

DOES REDEMPTIVE HISTORY  
HAVE PRIORITY TO WORLDVIEW?  
WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING

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We need to distinguish layers in dealing with the relation of history to worldview. We can distinguish the world from human views about the world, that is, worldviews. We can distinguish events in the world from human views about the events, that is, discourses about redemptive history. The world and the events are respectively prior to human views about the world and views about the events. But that says little.

If we compare the world to the events, we have mutual relations rather than merely a completely one-directional priority. The events presuppose an earlier world order in which the events take place. Conversely, the world presupposes events bringing it to its present state. Likewise, human accounts concerning the world and concerning events are entangled in each other.

Stabilities, expressed in a world order, go together with dynamicities in developing that order. Neither is conceivable apart from the other. All of these elements are ultimately rooted in the plan of God. The plan of God includes a plan for a world and a plan for events taking place in the world.

God himself is both stable and dynamic. He is always the same God, with perfect stability. And he is eternally active. The Father eternally begets the Son and loves the Son. The Son executes the plan of the Father. The indwelling of persons in the Trinity is reflected in the correlation between stability and dynamicity in the world.

For preaching, the implication would seem to be that we need both the stability of doctrine and the dynamicity belonging to the telling of stories concerning what God has done.

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Which has priority, redemptive history or worldview? Which has priority in preaching? Which has priority in all of life? Several currents today suggest a priority for redemptive history. “Narrative theology” would say that story is more basic than theological affirmations.<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright

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<sup>1</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 116–23; Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in*

suggests that story is fundamental in human life, so that in some ways the story of Israel is the best background for understanding what is happening in the NT.<sup>2</sup> In popular Christian circles, “story” seems to be a promising category for Christian communication. To consider the question of priority, we first need some rough definitions for the key pieces: for redemptive history, for worldview, and then also for the word *priority*.

### I. *The Meaning of Redemptive History*

*Redemptive history* means the unfolding in time of God’s work of redemption. Here we are conceiving of *redemption* broadly, as encompassing not only the central acts of redemption in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, but the preceding works of God in the OT. We include the preparation for the coming of Christ, from the fall of Adam onwards. And we include the works of application, in God’s acts of saving individuals and groups, from Adam onwards until the second coming.

But the conception of redemptive history becomes two-layered when we observe that we can focus either on the events or on human *conceptions* and *discourses* concerning the events. So *redemptive history* could either designate the events or the topic “redemptive events” as *discussed* within human discourses.

The events clearly have a kind of “priority” to the discourses. They mostly precede the discourses in time, and they form the subject-matter for the knowledge and verbal discussion by human beings. They are logically prior, in that knowledge of the events presupposes the existence of the events, as possible objects of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

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*Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and others.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 38–44, 70, 77. It should be noted, however, that Wright affirms that stories can “embody worldviews” (p. 38) and “are a fundamental characteristic of worldviews” (p. 39), so that he should not be accused of opposing the two. I mention his work because a careless reading of it could encourage the prioritizing of story. Wright does postulate that story and worldview together are “at a more fundamental level than explicitly formulated beliefs” (p. 38). But this claim is compatible with maintaining that “explicitly formulated beliefs” may articulate a worldview, and so in terms of content the explicit elements (formulated beliefs) and the implicit elements (worldview) overlap.

<sup>3</sup> Various skeptical views maintain that the biblical narratives *invent* the events. If that were the case, no events or only faint traces of events would precede the stories. We cannot take a long detour to respond to such skeptical views. We here assume that the Bible is testifying to events that happened, when it describes the life of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the reign of Saul, or the life of Christ.

## II. *The Meaning of Worldview*

Now what is a *worldview*? This question is challenging, since there are competing definitions. For our purposes, we can define a *worldview* as a human viewpoint containing answers to some of the big questions about human existence, such as the following: What is real? Does God exist? Or are there many gods or spirits? Where did we come from and where are we going? What is the meaning of life? What makes life meaningful, and how do I personally find meaning in my life? Can we know things, and what can we know? How do we know, and how can we know that we know something? What is morality and is there an absolute standard for morality?

