to use it within a Christian framework.

We can illustrate more specifically the distinctiveness of Christian thinking in the

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14 In "Backgrounds to My Thought," 6-7, Frame also indicates a connection between this triad and Van Til's treatment of the correlation of God, man, and nature in Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God* (ed. William Edgar; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2007).

15 Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics*, Volume II of the series In Defense of Biblical Christianity (n.l.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1971). According to Frame, Van Til's triad can be traced back to the Westminster Confession of Faith 16.7 (see Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 5n14 [NB: pagination should be redone according to the page numbering when Frame's "Backgrounds" appears in the Festschrift.]).

16 See especially Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (2d. ed.; revised and abridged; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963); Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (n.l.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969); AGG; CVT. Van Til built on earlier thinking, especially from Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper, John Calvin, and St. Augustine.

area of ethics. Frame has pointed out that non-Christian ethics has tended to take one of three major forms.[17] *De-ontological* ethical systems start with absolute norms and base everything else on them. These systems owe their plausibility to prioritizing the normative perspective. *Existentialist* ethical systems start with the primacy of the individual, his will, and his personal decisions. These prioritize the existential perspective. Finally, *teleological* and *utilitarian* ethical systems start with the goal of maximizing human pleasure and well being. These prioritize the situational perspective. All three kinds of approaches refuse to recognize the Christian God. So all three end up exalting one perspective as a kind of substitute for God and his authority. This one perspective is forced to become the monolithic source for everything else. By contrast, Christians can acknowledge the true God as the author of the norms (through his word), the creator of the persons, and the governor over the situation.

Hence a Christian approach can affirm an intrinsic harmony among the three perspectives. It does not need artificially to create an autonomous, humanly-generated source of ethics by making one perspective superior and giving it a godlike role. Instead, a Christian approach affirms that God alone is God. This affirmation, basic to the Christian faith, enables Christians to refuse to make God substitutes in the form of favored philosophical sources for ethical thinking. And it enables them to affirm that, because of God's sovereign authority and control, normative, existential, and situational perspectives cohere in harmony.

The influence of biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos

John Frame also acknowledges the influence of biblical theology on the development of his theological thinking and his program:

> Recall my emphasis in Part One [of DKG] on covenant lordship; that was biblical theology. The biblical theological method is prominent in my *Doctrine of the Word of God* and *Doctrine of God*, both as yet unpublished.[18]

That is to say, the whole structure of Frame's thinking about "covenant lordship," including his triad of perspectives, authority, control, and presence, is "biblical theology." By "biblical theology" Frame means biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos, the study of "the *history* of God's dealings with creation."[19] Frame cites both Geerhardus Vos and his successors, such as Edmund P. Clowney, Meredith G. Kline, and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., all of whom developed their thinking within the framework of Reformed

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17 See DCL, Part II: "Non-Christian Ethics," 39-125.

18 DKG, 209n35. Frame makes this remark in the context of a longer discussion of both the contributions of biblical theology and the dangers of prideful or immature use of it. See also his references in "Backgrounds to My Thought."

19 DKG, 207. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, 1966), 13. Vos expresses a preference for the label "History of Special Revelation" (ibid., 23); Frame prefers "history of the covenant" (DKG, 211). Both settle for "biblical theology" only because it is a more traditional expression.

theology.[20] Frame writes as a systematic theologian, but acknowledges the need for systematic theology to be sensitive to dimensions of Scripture highlighted in biblical theology.[21]

How does Frame's thinking about covenant lordship reflect biblical theology? In discussing covenant lordship, he intends to point to the rich material in the Bible itself concerning God's covenantal relations to mankind and to Israel and to the church, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Frame's categories of authority, control, and presence, as well as the master term "Lord," are meant to evoke the richness of the history of special revelation. Authority, control, and presence are manifest in God's creation of the world in Genesis 1, in his interaction with Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3, in his relations to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and so on. Frame's categories have a flexibility that allow us to see how they are at work in all manifestations of God's Lordship, and in all the richness of covenantal relations through the Old Testament.

The flexibility of categories is next door to their ability to function as perspectives. A tightly circumscribed, technical category like "burnt offering" has great specificity in meaning and in use. If we use it outside its narrow sphere, we use it only playfully or metaphorically. By contrast, Frame's triad of lordship has the flexibility built in. Such flexibility in many cases is more characteristic of biblical theology than it is of traditional systematic theology. The built-in flexibility permits an easy extension of the categories into perspectives. For example, *everything* that God does, whether or not we explicitly label it as a display of his presence, inevitably involves his presence. Presence becomes a perspective, in that it is characteristic of all passages in the Bible that involve God at all.

Wider uses of multiple perspectives

In sum, Reformed theology as a whole, the Reformed apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, and the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos had important influence and offered important encouragement for the development of Frame's multiperspectivalism. But was the Reformed background *necessary* for the development? My account up to this point might suggest that it was. But within multiperspectivalism we find also a concern to

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20 See DKG, 207n33. Clowney, Kline, Gaffin, and Frame at an early period in their career were all students at Westminster Theological Seminary. And all later taught at Westminster for a time. Vos stayed at Princeton Theological Seminary after the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary as a split off of Princeton in 1929. But Vos's affinities with Westminster are still profound. So the developments of Frame's perspectivalism are closely tied to Westminster.

21 DKG, 212:

It is especially important for systematic theologians today to be aware of the developments in biblical theology, a discipline in which new discoveries are being made almost daily. Too frequently, systematic theologians (including this one!) lag far behind biblical theologians in the sophistication of their exegesis.

