

[This article represents the start of a book on aspects of the theology of John M. Frame]

## The Ascendant Role of Divine Lordship in Framian Theology

By John Barber

### 1. An introduction of the concept of “lordship” in Framian theology

Lordship is the defining control belief in the theology of John M. Frame. This is due to the fact that Frame holds to a very high view of Scripture; and, as far as he can see, it is Scripture that reveals lordship as maintaining a *locus* of first importance. As the theologian so decisively puts it, “The first thing, and in one sense the only thing, we need to know about God is that he is Lord. Surely no name, no description of God, is more central to Scripture than this.”<sup>1</sup> Even more emphatically, he states, “The central message of Scripture is that God is Lord.”<sup>2</sup> How does Frame justify his claim that lordship is Scripture’s central message? He locates its prominent position in the self-disclosure of God, as recorded in Scripture. “When God met Moses in the burning bush and announced that he would deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, Moses asked his name. Then God replied, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites:

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<sup>1</sup> *DG*, 21

<sup>2</sup> *DG*, 25.

“I am has sent me to you” (Ex. 3:14)...So the name of God, the name by which he wants his people especially to remember him forever, is Yahweh or Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

Frame’s detection of the priority of lordship in God’s self-disclosure to his people leads him to treat lordship consistently within the bounds of the biblical idea of covenant. “The central motif of this book [*The Doctrine of God*]...is that God is Lord of the covenant. Since God chose the name Lord (or Yahweh, from the Hebrew *yahweh*) for himself, since it is found thousands of times in Scripture, and since it is at the heart of the fundamental confession of faith of God’s people (Deut. 6:4—5; Rom. 10:9). It would seem to be a promising starting point.”<sup>4</sup>

Though primary, Frame does not make divine lordship an exclusionary truth. “Covenant lordship does not exclude other basic biblical themes, such as hope or community, or even liberation. The concept of covenant, as I understand it, incorporates many diverse elements, so that it provides a key for us to understand how the other themes fit into the overall biblical story. And it often liberates us from the temptation to set one theme against, for in the covenant these apparently diverse concepts and themes display a wonderful unity.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, lordship remains the *sine qua non* of Frame’s theological statement. “At a time when theologies are regularly built around central motifs like history, hope, love, reconciliation, and liberation, it is a bit surprising that so few of them focus on the concept of divine lordship. In view of the centrality of lordship in Scripture’s own doctrine of God, and specifically in its Christology, it would seem to be an obvious choice as a central motif for a theological discussion.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *DG*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *DG*, 12

<sup>5</sup> *DG*, 12. See also John M. Frame, “Covenant and the Unity of Scripture,” available at the Third Millennium Web site, [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org).

<sup>6</sup> *DG*, 22.

Emerging from Frame's compendious view of God's covenantal lordship is a particular theological structure, which we shall call "perspectivalism."<sup>7</sup> The theologian sees all of God's relationship to the world according to this structure. Perspectivalism is an apt description of this structure for Frame sees God's relationship to the world according to three perspectives. These perspectives are control, authority, and presence (hereafter referred to as CAP). At one point, Frame refers to CAP as his "Lordship triad,"<sup>8</sup> and in another place as the "lordship attributes"<sup>9</sup> By these idioms he means that "The three lordship attributes are 'perspectivally related,' that is, each one is involved in the other two. None of them can be rightly understood, except as inseparably related to the others. So redemption necessarily involves God's control and authority, as well as his presence."<sup>10</sup>

Frame is committed to seeing everything about God, from his acts, to his attributes, to the way in which creatures have knowledge of God, in mutual dependence. References to CAP, directly or indirectly, are so multitudinous in his written volumes and select treatises that space does not permit a full examination of its reference points.<sup>11</sup> Perspectivalism occupies a cardinal area of importance in Frame's theology because, according to him, CAP sums up the very essence of God's lordship. "Control, authority, personal presence – remember the triad. It will appear often in this book [*Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*], for I know of no better way to summarize the biblical concept of divine lordship."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The term, perspectivalism, is not found in Frame's writings. Rather, he uses words like "perspectives" or "perspective" when addressing a broad array of theological issues. Perspectivalism is simply another way to express the perspectives motif that continues throughout his theology.

<sup>8</sup> *PWG*, 32

<sup>9</sup> *DKG*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> *DG*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> In the chapter titled, Images of God, in his *The Doctrine of God*, Frame comments that even God's "Names, images, and attributes, then, are perspectivally related: they tell us the same truths about God in different ways." For this reference, see *DG*, 362f.