We might be tempted to say *worldview* is nearly the same as *theology*. But “theology” often denotes an explicitly worked out set of answers to the big questions. “Worldview” can encompass answers that people have not explicitly worked out, but which they nevertheless *hold*. They hold various views *tacitly*. They have “answers” without knowing self-consciously that they have them. For example, many tribal cultures have a detailed view of the spirit world. But this view has never been worked out by a detailed process of reasoning and drawing conclusions. It is passed on from the previous generation.

Another difference between theology and worldview is that theology is closely associated with the Christian faith and with the Bible as a source for theology. Worldviews, by contrast, characterize people of all religions and cultures. But this difference is not so important for our purposes. If we are Christian believers, we are concerned with a Christian worldview, rather than whatever competing worldviews offer themselves around the world. And a Christian worldview should base itself on the Bible, which is “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). Christian people may be tempted to arrive at their worldview primarily by subconscious absorption of various lessons from nature and culture. But nature and culture are not infallible. Natural *revelation* is infallible, but it must be interpreted. And our interpretive abilities are marred and deranged by the fall and by indwelling sin. We must come to Christ—the Christ who speaks to us in the Bible—for a remedy for our interpretive abilities. Theology that has its foundation in biblical teaching finds out from biblical teaching about the reality of nature and culture. Though theology should be based on the Bible, it also looks out at the world, once it is informed by what the Bible says about the world. So the difference between theology and worldview is not so great. If we like, we can still distinguish between theology as an *explicit* system of belief and worldview as something *implicitly* held. But in healthy spiritual cases, the two will correspond.

In a manner similar to redemptive history, there are two layers to worldview. There is the world that we view, and then there is the view that we have of the world. Since people differ from each other in worldview, we must also reckon with the possibility of delusion. Some radical relativists or radical subjectivists might want to claim that everyone has a worldview, but that we have no way of

adjudicating between worldviews. According to this approach, no worldview is right or wrong, but just is. Worldviews are all equally good or equally bad, or maybe not good or bad at all, but just “there.”

But I am a Christian believer, and I am focusing at this point on Christians. God exists, and he is the standard for truth. Also, because God created the world, there is a world, and views of the world can be either right or wrong or some of both.

Now what is the relation of the world to worldviews? The world has a priority to views of the world, because the world has to be there first in order for us to have views concerning it. The object of knowledge precedes human knowledge.

### III. *Kinds of Priority*

We have seen then that there are various kinds of priority. Redemptive history as events has a priority to our human conception of the events. And the world as a whole has a priority to our conceptions or views of the world. (See Table 1.)

So now let us return to the question we had at the beginning: whether redemptive history has priority to worldview. When we ask this question, we had better make our comparisons on the same level. Otherwise, we get results that are too easy. Suppose, for example, that we choose to compare the object of knowledge on one side with our human formulations of knowledge on the other side. Redemptive history, as events, is a possible object of knowledge, while a worldview is an aspect of human knowledge. The events are clearly prior to worldviews, because history has to happen in order for us to exist and be here; and then we have to be here in order to have worldviews. Likewise, the world (as object) has a priority to our conceptions of redemptive history. The world has to be here in order for us to be here, and we have to be here in order to develop our conceptions.