Frame also notes that some advocates of biblical theology have gone to excess (DKG, 209-212; Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 9 [NB: correct page number on the basis of the Festschrift]). See also Vern S. Poythress, "Kinds of Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 70/1 (2008) 129-42.

listen sympathetically to other perspectives. Logically this concern embraces perspectives from people who occupy other streams of Christian tradition. Could other Christian traditions develop multiperspectivalism?[22]

Here also Van Til's apologetics has a positive contribution. Van Til has an emphasis not only on *antithesis* but also on *common grace*.[23] The doctrine of common grace says that God shows mercy and gives blessings even to rebels, and the blessings that God gives can include various human insights into truth. These insights come to non-Christians. How much more may we expect that God may give blessings and insights to Christians, including Christians in other traditions besides the Reformed tradition. God gives blessings not because our theology is already absolutely perfect, but out of his grace, which he gives on the basis of Christ's perfection.

All genuine Christians have been regenerated through the work of the Holy Spirit, and have become a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; see John 3:1-8; Eph. 4:22-24). The Lord has renewed their minds and set them on the path of righteousness, including righteous *thinking*. But all of us are inconsistent and still retain remnants of sinful ways of thinking. We need to help one another out of each other's sins. And God continues to bless us in ways that we do not deserve. Hence, in principle, if multiperspectivalism is indeed a valid approach, any Christian anywhere can receive insights from the Lord leading him into a multiperspectival approach.

In fact the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) leads in this very direction. If you love your neighbor, you are willing to listen to him sympathetically. And if you listen, you begin to understand his perspective. Maybe you find some erroneous thinking. But you also find some positive insights. When you find insights, you incorporate your neighbor's perspective into your own thinking, and then you have two perspectives instead of one. At a basic level, people are doing sympathetic listening all the time, whether in marriage and family, at work, or in education. Multiperspectivalism can be seen as little more than a self-conscious description and codification of some of the processes that are innate in loving your neighbor.

In particular, Christian cross-cultural missions have always involved multiple perspectives. A Christian crossing from American to Chinese culture has an American perspective with which he begins. As he learns more about Chinese culture, he learns about how things look from a Chinese as well as an American point of view. So he has two perspectives.

Similarly, biblically-based Christian counseling involves multiple perspectives. The counselor has his perspective, which should based on mature knowledge of Scripture. He listens to the counselee sympathetically, and tries to understand the counselee's thinking and feeling and "perspective." The counselor gradually develops an understanding of a second perspective, the perspective of the counselee, and then endeavors to bridge between God's truth in Scripture and the counselee's situation.

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22 More broadly still, could multiperspectivalism develop even outside of Christianity? Some forms of "perspectivism" crop up here and there (see footnote 8); but Frame's multiperspectivalism is grounded ultimately in the Trinity, and is therefore possible only within the circle of Christian Trinitarian theology.

23 See, for example, Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (n.l.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

God is the ultimate source for whatever insights we receive concerning multiple perspectives. God can give us insight suddenly, in a moment, in a flash. But frequently God uses means. Scripture itself is, of course, a primary means. But God also uses the skills and insights of others within the body of Christ. For example, John Frame learned from Van Til, rather than developing his multiperspectivalism completely from scratch. The Christian counselor learns from the example of more mature counselors, as well as those who may undertake to instruct him in the art. The missionary intern learns from the missionary veteran. He sees how to move from one perspective to another through both instruction in general principles and through observing examples that embody the principles.

Thus, though it is possible in principle for people to develop a multiperspectival approach from scratch, it is certainly easier to do it when they build on the work of others.

My own growth in multiperspectivalism

I may use my own growth in multiperspectivalism as a further example of how one person learns from another. In 1971 I became a student at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, where John Frame was teaching. I was attracted to his teaching, including its multiperspectival dimensions, and adopted it as my own.

Frame's thinking was explicitly multiperspectival. But I also learned multiperspectival thinking from Edmund P. Clowney, who taught practical theology at Westminster. Clowney did not talk explicitly about perspectives. But his approach was nascently multiperspectival. How so?

Clowney's thinking used biblical theology. He followed the metaphorical and analogical aspects of Scripture as he showed how the Old Testament pointed forward to Christ. The Old Testament pointed forward partly through types and shadows that analogically pointed to Christ.[24] Thus Clowney helped me adjust to using some key categories like sacrifice, temple, and kingship in a flexible way, as I saw relations between Old Testament institutions and Christ. This flexibility, as we have observed, is next door to perspectival practice.

Clowney also adopted an insight found already in the Westminster Standards, the

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24 This analogical connection was already propounded in the Westminster Standards:

> This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old Testament. (Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.5; see Westminster Larger Catechism, 34)

Clowney developed these Confessional themes further in books like *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); and *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). See also Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (reprint; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995).

insight that Christ is our final prophet, king, and priest.[25] Christ's teaching ministry showed his work as a prophet. His working of miracles showed the exercise of power, and therefore his kingship. His sacrifice on the cross showed his work as priest.

But as I thought about these truths, and combined them with Clowney's use of analogy and typology in the Old Testament, it seemed to me that the three kinds of work of Christ could not be neatly isolated. When Christ taught, he taught with *authority*. His teaching manifested a kingly claim. So his teaching was not only prophetic, but kingly as well.

When Christ cast out demons with miraculous power, that was a kingly work. But he characteristically drove out the demons using verbal commands, which were prophetic utterances (Luke 4:36). Moreover, the very character of his miracles revealed the character of Christ. The miracles indirectly revealed something about who he was and the character of his kingdom. For example, his healing of the paralytic in Matthew 9:2-8 showed that Christ had power to forgive sins. The miracle taught something. And if it *taught*, it was indirectly *prophetic* as well as directly kingly.