<sup>12</sup> *DKG*, 17

As previously stated, Frame understands lordship, not as a recondite idea, but as an intensely covenantal term. God is always the Lord in relationship to the creation, especially to people. This idea is of leading importance insofar as the covenant represents the redemptive and geo-political constitutionalism that binds God with ancient Israel and later with his Church. “First of all, lordship is a covenantal concept. ‘Lord’ is the name God gives to himself as head of the Mosaic Covenant and the name given to Jesus Christ as head of the New Covenant... We may, therefore, define divine lordship as covenant headship.”<sup>13</sup> By the same token, Frame believes that the exigent demands of covenant are also binding upon all nations and people of the earth. Now, to say that the aggregate peoples of the earth are covenantally responsible to Yahweh presents a theological acclimatization that might fairly be viewed as cryptic. However, there are two central reasons why Frame believes that all people of the world are duty-bound before the divine covenants of Scripture.

First, the language of the covenants binds them.

In a broad sense, all of God’s dealings with creation are covenantal in character. Meredith Kline<sup>14</sup> and others have observed that the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 is parallel in important respects to other narratives that describe the establishment of covenants. During the creation week, all things, plants, animals, and person are appointed to be covenant servants, to obey God’s law, and to be instruments (positively or negatively) of his gracious purpose. Thus everything and everybody is in covenant with God (cf. Isa. 24:5: all the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ have broken the ‘everlasting covenant’). The Creator-creature relation is a covenant relation, a Lord-servant relation. When the Lord singled out Israel as his

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<sup>13</sup> *DKG*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> See Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980).

special people to be Lord over them in a peculiar way, he was not giving them an absolutely unique status; rather, he was calling them essentially into the status that all men occupy yet fail to acknowledge.”<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, he notes, “And, as I indicated earlier, all human beings, not just Israelites and Christians, are related to God covenantally... The covenant between God and Adam includes the whole human race (Rom. 5:12-21)... And we are also members of God’s covenant with Noah’s family (Gen. 8:20—9:17), in which God pledges his presence to maintain the seasons and to delay the final judgment. The Noachic covenant is made not only with Noah’s family, but also with ‘every living creature on earth’ (9:10).”<sup>16</sup>

Second, Frame contends that all people of the world are subjects of the divine covenants of Scripture inasmuch as God intends both the Old Testament Israelite community and the Christian Church to be a blessing to the surrounding nations via common grace.

In the new covenant, God reaches out to all nations, not only to Israel (Matt. 28:18—20). Indeed, that has been his purpose in all the covenants, throughout the history of redemption. God’s covenant with Israel is specifically with them, but they are to be his witnesses to all nations, for in Abraham all the nations of the earth are to be blessed (Gen. 12:3)... It is therefore God’s covenant that provides the blessings of common grace, the kindness of God to all his creatures.<sup>17</sup> In summary, Frame states, “So God’s covenant lordship is not limited to Israel. His kingship is over all the nations, over all the earth (Ps. 47:7—9).”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *DKG*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *DG*, 102

<sup>17</sup> *DG*, 34. Part of this quote shows the universal meaning of God’s *hesed*, his covenant love to Israel, as revealed in Psalm 36:7.

<sup>18</sup> *DG*, 34.

It is the covenantal criterion that leads Frame to an arrangement of his theology that is seminal. He reverses many of the traditional, theological categories that have marked the history of dogmatics for centuries. “Thus, I shall discuss God’s acts before his attributes...I will proceed from history to eternity, from the ethical to the metaphysical, from the communicable to the incommunicable.”<sup>19</sup> Though he justifies this reversal on the grounds that it “does not make much substantive difference what doctrine comes first and what comes second,” and also because the reversal serves a “pedagogical difference”<sup>20</sup> for students and pastors who lack philosophical training and who would thus find his order “more intelligible and interesting,”<sup>21</sup> I cannot help but see this reversal as the natural outcome of Frame’s stress on covenantal lordship. For to begin theological reflection from the vantage point of the Lord of the covenant is to begin in the concrete, not the abstract (note: much more will be said regarding the Framian reversal).