In order to compare two items in the same layer, we must first choose our layer. Either we focus on the objects already there, or we focus on human knowledge. Let us first pose the question in terms of the objects. Is the world prior to history (the events) or history prior to the world? Once again there are different possible answers. But this time the answers depend on where we start in time. The world as a completed creation existed at the end of the sixth day in Gen 1. It has to exist in order for there to be a subsequent history, which includes the fall and then the story of redemption, beginning in Gen 3. So the world of Gen 1:31 is chronologically prior to the history of Gen 3. But we can also focus on the world of the present. The world we are now in depends on a prior history, a series of events that led to its being what it is. Even the completed world of the sixth day depends on a series of events that took place during the six days. Those early events are not *redemptive* history, because the fall has not yet taken place and there is not yet any need for redemption. But they are *history*, broadly speaking (in distinction from human writing about the

Table 1: *Priorities of Objects to Human Knowledge*

	<i>A World</i>	<i>Events</i>
<i>Objects:</i>	things in the world	events in the world
	↓ priority ↓	↓ priority ↓
<i>Human knowledge:</i>	worldview	concept of redemptive history

events). So the world as a completed whole depends on the events. But then the events depend on there being *something*. That “something” is given in Gen 1:1–2.<sup>4</sup> It is a “world,” in a broad sense.

In short, subsequent to Gen 1:1, there is always a “world” prior to particular events that happen in the world. But, conversely, apart from Gen 1:1, there are always events prior to the particular state of the world at a particular time. There is a mutual dependence here.

#### IV. *Priority in God Himself*

We can find something even deeper, if we reflect further. God is prior to both the world and the events in the world, in several respects. He is prior in existence. He is prior in time, in the sense that he existed “in the beginning.” He always existed. (I do not mean to imply that God is dependent on created time. His existence is eternal and mysterious to us who are creatures of time.) He is prior in terms of his plan. Though human thinking about history and human thinking about the world presuppose the object of knowledge, God’s knowledge of the world precedes the world. He made it according to his plan. And he carries out the events in it according to his plan.

At the level of God’s plan, it is hard to define an *ultimate* kind of priority that would belong either to the world or to the events in the world. God’s plan encompasses both. And his plan is comprehensive. Planning for the world—this world—means planning for a world in which things happen. Moreover, the things that happen have a divine purpose, and lead to the divine goal of consummation. The preliminary stage of the goal that God had in mind is of course the bringing about of a finished creation at the end of the sixth day. But, as many interpreters have noticed, this finished creation is not absolutely finished. Man has the task of filling the earth and subduing it. Since man is made in the image of God and imitates God in his work of dominion, it is not hard to infer that man will carry out the task of dominion and at some point

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<sup>4</sup> I here assume that Gen 1:1 describes the first event in creation, rather than being merely a summary of the events in 1:2–31. The issue is disputed, but does not radically affect the main question we are discussing.

that task will be finished. Man will finish in analogy with the fact that God's work of creating the world was finished at the end of the sixth day. And then man will enter into his sabbath rest (Heb 4:9–10)—the consummation—in imitation of God entering into his rest on the seventh day.

So, in God's conception or plan, the world is not merely a static picture, like a portrait. It is in motion. God's plan includes both a plan for a world and a plan for that world to have a history. The world does not exist in God's conception, except as a world that has history as its motion. And God's conception of what will happen in history does not exist except as his conception of history *within the world* that God created. In God's plan, history and world go together, inextricably. And so the same is true not only for God's plan, but for the world itself, as soon as it is in actual existence.

We can also see the dependence of history on the world in more specific ways. God plans for a history, for events. But the history and the events presuppose the existence of things that will move during the course of history. History without things is like a stage with no actors and no props. The audience is ready, but nothing is happening. But in the case of world history, the human audience is not just an audience but a participant. And so is the "stage." Without God making a world, there is no audience and no stage, except for God himself, who understands all the activity of God. God's plan for the world includes in a single whole both the things in the world and the activities of the things.

We can try to think about possible priorities within God himself, before ever there was a world that God created. Does God's existence or his activity have priority? Before ever there was a world, God existed. God is. Is anything happening? Yes, we have the eternal activity of God. The Father knows the Son; the Father loves the Son. The Father fathers ("begets") the Son. God speaks his Word (John 1:1). The Spirit "searches ... the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10).