We can also look at the promise to forgive sins. The promise pronounced by Jesus is a pronouncement involving Jesus' exercise of his prophetic function. But we can also observe that forgiveness comes on the basis of substitution and sacrifice--ultimately, Christ's sacrifice. Forgiveness involves a priestly dimension. So a miracle that proclaims forgiveness also has a priestly dimension. Thus, the labels prophet, king, and priest can be used not merely in a more literal sense, but as *perspectives* on the whole of Christ's work. All of Christ's work is prophetic, in that it teaches things about him. All is kingly, because he is always acting with kingly authority. All is priestly, in that all his work is part of the total program for reconciling his people to God through his sacrifice.

So from Edmund Clowney I had a perspectival triad, namely prophet, king, and priest. This triad came in addition to the triads that I was learning from Frame. Of course, Clowney's triad also belonged to the Westminster Standards before Clowney's time. But Clowney's use of biblical theology and its analogical structures encouraged me to use these older categories in an extended, analogical way, and it was but a step to use them perspectivally.

When I had come this far, it was only a small step to consider the possibility of taking almost any category from biblical theology and expanding it into a perspective.[26] For example, start with the theme of the temple. Stretch it out into a perspective. See it as

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25 Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.1:

> It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, ... (See Westminster Larger Catechism, 43-45)

Frame also mentions the influence of Clowney's thinking on his triperspectivalism (Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 6).

26 The idea of using biblical themes as perspectives is further developed in Poythress, *Symphonic Theology*. I intended that the title, "Symphonic Theology," would be another label for Frame's multiperspectivalism. My title was, I think, prettier and more colorful than "multiperspectivalism," and I hoped that it would stick. But the term "multiperspectivalism" is more precisely descriptive, and so it has remained the more conventional label.

a particular embodiment of the theme of "God with us," which is fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 1:23). In fact, John indicates that the temple theme is fulfilled in Christ, whose body is the temple (John 2:21). The temple is closely related to the theme of God's presence, one of the categories in Frame's triad of covenant lordship. If the idea of temple is stretched out in this way, it thus becomes a perspective on all of God's dealings with us.

When I came to Westminster in 1971, Frame was already doing things of a similar sort. In ethics, Frame argued that each of the Ten Commandments had its own distinctive focus, but that any one of the commandments could also be used as a perspective on the *whole* of our ethical responsibility.[27]

In his course on the Doctrine of God Frame argued that the great miracles in the Bible could be used to provide a perspective on God's providence and on God's character. Pedagogically, Frame could start his theological discussion with miracles, and then go from there to look at providence, creation, and then the attributes of God.

This approach implies that miracles like the plagues in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the miracles of Elijah and Elisha, the miracles of Christ's earthly life, and the resurrection of Christ, show in particularly intensive form God's authority, power, and presence. Miracles also provide pictures of redemptive power that can encourage us as we confronted hardships, each in his own circumstance. Any one miracle can therefore become a perspective onto the larger plan of God for our redemption.

Multiple perspectives in the work of Kenneth L. Pike

In many respects Frame's multiperspectivalism developed under the influence of the theology and teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary.[28] But in my life I received another influence. Beginning in the summer of 1971, I studied for several summers at the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma, where Kenneth L. Pike taught tagmemics, a linguistic approach with multiperspectival characteristics. It is worthwhile for me to tell part of that story, because Pike developed his multiperspectivalism earlier than Frame, and independent of the influence of Westminster Theological Seminary.[29] And yet at bottom the two kinds of multiperspectivalism are virtually identical in spirit.

Pike was a Christian linguist who taught linguistics at the University of Michigan, but also spent a good deal of his career in the task of Bible translation with Wycliffe Bible Translators and its academic sister institution, the Summer Institute of Linguistics.[30] The challenge of translating a rich book like the Bible, and the challenge of analyzing a spectrum of exotic languages, with no discernible relation to Indo-European languages, contributed to Pike's endeavor to build a linguistic approach that was both practical and rich. Over a period of decades, Pike built an approach called tagmemic theory that

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27 See DCL.

28 See Frame, "Backgrounds to My Thought," 7-9 [NB: adjust pagination to the Festschrift.].

29 Pike mentioned to me in personal conversation that he had read some of Cornelius Van Til's writing. But I am not aware of any direct connection between Westminster Seminary and Pike's perspectivalism.

30 See the biographical information on Kenneth L. Pike at http://www.sil.org/klp/klp-bio.htm, accessed 12 Nov. 2008.

explicitly incorporated multiple perspectives.[31]

In retrospect we can find tentative steps toward multiple perspectives as early as 1947, when Pike wrote a book codifying his work on sound systems of language ("phonemics").[32] To account robustly for the complexity of sound patterns over a multitude of languages of the world, Pike had to balance a number of dimensions in these patterns. In his analysis we can see the early stages of what later developed into a perspectival triad: contrast, variation, and distribution.[33] He also devoted attention to what later came to be known as particle, wave, and field phenomena. The phenomena were there, and were acknowledged, but Pike had not yet fully organized them by generalization beyond the area of phonemics (sound).

In 1949 Pike began to concentrate on phenomena in the area of grammar, after thirteen years of concentration on sound patterns.[34] Comparisons between patterns in sound and in grammar led him to summarize the patterns in terms of three characteristic aspects of analysis of a linguistic unit: contrast, variation, and distribution.[35] These formed a perspectival triad, the first that Pike developed. The three aspects are interdependent and interlocked with one another. In actual phenomena in language use, they are not strictly isolatable, but are co-present dimensions in the total function of the language.