For the purpose of clarifying Frame’s position on lordship, it is worth noting his differences with Karl Barth. Previously in this chapter, Frame is quoted as saying, “In view of the centrality of lordship in Scripture’s own doctrine of God, and specifically in its Christology, it would seem to be an obvious choice as a central motif for a theological discussion.”<sup>22</sup> In his footnote to this point, Frame notes that a rare exception in the twentieth century is the theology of Karl Barth, for whom divine revelation is always a revelation of God’s lordship.<sup>23</sup> However, Frame goes on to note that his view of divine lordship is quite different from that of Barth, and that this distinction is found in chapter 26 of his book, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*.<sup>24</sup> The chapter presents a detailed analysis of Cornelius Van Til’s problems with the

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<sup>19</sup> *DG*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> *DG*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> See Karl Barth *Church Doctrine*, 1.1.339—83.

<sup>24</sup> See *CVT*, 353-69.

theology of Karl Barth, but does not offer a great deal regarding the differences between Frame and Barth on lordship. So we must assume that Frame wants us to see his differences with Barth through the lens of Van Til. What does Frame show us?

He reveals Van Til's attribution to Barth of the same fallacies he finds in the philosophical presuppositions of Kant. Van Til, following the Dutch philosopher, Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977), believed that Kant had formulated the "nature-freedom scheme" of modern thought. This scheme is the successor of the medieval nature-grace scheme, which itself was an outworking of the Greek distinction between *matter* and *form*. Frame explains,

On Dooyeweerd's analysis, Western philosophy can be divided into three phases. The first is the form-matter scheme of the Greeks, which we have discussed. The second is the nature-grace scheme of medieval Scholasticism. Nature-grace thinkers accept the form matter scheme as a description of nature, but then superimpose upon nature another level of reality, grace, in which occur the events of Creation and redemption. In the third phase, the nature-freedom scheme, the medieval realm of grace becomes secularized. Rather than a realm of sovereign divine actions, it becomes a realm in which man can act in autonomous freedom, without the restrictions of nature. None of these three motifs represents the biblical worldview, which, should be described in terms of "creation, fall, redemption."

How do Van Til and Frame connect Barth to the nature-freedom scheme of Kant? In Kant's thought, the nature-freedom scheme is most evident in the realm of "phenomenon," the world as it appears to us, and the "noumena," the world as it really is apart from human experience. Although Barth did speak well of Kant,<sup>25</sup> he was highly critical of Kant's argument

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<sup>25</sup> Barth argues that Kant's critique of the ontological proof for God served theology well in that it made possible the limitations of natural or speculative reason, so that God's self-disclosure can become the basis for theology. Barth

that the postulate of God arises out of morality without direct reference to moral obligation. At the same time, Barth thought he could do justice to the twin concepts of revelation and grace within a broadly Kantian framework.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, there arises the central concept of Barth's theology: "Christ as *Geschichte*." Much could be said respecting Barth's views; however, the distilled essence, as Van Til and Frame see it, is that Barth recreates the historic problem of dualism, this time between *Geschichte* (reality in its totality), and *Historie* (actual events in time and space). In Christ as *Geschichte*, the events of redemption are unchained from empirical events: time is swallowed up into eternity, resurrection is a physical event, but is first and foremost *Geschichte*, or what Van Till called an "innerworldly something."<sup>27</sup> Redemption therefore takes on a different meaning. "Christ as *Geschichte* is the act of revelation whereby God is wholly revealed and wholly hidden to man. Man's faith in this act becomes participation in God's revelation."<sup>28</sup> Redemption also becomes universal. Barth believed that Christ means to save all men, a belief that finds expression in his concept of "indirect identity." Frame notes, "Jesus' being as man in his work, and that work is to save all men. His being is his *Geschichte*. In Christ as *Geschichte*, there is an 'indirect identity' between

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writes, "Our consciousness of ourselves and the world, i.e. our awareness and conception of ego, and of people and things existing outside ourselves, might well be a matter of mere supposition, of pure appearance, a form of nothingness, and our step from consciousness to being a fellow fiction. It is not true that we have an immediate awareness of our own or any other reality. It is only true that we immediately suppose that we have awareness." (CD III/1, 345).