We might try to claim that the existence of God is prior to his activities. And it is indeed true that for God to act presupposes that God exists. But it is also true that for God to exist presupposes that God acts in love and in knowledge. Why? Because it is *God* that we are saying exists, and God is that kind of God. God is always loving, and his existence does not precede his activities, as if we could say that he first existed in some "bare" and inactive manner, before he started acting.

### V. *Priority in Our Conceptions*

The most fruitful path for us to discuss is to move downward a few layers, to consider our conceptions of redemptive history and our conceptions of the world (worldviews). Which has priority?

What do we mean by priority? We could mean that we use a certain temporal order when we try to explain the Christian gospel to an unbeliever. We start with the story of redemption, and then, at some later point in our discussion, we fill in "theology," in the form of a doctrine of God, a doctrine of man, a doctrine

of sin, a doctrine of Christ, and a doctrine of salvation. Or we use the reverse order. We start with doctrine, and then present the story.

For many ordinary people, story may seem less “remote” than a summary of doctrine. But we need two qualifying observations. First, it depends on the person. If a person begins the conversation by asking about the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of creation, is it not the polite thing to try to address his question? Answering his question more fully might involve us in the story of redemption. But conversely, answering a question about the whys and wherefores of the story of redemption may involve us in theological exposition. The gospel itself remains the same all the time. But *explaining* the gospel is a person-dependent exercise. There is not one, uniform way that is the only way permitted, regardless of who is our addressee.

Second, even with a single addressee, most Christians would allow that we have flexibility. We must present the gospel faithfully, but not necessarily comprehensively. What we say may depend on the circumstances as well as the addressee. And it may depend on us, in that each of us will be more adept at presenting some aspects of the gospel in some ways. So a blanket claim for the priority of story would seem to go too far. A modest claim that many people are interested in stories and are engaged by stories is helpful at a practical level. But it need not lead to fights about “Who is right?” A fuller explanation of the gospel will involve both story and worldview, because a full explanation of one inevitably includes an explanation of the other.

Priority could also mean that we consistently use a particular temporal order in our own reasoning about Christianity. But that seems hard to do, because people go back and forth. If we give a consistent temporal priority to redemptive history, it would seem in the extreme to mean that we move from redemptive history to learning a lot about God (for example). But then we would never allow what we learn about God to color or enrich our conception of the story of creation in Gen 1 or the story of the call of Abram in Gen 12, or the story of the feeding of the five thousand in the Gospel of John. But if what we learn about God is in fact true, it is relevant to a deeper appreciation of what it means for God to call Abram or to be involved in the feeding of the five thousand.

The same, of course, is true in the reverse direction. Suppose we say that worldview, including our doctrine of God, has a consistent temporal priority to redemptive history. That position would forbid us from doing any reasoning that started from redemptive history and drew conclusions about the doctrine of God. But that too is an unnatural restriction. If we learn more about how God acts in redemptive history, we learn more about God. And surely that deepens our doctrine of God, though the deepening might be subtle.

So, with the word *priority*, what do we mean? Maybe we mean something about the organization of the biblical canon. The earlier portions of the Bible primarily take the form of narratives rather than expositions of doctrine. Genesis 1 is indeed a narrative. It tells us about a series of events that happened. But it also gives us a lot of information about God and the world. It tells us what

kind of world we live in. What is this if not the beginning of a worldview, when we read the narrative?

The principal parts of the Bible where we see the most concentrated theological exposition are the NT letters. These come fairly late in the process of addition to the body of canonical literature. But their lateness is related to their role in expounding the meaning of the climax of redemption in Christ (Heb 1:1–3). So the fact of *temporal* priority belonging to other books of the Bible does not undermine the mutual illumination that comes from considering the earlier books in the light of the climax. The climax has clearly revealed what was formerly a mystery, and has summed up and brought into focus what formerly seemed more scattered. So the climax in some sense has an *explanatory* centrality and therefore an explanatory “priority” in relation to the whole.