In 1959 Pike wrote an article entitled "Language as Particle, Wave, and Field."[36] Here for the first time he introduced three "views" of language. Pike explained that linguistics could look at language as consisting of particles (a static approach oriented to distinguishable pieces), waves (a dynamic approach, looking at flow and mutual influence), and fields (a relational approach, focusing on systematic patterning of relations in multiple dimensions). Each of these approaches can in principle be applied to the same piece of language, and people notice different patterns by using each approach. These views are three perspectives.[37]

By this time Pike was a self-conscious perspectivalist, but of what kind? His

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31 Pike tells the story himself in Kenneth L. Pike, "Toward the Development of Tagmemic Postulates," in *Tagmemics: Volume 2: Theoretical Discussion* (ed. Ruth M. Brend and Kenneth L. Pike; The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1976), 91-127. Others also contributed to the development, including Robert E. Longacre, Kenneth Pike's wife Evelyn, and his sister Eunice. Pike's article (ibid.) acknowledges contributions from many others.

32 Kenneth L. Pike, *Phonemics: A Technique for Reducing Languages to Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947).

33 Technically, "contrast" is more specifically "contrastive-identificational features," and includes features that help to establish the identity of a particular unit as well as features that bring that unit into contrast with other, similar units. See the exposition in Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln, NB/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 42-51.

34 Pike, "Toward the Development," 94.

35 Ibid., 96. See the fully developed explanation of these concepts in Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 42-65.

36 Kenneth L. Pike, "Language as Particle, Wave, and Field," *The Texas Quarterly* 2/2 (1959) 37-54; reprinted in *Kenneth L. Pike: Selected Writings to Commemorate the 60th Birthday of Kenneth Lee Pike* (ed. Ruth M. Brend; The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1972), 117-128. More mature explanation of the three perspectives can be found in Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 19-38.

37 "His experience [the experience of an observer of language] of the factness around him is affected by his perspectives" (Pike, *Linguistic Concepts*, 12). On the relation of linguistic theories to human perspectives, see ibid., 5-13.

thinking continued to develop. By 1967 he was analyzing not only language but human behavior in general as "trimodal."[38] The three "modes" were the feature mode (identity and contrast), the manifestation mode (variation), and the distribution mode (distribution). These three interlock. His modal approach not only encompassed the earlier triads, but uncovered further manifestations of them.[39]

In 1971, when I met him, Pike confided that he thought that the modes reflected within language the Trinitarian character of God. The triadic modes were three-in-one modes, each distinct, but each deeply interlocked with and presupposing the others, each also belonging to the unified whole which was a linguistic unit. Each was a perspective on the whole.

Perspectives in Dorothy Sayers

Dorothy Sayers gives us an instance of perspectival thinking from a point even earlier in time than Pike or Frame. In 1941 Sayers published the book *The Mind of the Maker*.[40] She starts with her own experience as a creative writer (she primarily wrote detective stories). Sayers finds in the process of artistic creation an analogy to the Trinitarian character of God. She observes that any act of human creation has three coinherent aspects, which she names "Idea," "Energy," and "Power." "The Creative Idea" is the idea of the creative work as a whole, even before it comes to expression. "This is the image of the Father."[41] "The Creative Energy" or "Activity" is the process of working out the idea, both mentally and on paper. Sayers describes it as "working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion. ... this is the image of the Word."[42] Third is "the Creative Power," "the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: ... this is the image of the indwelling Spirit."[43]

Sayers also observes that each of three aspects, Idea, Activity, and Power, is intelligible only in the context of the others. She affirms the coinherence or indwelling of each in the others.[44]

Part II: The present shape of multiperspectivalism

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38 Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior* (2d ed.; The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1967).

39 The entire structure for a tagmemic framework for discourse can be derived analogically, starting with a single perspectival triad, namely particle, wave, and field. See Vern S. Poythress, "A Framework for Discourse Analysis: The Components of a Discourse, from a Tagmemic Viewpoint," *Semiotica* 38-3/4 (1982): 277-298; Vern S. Poythress, "Hierarchy in Discourse Analysis: A Revision of Tagmemics," *Semiotica* 40-1/2 (1982): 107-137.

40 Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941). Sayers's thinking about the Trinity is visible at an even earlier point in time in Dorothy Sayers, *Zeal of Thy House* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1937).

41 Ibid., 37.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 37-38.

44 I have taken the liberty of reproducing here two paragraphs that are also to appear in Vern S. Poythress, *God's Speech and Ours: A God-Centered Approach to Language* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, to appear).

Perspectivalism as an implication of general revelation

Now that we have looked briefly at some of the historical developments of perspectivalism, it is time to consider the character of the product. What is the distinctive character of multiperspectivalism?

Our survey of the historical developments is still pertinent. A form of perspectivalism related to the Trinitarian character of God appeared independently in at least three different places, in the work of John Frame, in the work of Kenneth Pike, and in the work of Dorothy Sayers. The independence of these three works suggests that God, as the archetype, has impressed ectypal images of his Trinitarian nature on the order of the created world.[45]

Sayers and Pike derived much of their reflection from general revelation in human artistic creativity and in language, respectively. At the same time, as Christians, Sayers and Pike had the benefit of special revelation in the Bible, which articulated the Trinitarian character of God. Sayers and Pike undoubtedly deepened their reflections through the interaction that they discovered between special revelational knowledge of the Trinity and patterns of perspectival interlocking that they observed from general revelation.[46] At the same time, both authors direct their primary focus toward subject matter coming from general revelation. Pike's published work in professional linguistics seldom mentions explicitly his Christian commitment, let alone his Trinitarian thinking. Yet his work shows clear Trinitarian patterns in its use of perspectival triads.