<sup>26</sup> Crucial as a backdrop to Barth's revelatory theology as it developed is the work of Immanuel Kant, and especially the neo-Kantians, he studied under at Marburg. For Kant, the only basis for knowledge is the phenomena, consequently God is not a suitable subject for epistemology relegated instead to the arena of faith. See Julian W. Ward, *A Critical Evaluation of the Epistemology of Michael Polanyi and Comparison with that of Kant* (Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, University of Manchester, 1997), 115. See also extended discussion in S. Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism: Barth's earliest theology and the Marburg school* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7-122. Marrying this concept with the post-lapsarian noetic ramifications, ensuing in absolute estrangement from God, Barth was able to deduce that humanity is in an impossible quandary in that God is, humanly speaking, a comprehensively non-cognitive entity, and therefore, noumena. There is accordingly no natural knowledge of God (Barth, CD1/2: 257; Trevor Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth: toward a reading of his theology* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1999) 42.

<sup>27</sup> *CB*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> *CB*, 29.

God and man. In him is revealed is revealed the full being of God and man. Because of that indirect identity, God's grace is inherently universal."<sup>29</sup> Given this, all people's redemption is assured in Christ.

This brief review reveals some important differences between Frame and Barth on lordship. Although Frame has not written a list, and although not exhaustive, I will summarize the differences as follows:

1. The Barthian idea that God is both "hidden" and revealed" is a philosophical abstraction without real content. This is completely against the Framian idea of God's personalism, which denies any abstract concept of God resulting in epistemic impotency.<sup>30</sup>
2. Barth's claim that God is "wholly revealed" in Christ, that we should not seek for a God before or above Jesus Christ, but that all of God's redemptive love is seen in Christ, denies the economic Trinity.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, Frame is highly committed to the Reformed tradition respecting the Lord's freedom in election.
3. Barth denies direct revelation. Barth says that to claim a direct revelation of God is to place it under our control and ready for our manipulation. So the Bible merely "points" to the Word of God.<sup>32</sup> Frame believes that the Lord has revealed his Word to

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<sup>29</sup> *CB*, 16-21.

<sup>30</sup> To further clarify Frame's position, he says, "Our moral standard is not an impersonal, abstract property. It is a person, the living God. The center of biblical morality is that we should be like him. As I argued earlier in this book, covenant lordship means personalism. The personal is prior to the impersonal; God's personal goodness defines any legitimate abstract concept of goodness." (*DG*, 230).

<sup>31</sup> This, in my view, is real problem in the intricacies of Barth's Christological formulation. Jesus is always, in Barth, the *logos ensarkos* and must therefore always be conceived from eternity as the humanity of God and therefore not in any sense in a Christological economy of transcendent logos who maintains a central role in the divine decrees. To deny the electing purposes of God creates, in theory, a direct connection between God's love and all humankind. Nothing less than universalism can result, in which all humanity finds their election in Christ.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation then, in Barth, is a dynamic, unfolding event and not to be construed with a natural phenomenon. In Barth, revelation is communicated in three primary mediums: Jesus Christ, Scripture and the proclamation of the ecclesia (Hart, 1999: 28-47. However, Barth argues that revelation cannot necessarily be limited to these, and the whole of creation can bear witness to divine revelation also viewed as dynamic event (Barth, 1946: 88; Hart, 1999:

us in the Bible and that a claim to the contrary denies the revealed will of God and the sovereignty of God in its transmission to us through holy men of old.<sup>33</sup>

4. Barth's abstract language of God is therefore ambiguous and leaves people with no clear ethical content to follow. Frame contends that God has revealed his covenant promises and stipulations in Scripture, before which all people are responsible.

If Frame differs with Barth on lordship, he is in radical opposition to Paul Tillich. A brief comparison between the two theologians will again serve the purpose of clarifying Frame's stance on lordship.

It is the Framian idea of personalism that is very much at odds with the existentialist conceptions of Paul Tillich. In Tillich, the very nature of God takes on clear pantheistic and universalistic overtones. In commenting on the idea of a personal God, Tillich writes,

The solution of the difficulties in the phrase "personal God" follows from this.

"Personal God" does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality... Ordinarily theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind. The protest of atheism against such a highest person is correct. There is no evidence for his existence, nor is he a matter of ultimate concern. God is not God without universal participation. "Personal God" is a confusing symbol.<sup>34</sup>

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170-172). This should not, however, be regarded as general revelation finding its loci in the phenomenal realm. Rather, for revelation to happen, it must always be a dynamic accomplishment on the part of the triune God.

<sup>33</sup> Barth's doctrine of divine aseity ensues in humanity with the consequence that there is absolutely no natural knowledge of God. Consequently, any knowledge of God; indeed, any knowledge of TRUE knowledge at all must be special revelation. However, this special revelation is not conducive to the propositional nature of Scripture, but reaches its climax in the "Christ-event." So that while epistemological issues are rarely discussed in Barth he can assert that all knowledge has its ontic and noetic grounding in Chris. (Hart, 1999: 127-128).