The climax, of course, involves the accomplishment of the work of Christ in history. It is a climax of *events*. And that might seem to give the priority to redemptive history. But we must be careful. We artificially tip the scales in one direction if we fail to distinguish between the events and our discourses regarding the events. Our discourses about the events include discourses about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But these discourses simultaneously involve worldview and theology. The Gospels themselves give us not only events, but the meanings of the events. They include theological emphases in narrative form. The world is a world in which redemption takes place through the work of Christ. And Christ is God and man who accomplishes this work in harmony with who he is. Who he is belongs to worldview.

## VI. *Show and Tell*

One way of thinking about priority is by comparing “showing” with “telling.”<sup>5</sup> Stories *show* us the nature of the characters. And, if they are good stories, they may show us something about the nature of life and the nature of the world. Expositions can directly describe and assert things about the characters in the story. Expositions may *tell* us that one character is wise and another foolish, one kind and another cruel. Expositions can also try to tell us the meaning of life and the meaning of morality. So which is better, expositions that tell us or stories that show us characters and living?

Experts who advise people on how to write good stories often have to make the point that usually stories should concentrate on showing rather than telling. Part of the genius of stories is to let people see the characters in action, and thereby picture them and identify with their experiences rather than just have a direct exposition of their character traits.

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<sup>5</sup> The distinction is discussed in the context of literary theory. See V. Phillips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 31–34. I was alerted to the terminology by C. John Collins, who uses it in a number of places, including *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006), 11–12.



This advice makes sense. But in the larger picture of human communication as a whole, it all depends on what one wants to communicate and who is the audience. An exposition that tells us the meaning of life or tells us what should be our moral standards may function much more efficiently to summarize the point of many stories. The stories and the summaries of their “point” complement one another. And if we look at the OT, it does not take long to see both. Exodus 20 gives us the Ten Commandments. These occur within the narrative framework of the book of Exodus as a whole. But there is no denial that they are not themselves narrative. They are *commandments*. They are *telling* us what kind of people God expects us to be.

Deuteronomy has an outer narrative framework. But within that framework we find not only a large number of commandments, but also passages that interpret the theological significance of the past history, from creation to exodus and wilderness. We find in Exod 34 a summary of the nature of God. The exposition and the commandments reveal explicitly some of the implications that are doubtless implicit in the narratives. But it is wise to make implications explicit, lest people miss the point. The narratives in the OT are not told merely for entertainment or for narrowly informational purposes. If not, what *are* they for? Partly to back up the parts that are more explicitly theological or moral or—as in the book of Psalms—expressions of ongoing experience of covenantal communion with God and the existential challenges of that communion, challenges that are both individual and corporate.

My point is a simple one. In the Bible, showing and telling complement each other rather than competing with each other. Each supports the other. The telling that occurs in exposition and in commandments makes explicit the current applications and implications of narrative, which otherwise might be distorted into mere entertainment or information about an allegedly dead past. The showing that takes place in narrative shows how the truths in theology and morality work out in real lives in specific places and times, and how those lives fit into an overarching plan of divine work in history (redemptive history).

### VII. *Roles in Our Own Thinking*

We may also focus on the roles of our modern *conceptions* of redemptive history and our worldviews, that is, our *conceptions* about the world. Which should have priority in our thinking? The same issues of interaction between the two come up here as we have seen in showing and telling and as we have seen in trying to prioritize the world or events in the world. The two in fact go together.

Let us put it another way. If we tell stories, we presuppose a world and a cluster of characters, whether divine or demonic or human, where such stories make sense. This principle holds true even when the “world” and the characters in it are fictional. It certainly holds also when a story is nonfictional. When we tell a story, we have a world and people in it. In so doing, we presuppose a worldview that we tacitly hold. Conversely, if we explain our worldview, we tell

about the world. In so doing, we presuppose that the world has events and causal developments and human beings who act with intentions and purposes. The nature of the world gets revealed in events.