The key role of persons

We may also note the important role played by the study of persons and by the God-man relation in all of the historical instances of Trinitarian perspectivalism.

Consider first Dorothy Sayers. At an early point she explicitly indicates that she is working with the concept of man as the image of God.[47] She undertakes to understand God's activity as Creator by analogy with human artistic creativity. In the process she undercovers a coinherent perspectival triad, namely Idea, Energy, and Power. Creativity, as a characteristic of persons, becomes the key entry point for reflecting on the image of God, which has to do with man as personal. And man is in the image of God who is personal and creative.

Next, consider Kenneth Pike. He is dealing with language, which is innately associated with persons. As a Bible translator, he is repeatedly confronted with the fact that God speaks in the Bible, and that God's speech is analogous to human speech. Thus, he has before him a natural bridge between the Trinitarian character of God and the nature of human language. Pike uncovered the key triad of particle, wave, and field by

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45 See the argument for the Trinitarian basis for scientific law in Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 24-26; and the Trinitarian basis for language in Poythress, *God's Speech and Ours*.

46 On the close correlation and interaction between general and special revelation, see Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, chapters 6-11.

47 Sayers, *Mind*, chapter 2, pp. 19-31.

interacting with what was going on in elementary particle physics.[48] But at the same time he was aware of the potential for persons, by choice, to take a stance in which they direct their awareness toward some one aspect of their situation. Personal choice introduces the possibility of multiple perspectives. Persons are central in his reckoning: "The observer standpoint is relevant to finding data: no 'thing-in-itself' (i.e. apart from an observer) is discussed in the theory [Pike's tagmemic theory]."[49]

John Frame obtained his fundamental triads in the context of persons. Frame's triad for covenant lordship comes, of course, in the context of covenant, which is a *personal* relation between God and man. The triad for ethics comes in the context of ethical responsibility, which must be fully *personal* responsibility. Edmund Clowney's triad of prophet, king, and priest comes in the context of considering the work of Christ, who is a person. Christ's work fulfills the pattern of the various persons in the Old Testament who served in the personal roles of prophet, king, and priest.

The Trinitarian root of perspectivalism

In retrospect, we may guess that the role of persons in perspectivalism is no accident. Perspectivalism of a Trinitarian kind has its ultimate roots in the Trinitarian character of God. God is one God, and he is also three Persons. The doctrine of the Trinity is itself fundamentally and deeply personal. We are confronted forcefully with the necessity for Trinitarian thinking especially when we see the personalism in the Gospel of John. The Son relates personally to the Father, and the Spirit is introduced as "another Helper" who will function toward the disciples like the Son (John 14:16; also in John 16).

The three Persons are distinct from one another. The Bible describes their interactions. The Father sends the Son, and the Son obeys the Father (John 6:38-39; 12:49; 14:31). The Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father (John 13:31-32; 17:1-5). The Spirit speaks what he hears from the Father and the Son (John 16:13-14).

At the same time, all the Persons of the Trinity are involved in all the acts of God. The Father created the world through the Word (that is, the Son) in the power of the Spirit (John 1:1-3; Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6; Ps. 104:30). So each Person offers us a "perspective" on the acts of God. In fact, then, each Person offers a "perspective" on God himself. Through the Son, that is, through the perspective that the Son gives us, we know the Father: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27-28).

The revelation of the Father through the Son is possible because the Father dwells in the Son to do his works:

> Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the
> Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The

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48 Pike, "Toward the Development," 99.

49 Ibid., 91. Pike's inclusion of the observer is all the more striking when it is contrasted with the tendency of much linguistic theory of the time to construct a formal system, dropping the persons out of the picture.

> words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. (John 14:9-11)

The mutual indwelling of Persons in the Trinity, called *coinherence* or *perichoresis*, is the ultimate background for how we know the Father through the Son. This knowledge is *perspectival*. We know the Father *through* the perspective offered in the Son.

Human experience of perspectives derives from an ultimate archetype, namely the plurality of Persons in the Trinity and their coinherence. The plurality of Persons implies a plurality of perspectives. The indwelling of Persons in coinherence implies the harmony and compatibility of distinct perspectives, as well as the fact that one starting point in one Person opens the door to all three Persons. Each Person offers us a perspective on the whole of God.

Hence, the archetype for perspectives is the Trinity. The Persons of the Trinity know one another (Matt. 11:27-28). Such knowledge is personal. The Son knows the Father as a Person, as well as knowing all facts about the Person. The Son knows the Father as Father from his standpoint as the Son. Hence, there are three archetypal perspectives on knowledge, the perspectives of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one. There is only one God.

This unity in plurality and plurality in unity has implications for derivative knowledge, the knowledge by creatures. As creatures we have knowledge that is an ectype, a derivative knowledge, rather than the archetype, the original infinite knowledge of God. Ectypal knowledge must inevitably show the stamp of its Trinitarian archetype, because all knowledge, insofar as it is true knowledge at all, is knowledge of truth, and archetypal truth is God's truth, truth in his mind. His truth is manifest in the Word, who is the Truth in the absolute sense (John 14:6). To know truth is to know truth from the One who is the Truth, from the Son, and in knowing Truth from the Son, we know the image of the truth in the mind of the Father.