<sup>34</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:245.

In response to Tillich's theistic formulation, Frame is clear. "First, however, we should observe the obvious: Yahweh, or Lord, is a personal name, a proper name...first and foremost, Yahweh is the name of a person... We move away from Scripture's pervasive emphasis if, with Paul Tillich, we deny that God is 'a' person, and affirm only 'that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality.' An impersonal principle could fit the terms of Tillich's formula."<sup>35</sup>

Frame continues,

Thus we learn something very important about the biblical worldview. In Scripture, the personal is greater than the impersonal. The impersonal things and forces in this world are created and directed by a personal God. According to naturalistic thought, all persons in the world are the products of impersonal forces, and they can best be understood by reducing them to impersonal bits of matter and energy, or by making them aspects of an impersonal oneness. In these views, persons are reducible to the impersonal. But in the biblical view, the impersonal reduces to the personal Lord. All the wonderful things that we find in personality—intelligence, compassion, creativity, love, justice—are not ephemeral data, doomed to be snuffed out in cosmic calamity; rather, they are aspects of what is most permanent, most ultimate. They are what the universe is really all about."<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Relationship of divine lordship to ethics, apologetics, and culture

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<sup>35</sup> DG, 26. Between this quote, and the one that follows, Frame injects a digression that, at first, can be taken to agree with Tillich. "Scripture rarely, if ever uses the word person to describe God, or even to refer to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit." However, he goes on to distance himself from Tillich stating, "But, like Trinity, person is an extrabiblical word that is very nearly unavailable for us. It is the word in our vocabulary that applies to beings who speak, act intentionally, and so on. The biblical term living reinforces this picture. God is the living God, over against all the nonliving gods of the nations (See, e.g., Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26, 36, 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Ps. 42:2; 84: 2; Jer. 10:10; Matt. 16:16; 26:63; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26)."

<sup>36</sup> See comments on DG, 26.

The central theme of the all-encompassing lordship of God in and over his creation finds expression in all of Frame's theology; but for the purpose of this work, we will focus on three areas: ethics, apologetics, and culture. Before proceeding, it is worth noting that although Frame has written on virtually every area of dogmatics, and numerous philosophical issues, always bearing in mind the practical import of his subject, we will focus on the related fields of ethics, apologetics, and culture for the reason that in Frame's theology these areas represent the clearest integration between theology and experience. Since it is the purpose of this work not merely to define in the abstract what lordship means to Frame, but more importantly to show the relevance the lordship principle for our present-day milieu in the West, the aforementioned combination of theological disciplines is most appropriate.

#### *Relationship of lordship and ethics*

Frame believes that all things can be reduced to ethics.<sup>37</sup> The *ergo* linking lordship with ethics is found in two closely related ideas in Frame's thought: that the holy nature of the Lord is the antecedent qualification to all human thought and behavior, and that God's covenant presence in the creation requires all people to defer to God's holiness in thought, word, and deed. Now, to say that all things can be reduced to ethics should not be taken in a restrictive sense: that the juncture linking abstract ideas with concrete instances precipitates ethical consideration. The idea is far more nuanced. He means that all things are literally of the nature of ethics. Nothing, neither abstract thought, nor the objects of ideas can exist autonomously, but all things find their meaning in God who is Lord of all. Formerly, mention was made to the fact that Frame reverses many of the traditional categories in theology ("from history to eternity, from the ethical to the

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<sup>37</sup> See *DG*, 94-102, 152. Anecdotally, many years ago, when I was a student of Dr. Frame, he said before our class in apologetics, "Everything can be boiled down to a matter of ethics." For other references on the primacy of ethics in Frame's system of thought, see *DG* 186, 187, 199, and 400.

metaphysical, from the communicable to the incommunicable.”<sup>38</sup>). This reversal is the outcome of the more fundamental Framian premise that nothing exists *in itself* but is related both in essence, and in existence, to the Lord. Because all thought is essentially an activity before God, epistemology is overtly ethical. So, differently from the vast majority of dogmaticians who move from epistemology to ethics, Frame views ethics as prior to epistemology. “Although my epistemology was published before my ethics, I developed the threefold scheme in ethics before applying it to epistemology. Ethics is its natural home, and I think the ethical applications of it are more easily understood than the applications to epistemological theology. Indeed the point of my epistemology is that epistemology can be fruitfully understood as a subdivision of ethics and thus can be fruitfully analyzed by the use of my meta-ethic.”<sup>39</sup>