A perfectly static world is impossible to know, because knowing involves human interaction with the world, and the interaction takes place in events and in history. Conversely, a perfectly moving world with no fixed points is impossible to know, because we cannot know mere flux, and we cannot know anything if we ourselves are mere flux, with no stable memories and stable categories as background for our knowledge. In actual fact, stabilities and change must both be present, in harmonious relation to each other.

Let us suppose that one writer tries to prioritize story. Perhaps his advocacy is merely a personal preference, or merely a proposal for one strategy. Perhaps he merely indicates his own gifts and interests. So far, there is no necessary conflict with someone else who prioritizes worldview. But now suppose that he claims something more, some universal principle in his advocacy. In that case, we still need to ask what he thinks is the point or points or purposes of the stories. Either he is proposing an implicit theology or morality, or endeavoring to influence worldviews, or he is not. If he is not, his advocacy of stories threatens to degenerate into entertainment or mere information about the past. We may therefore ask skeptically whether the advocate of story wants to have his cake and eat it too. Perhaps he wants to advocate theology and morality, but without having to take explicit responsibility for grounding his advocacy in an explicit claim, which would amount to a claim for transcendent knowledge—knowledge concerning God, the world as a whole, or absolute moral standards. The priority of story then becomes a convenient way of concealing, perhaps from himself as well as others, the importance of transcendent grounding for knowledge.

In other words, the advocate of story as an exclusive tool is in danger of concealing from himself and others his dependence on theology and moral standards.

On the other hand, let us suppose another writer advocates the priority of worldview. Once again, this may be a matter of personal preference, or a proposal for one useful strategy. There is nothing the matter with that. Or does his advocacy claim to express a universal principle of priority to worldview? In that case, we still need to ask what he thinks is the way that worldview works out in the interpretation of universal history and the interpretation of individual lives. Without that, the supposed worldview is a pure generality, without clear connection with the particularities of corporate history or individual living.

We may ask skeptically whether the advocate of worldview wants to have his cake and eat it too. Perhaps he wants to advocate meaning for life and history, but without having to take explicit responsibility for specifying any specific meanings, with respect to either universal history or individual life stories.

### VIII. *Perspectives: Static and Dynamic*

In preference to these one-sided and exclusive claims for prioritizing redemptive history or worldview, I am advocating both. Each is like a perspective on the whole. And the best practice in using perspectives is to admit that they are perspectives, each of which implies the other and each of which enriches the other.

In this case, these two perspectives have a close relation to two general perspectives, sometimes called the static perspective and the dynamic perspective.<sup>6</sup> The static perspective focuses on what is the same through time. That is very much the focus of worldview. What are the constant features and structures and truths about the world and about God? The dynamic perspective focuses on what changes through time. That is the focus of a redemptive historical emphasis. But these two are both perspectives. They both presuppose the existence of the larger whole in which there is both stability and change. Stability becomes known to human beings only through interaction, and the interaction involves change. Conversely, change is intelligible only if some things function as participants and actors in the change, and these participants and actors are at least relatively stable. Otherwise, we have mere flux, mere chaos, and we cannot talk about it at all.

In particular, redemptive history presupposes God, who is the same God. God remains the same, or else redemption *by God* loses all its meaning. Redemptive history presupposes knowledge of God that is stable. Conversely, worldview presupposes human acquisition of knowledge of the world, and this acquisition involves events, a history. The history in question is an aspect of redemptive history, because true knowledge of God presupposes that God saves us, in history, from our former ignorance (Eph 4:17–24) and suppression of knowledge (Rom 1:18–23).

The complementary character of the static perspective and the dynamic perspective has its root in God himself. God the Father is preeminently the origin of the plan of God. And that plan is stable. It remains the same through all time, because it is a pretemporal plan that encompasses every event in history. God the Son is preeminently the one who executes the plan of God in time and history. That is, the Son works in bringing about the dynamics of change and works to accomplish the history of redemption. God the Father is in focus in the static perspective, and God the Son is in focus in the dynamic perspective.