In addition, it must be said, we know through the teaching of the Holy Spirit: "But it is the spirit in man, the *breath of the Almighty*, that makes him understand" (Job 32:8). A number of New Testament passages emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in giving us saving knowledge of God in Christ: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). This promise comes only to those who believe in the Son. The Spirit has a special redemptive role for believers.

At the same time, on the basis of broader statements like that in Job 32:8 (see also Ps. 94:10), we may infer that the special redemptive teaching by the Spirit has as its broader background a general creational activity of the Spirit in teaching human beings anything that they know at all. What the Spirit teaches in this creational activity derives from the source of knowledge in the Son, who is the Word, the Wisdom of God (Col. 2:3; 1 Cor. 1:30), and the Truth of God (John 14:6). Hence all human knowledge has a Trinitarian structure in its source.

The role of man and the centrality of Christ

Since human beings are made in the image of God, and they can enjoy personal fellowship with God, it should not be surprising that we find some of the most striking analogues to the Trinitarian mystery in human beings: their knowledge, their covenantal relation to God (covenant lordship), their ethical responsibility to God (triad of ethics), their language (Kenneth Pike), and their artistic creativity (Dorothy Sayers). At the heart of all these manifestations of God is the mediation of the Son of God. Consider first the theme of covenant lordship, as developed by John Frame. Isaiah predicts the coming of the Messianic servant to bring final salvation, and identifies him as both the Lord of the covenant (Isa. 9:6-7) and as the covenant itself (Isa. 42:6; 49:8). Christ supremely and climactically manifests authority, control, and presence. He has the authority of God (Luke 4:36; 5:21-24; Matt. 5:21-22); he manifests the control of God in healing and in ruling the waters (Matt. 8); he is the presence of God, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

Christ also sums up in his person the various dimensions of our ethical responsibility. His righteousness is the ultimate norm, which is reflected in the particular normative pronouncements throughout the Bible. His person is the ultimate goal, because the goal of history is to display the glory of God in the glory of Christ (John 17:1-5; Rev. 21:22-24). His person is also the ultimate motive: Christ-likeness is worked in us through the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

Christ as the Word of God is the ultimate origin behind all manifestations of language (Pike). Christ the Creator is the ultimate origin behind all instances of human creativity (Sayers). Christ as prophet, king, and priest is the ultimate model for the Old Testament ectypal instances of prophets, kings, and priests (Clowney).

In affirming the centrality of Christ, we do not produce a Christomonism that collapses the full Trinitarian character of God into one Person, or (worse) into the human nature of Christ. Rather, we retain the distinction of Persons, and the distinction of the two natures of Christ; at the same time, we affirm the epistemological insight that any one can be a perspectival starting point for meditation on the whole.

Imaging

Man is made in the image of God, according to Genesis 1:26-28. But in the New Testament we discover something more: Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15; see Heb. 1:3). The statement about Christ occurs in the context of Christ as mediator of creation, rather than merely in the context of redemption. So we can infer that in the original act of creation, Adam was created not simply in the image of God, but after the pattern of the archetypal divine image, namely the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Adam, be it noted, also fathers Seth "in his own likeness, after his image" (Gen. 5:3).

Meredith G. Kline has further reflected on this imaging structure, and extended the idea metaphorically, in the manner of the flexible terminology in biblical theology.[50] Theophanies in the Old Testament display or "image" God in visible manifestations. Kline sees a close relation between theophany, especially the cloud of glory, and the Holy Spirit. But theophanies include manifestations of God in human form, as in Ezekiel 1:26-

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50 Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

28, and in some of the appearances to Abraham (Gen. 18) and others (Judg. 13:6, 18, 22). These appearances in human form surely anticipate the incarnation of Christ, who is the final, permanent "theophany" in human form.[51] Hence, theophany is intrinsically Trinitarian. It is a revelation of the Father in the Son through the Spirit. How else could it be? If we as sinners stand before God in his holiness, we will die (Isa. 6:5-7; Ex. 33:20-23). We need mediation: specifically, we need the mediation of the Son, in whom dwells the Spirit, and who sends the Spirit to unite us to himself.

The central theophany is in the Son, in his incarnation. But Old Testament theophanies also include visible manifestations, in light, in cloud, in thunder, in fire, in a burning bush. These physical phenomena "image" God in a subordinate way, by displaying something of his character. The creation itself is described in a manner reminiscent of the language of theophany in Psalm 104:1-4. Hence, creation itself displays the character of God, which is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in Romans:

> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking ,and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom. 1:19-21)

Theophany, as we have seen, is innately Trinitarian, and therefore perspectival. We see the Father in the Son. By implication, the creation itself displays the imprint of Trinitarian structure. Though man is the image of God in a unique sense, the created world "images" God in a great variety of ways. It images the Trinitarian God. Hence, it is rich with the potential for perspectival investigation.[52] Yet the darkness of darkened hearts in idolatry throws up barriers to the clarity and depth of knowledge.

Reformed theology as an aid to multiperspectivalism

The work of Dorothy Sayers and Kenneth Pike shows that a multiperspectival approach can develop directly from Trinitarian doctrine and general revelation. It need not have strong, direct dependence on the distinctives of Reformed theology. Nevertheless, multiperspectivalism enjoys affinities with some of the distinctives in Reformed theology. The affinities are most obvious with the particular form of Reformed theology that resided at Westminster Theological Seminary. We have already noted several.

(1) Van Til's emphasis on antithesis emboldens students to think in a distinctively Christian manner, and to be willing to break with the bulk of Western thought.