Yet these two perspectives are not disjoint. And we must beware of exaggerating the distinctiveness in the participation of the Father and the Son in divine action. God the Father and God the Son indwell each other, through the Holy Spirit. So the participation of each in the plan and work of God involves the

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<sup>6</sup> The terminology derives from Kenneth L. Pike, *Linguistic Concepts: An Introduction to Tagmemics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), chs. 3–4, where the predominant terms are “particle” and “wave.”

participation of the other persons of the Trinity. And yet we can distinguish the mode of participation, because the Father sends the Son (Gal 4:4). In this context, we see the Father's preeminence in planning, since the sending is based on his plan. The Son who is sent comes into the world, and acts as the agent carrying out the will of the Father. The two human perspectives, namely the static and dynamic perspective, have a deeper ground in a divine archetype, namely the distinction between the stable plan of God the Father and the dynamic execution of the plan by God the Son.

Consequently, on the human level, the static perspective and the dynamic perspective, when properly understood, do not compete with each other, but interlock and involve one another. Each presupposes the presence of the other, and each is, in a sense, "in" the other. By implication, the perspective that starts with redemptive history and the perspective that starts with worldview complement each other. Competition between them indicates misunderstanding of God, of the world that God made (worldview), and God's redemptive-historical purpose that we as human beings should grow in knowledge through interaction that uses both.

### IX. *Perspectives for Ethics*

We may explore some further implications using John Frame's three perspectives for ethics—the normative perspective, the situational perspective, and the existential perspective. The normative perspective focuses on ethical norms, which remain stable. Among these norms are norms for what we should teach and for what is true. So the normative perspective leads naturally to a focus on doctrine, on theology, and on worldview as a summary of what is permanently true—what is stable or static.

The situational perspective focuses on the situation in which moral obedience has to be expressed. The broadest situation is redemptive history. So the situational perspective leads naturally to the emphasis on redemptive history.

Third, the existential perspective focuses on the persons who are moral agents, and on the attitudes that embody their moral responsibility. This is a third perspective, and it leads naturally to a focus on individual persons and their lives. So the focus is not the broad sweep of redemptive history, but the narrower scene of individual stories and individual moral struggles. And then, if we avoid being merely individualistic, it also includes interpersonal interaction in groups, and the reality of the church as the corporate body of Christ. But we are still focusing on the responsibilities that are ours within smaller segments of time. Not redemptive history in the large is our focus, but history in the small, in days and months and years.

According to John Frame, these three perspectives interlock. Each is a perspective on the whole. Similarly, worldview and redemptive history and individual lives interlock in a whole. Any one includes the others by implication, and any one is intelligible only in the context of the others.

### X. *Preaching*

This perspectival interdependence suggests implications for preaching. Some preachers predominantly preach theology. They preach doctrine. Each text is mined for its treasure of doctrine. Other preachers preach redemptive history. Each text fits into the overall history of redemption, and finds its significance when we reflect on how it fits into the unfolding of redemption in time. Still other preachers preach morality and application. This emphasis can fall into the error of moralism—preaching obligations without the grounding of salvation in the work of God. But the Bible contains personal applications. And this emphasis corresponds to the existential perspective on ethics.

The three perspectives on ethics belong together—normative, situational, and existential. Likewise, the three emphases in preaching belong together—doctrine, redemptive history, and personal application. If we try to isolate one, we impoverish the divine purpose in God's communication to us in the Bible. Likewise, an exclusive preference for worldview, or history and story, or personal relevance impoverishes our understanding of God and his word. Of course some people will preferentially emphasize one or another, either because of their particular gifts and interests, or because of the particular needs of a situation or an audience. But let us try to listen to one another and appreciate the complementary insights of the other person, in cases like this one where there are complementary relations rather than direct confrontation of truth and error.