Antithesis, of course, is not uniquely a Reformed idea. Many people nowadays are waking up to the distinctions between a Christian worldview and various non-Christian worldviews. But Reformed theology emphasizes the radicality of the depravity in fallen

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51 See John 12:41, which alludes to Isa. 6.
52 Such investigation is part of the point of Poythress, *Redeeming Science*.

human beings. Depravity extends to the mind (Eph. 4:17-19) and not merely to the will or the habits of the body. It affects the depths of the mind. And the effects can be subtle as well as overt. Hence, Reformed tradition offers a fertile soil for taking seriously the distinctiveness of Christian thought.

Van Til also analyzes ways in which Christian thinkers of the past have fallen into compromises with unbelieving, non-Christian thinking. He thus emboldens Christians not merely to adopt uncritically a metaphysical or epistemological framework that owes more to Kant or to Aristotle or to Plato than to Christ.

(2) Van Til emphasizes the Creator-creature distinction. The distinction underlines the absoluteness and exclusiveness of the claims of God the Creator. This emphasis encourages Christians to make sure that God alone receives our allegiance. Monoperspectival reductions of the truth frequently make some one perspective into a godlike origin for everything else.

On one level, knowledge of the Creator-creature distinction is common to all Christians, not merely Reformed Christians. But Reformed theology has made a point of dwelling on the absoluteness of God, and trying to make sure that all of theological reflection remains consistent with his absoluteness.

(3) The Creator-creature distinction also reminds Christians that in the arena of knowledge they do not have to be God, or to aspire to be divine in their knowledge. Christians can thus be free to admit that what they have is only finite knowledge, and that they have their knowledge only from the "perspective" of who they are with finite experience and a finite location. At the same time, because God reveals himself in general and special revelation, and supremely through Christ, Christians can be confident that they have genuine knowledge--knowledge of God, and knowledge concerning things around them.

Human perspectives are limited, but still valid (insofar as they are not distorted by sin). Any one Christian human perspective coheres with the infinitude of divine knowledge, because the perspective comes as a gift from God. Multiple perspectives are intrinsically all right rather than an embarrassment or a frustration. Hence, admitting that you are a creature leads naturally to multiperspectivalism.

Suppose, by contrast, that you abolish the Creator-creature distinction in your own thinking. If you think God is on the same level with you, then your knowledge must be God's knowledge if it is to be true at all. You must be God. Or you must bring God down to your level, in order to have assurance that your knowledge is valid. In that case, your perspective *is* God's perspective, pure and simple, and there is only one valid perspective, namely your own. That point of view is what Van Til and John Frame call "non-Christian rationalism." The human mind claims absolute autonomy and becomes the standard for truth. That approach has an intrinsic tendency toward monoperspectivalism. It exalts a single chosen perspective, and ends up crushing out all diversity in human perspectives.

When such godlike claims become implausible, as they inevitably do, the non-Christian moves to the opposite pole, "non-Christian irrationalism." He admits that he is not God, that his knowledge is not infinite. But he does not give up his autonomy. He still clings to the ultimacy of his own perspective. So then he lapses into skepticism. He concludes that no one can know anything rightly, because no one can attain infinity.

Multiple perspectives then become relativistic, as is characteristic of much postmodernist thinking.

(4) Reformed theology also emphasizes the comprehensive sovereignty of God. Comprehensive sovereignty encourages Christians to affirm the intrinsically harmonious relation between different perspectives, such as the normative, existential, and situational perspectives. God guarantees perfect harmony between the perspectives, because he completely controls them all, and all their manifestations. By contrast, if we are in doubt about the comprehensiveness of God's control, we are in effect leaving room for a final irrationalism. If we think that something may be even a little out of control, we have no guarantee that it will fit with thorough harmony into other dimensions of truth and of patterning that we find throughout the world of thought.

Especially when we multiply the number of dimensions that we inspect, the very multiplicity of insights can become threatening. If these are not united by the all-controlling God with an all-controlling, coherent plan, what will we do? The multiple insights need a single master perspective, a master key, if they are to be united at all. If we do not allow God to control every detail, we are likely to make ourselves substitute gods. The gods can take the form of a master perspective that will bring us rationalistic harmony on our own autonomous terms. Or they can take the form of skepticism that gives up on harmony because there may be chaos and irrationalism at the bottom of what we investigate (this is the "polytheistic" solution).

(5) Biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos and his successors at Westminster Seminary introduced flexible categories and flexibility in thinking analogically. Such flexibility is next door to perspectivalism. At the same time, Vos affirmed the importance of believing in divine revelation and the harmonious character of God's plan for all of history. Hence, coherence among the perspectives is guaranteed beforehand.

This coherence in Vosian biblical theology contrasts with other, non-Vosian forms of "biblical theology": some deviant kinds of biblical theology may allow for contradictory points of view to crop up in different parts of Scripture. The contradictions are alleged to be there on account of the variety of human authors and circumstances. This kind of contradiction breaks up the unity of the perspectives, and leads to denial of the accessibility of God's speech to us in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16). God is seen as absent, or as hiding in obscurity somewhere behind the contradictions in the variety of human perspectives. Perspectives then lose their ultimate Trinitarian unity.

(6) Van Til's teaching emphasizes the "equal ultimacy" of the one and the many in God. God is one God in three Persons. In God, "the one," that is, the oneness of God, is equally ultimate with "the many," that is, the three Persons. This equal ultimacy of the

one and the many is the final foundation for the one and the many that occur at the level of the creature.[53]

For example, there are many dogs, and there is one species, the species of dog. What is the relation between the two? Philosophers have found insuperable difficulties. If the one is prior, how did the many ever come about? Or if the many are prior, how did the many ever attain any subsequent unity? Van Til maintains that God's Trinitarian character is the final foundation answering this dilemma.

This picture of equal ultimacy is an encouragement for multiperspectival thinking on a human level. The diversity of human beings on earth is neither subordinate to nor prior to the unity of the one human race. (Adam was a single individual, but from the beginning God designed that he would bring into being a plurality of human beings.) The diversity in thinking among human beings, and the diversity in their perspectives, is neither prior to nor posterior to the unity in thinking that is common to all people made in the image of God. Thus, multiperspectivalism has a natural affinity to Van Til's thesis of equal ultimacy.

I have formulated the theme of the one and the many at a high level of generality. But it can be illustrated. The crossing of the Red Sea serves as one example of God's redemption. But it is a key example. God calls on Israel to look back on this example in order to take heart in the present (Ps. 78:2-4, 12-14). And he uses the exodus as an analogy for future redemption (Isa. 51:9-11). The one particular instance of redemption (one out of many) becomes a window or perspective through which we can view the general principle of redemption (the general pattern that unifies the instances). The instances are "the many." The general pattern is "the one." The general pattern is supremely manifested and embodied in the redemption accomplished by Christ. This one redemption leads to many "mini-redemptions" in the form of application of the benefits of redemption to each individual. The pattern of Christ's one redemption is also manifested typologically in the earlier "foreshadowing" of redemption in the exodus from Egypt.

(7) The absoluteness of God, the finiteness of human knowledge, and the multiplicity of human viewpoints, when taken together, lead in a fairly obvious way to affirming multiple human perspectives, and to affirming an intrinsic harmonizability of human perspectives in God's absolute knowledge. But God's absoluteness leads us further. His absoluteness implies his ability to make himself accessible. As Frame observes, if God controls all things, and controls his relation to us, he can make himself present and available to us.[54] Within a Christian framework, transcendence (control) undergirds immanence (presence), rather than being in tension with it.

God's presence, his accessibility, together with his mercy displayed in Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit working in us, encourages us to seek him fervently. His absoluteness implies that we must conform our minds to him, rather than vice-versa. This

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53 Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 25-26; *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (n.l.: den Dulk Foundation, 1969), 96; Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Nutley, N. J.: Craig Press, 1971); Vern S. Poythress, "A Biblical View of Mathematics," in *Foundations for Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1976), 161.

54 DKG, 12-18.

process of seeking him and conforming our minds to him leads naturally to appreciating the role of God in our epistemology. Our minds must be brought into conformity to him. We can never exhaustively understand the Trinity, but the Trinity is at the root of our epistemology. These thoughts together lead naturally to sees the roots of multiple perspectives in the knowledge relations among the Persons of the Trinity. These knowledge relations touch on the coinherence of the Persons. The coinherence of the Persons guarantees the coherence of perspectives at the deepest ontological level.[55]

There can be no other ultimate foundation for perspectives than in God himself. God alone is absolute. Thus absoluteness, a key concept in Reformed theology of God, serves naturally as a key incentive for moving toward multiperspectival thinking in human practice, a multiperspectivalism that imitates the coinherence of the Persons in the Trinity.

Reformed theology as reforming

What does multiperspectivalism imply for the future? The finiteness of human knowledge, together with human access to God in Christ, provides the basis for progress. We can grow. We can know more of God in Christ (Rom. 11:33-36). Using a multiplicity of perspectives aids growth. This growth includes the further refinement of human thinking, which in this world remains contaminated by sin and by the corruption of non-Christian influences.

Reformed theology itself, as a tradition, has not yet reached perfection.[56] Frame is thus not afraid to enrich that tradition, and even to challenge it, when he believes that he is following Scripture in so doing. Continuing to grow, and critically inspecting our heritage from past generations, is one implication of the depth of God's truth revealed in Scripture.

In fact, multiperspectivalism offers a radical challenge for growth. God in the absoluteness of his Trinitarian being is the final ontological foundation for the created order. And that has implications for language as a whole and for the category systems that have a role in human thinking, including theological thinking.[57]

In a postmodernist environment where the primary note is skepticism and antipathy to absolutist claims, we should be careful to strike a note in opposition to both modernism and postmodernism. Both commit themselves to human autonomy. The way of Christ is the way of discipleship, the way of firm reliance on his instruction, which is found in Scripture. That way does not despise the fruits of centuries of saints who have profited from Scripture. In particular, we profit from saints within the Reformed tradition, which has been a significant aid in the blossoming of multiperspectivalism.

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55 Thus multiperspectivalism has come to serve many areas: pedagogy, discovery (heuristic), ecclesiology (diversity of members in one body), analysis of conceptual terms (potential for varying use of a term), and ontology.

56 The reality of fallibility is affirmed explicitly in Reformed tradition in the Westminster Confession of Faith 31.4: "All synods and councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred."

57 See Vern S. Poythress, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 187-219; Vern S. Poythress, *God's Speech and Ours*.

Multiperspectivalism means appreciating all the perspectives offered by saints in past generations, and enriching them rather than discarding them for the sake of novelty or rebellion. It would be folly, as well as ingratitude, to cast off that tradition by accommodating modernity or postmodernity. In the process, we may also appropriate, in good multiperspectival fashion, insights that arise from common grace within both postmodernism and modernism. But we will do so in submission to Christ the Lord, who is the absolute God, in the unity with the Father and the Spirit.