The consequence of making ethics a ground of epistemology is to make human behavior before God a key to knowledge about God, the world, and the self. Thus, knowledge is not only propositional in nature, though it contains propositional elements,<sup>40</sup> but is essentially ethical, insofar as God defines all truth and *is* truth. According to Frame, even propositional truths are to be interpreted ethically, that is, in relationship to God. “Therefore, propositional knowledge is based on knowledge of a person. He supplies the norms, the justifications, that are missing in secular accounts of knowledge, as well as the truths that we are to believe and the mental capacity for us to come to knowledge...He is the ultimate *truth*: the truth is what he is and what he has decreed to be.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *DG*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> *PWG*, 40. By “meta-ethic” Frame means to develop a general method for approaching ethical problems, not a mechanical system for answering all ethical questions with fixed resolution. For now, I do not intend to embellish the distinction between “ethics” and “meta-ethics” as Frame presents the two.

<sup>40</sup> For more on Frame’s discussion on propositional truth, see *DG*, 475—9.

<sup>41</sup> *DG*, 480—1.

Frame believes that *only* God's Word can serve as an adequate basis for ethics. "A fully Christian ethic accepts only God's word as final..."<sup>42</sup> However, he also holds that the Word is revealed in the world and in the self. By adding "the world and the self," Frame does not mean to set these over and against the Bible as separate authorities. He means that the biblical God is revealed to us in the world and the self, and that these forums are subservient to the Bible. So, in keeping with perspectivalism, Frame presents us a view of ethics from three perspectives: the existential perspective, the situational perspective, and the normative perspective.<sup>43</sup>

In dissimilarity to his own scheme of ethics, Frame has a great deal to say about non-Christian ethical systems. His chief criticism of non-Christian ethical systems is that they are not built on a belief *in* something, but are the product of non-belief. "The main problem [with secular ethics] is not conceptual confusion, a lack of logical skill, or ignorance of facts, although such problems do exist in both Christian and non-Christian ethical systems. The chief problem is rather unbelief itself."<sup>44</sup> It is this unbelief that Frame sees as inherently utopian in nature. This pithy comment of his hits its mark. "But we cannot exist without ultimate values, so we become gods ourselves."<sup>45</sup> Frame says something quite similar elsewhere where he scrutinizes secular ethics, illuminating its natural inclination with regard to relativism and dogmatism. Abbreviating his argument, he says that because secular liberalism discards God, anything in the area of ethics is thus acceptable. But since such an idea can only lead to bedlam, the secularist exchanges God with a new moral absolute: his own autonomous moral judgment. Seeing as this judgment is of the nature of a false god, it seeks to inflict itself on others—hence its assertively utopian

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<sup>42</sup> *DG*, 195.

<sup>43</sup> A full treatment of the three perspectives is found in *DCL*, 131—360.

<sup>44</sup> *DG*, 194.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem.*, 114.

temperament.<sup>46</sup> So when the theologian says that the essential problem with non-Christian though is unbelief itself, he is not comparing this unbelief to a lifeless battery. Unbelief is a force to be reckoned with and must be appreciated in the environment of nothing short of spiritual warfare. “There is a war, but the war is between Christ and Satan, Christ and unbelief, not Christ and culture.”<sup>47</sup>

### *Relationship of lordship and presuppositional apologetics*

John Frame is highly committed to a rigorous apologetic for the Christian faith. He draws a direct connection between the rudimentary role of divine lordship and the need for apologetics on the basis of the Christian commitment to lordship. In the prolegomena to his incisive, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, he writes, “Our theme verse, 1 Peter 3:15, begins by telling us, ‘In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.’ The apologist must be a believer in Christ, committed to the lordship of Christ (cf. Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11).<sup>48</sup> The initial proposition of lordship does not logically lead to the assumption that apologetics is a necessity. For this, one would prefer the axiom, “The Christian committed to the lordship of Christ, must be an apologist.” However, the congruency of the argumentation is pastoral; it assumes lordship as an *a priori* cause of apologetics, and therefore a non-exceptional duty in the face of lordship. Frame remarks, “Some theologians present apologetics as if it were almost an exception to this commitment.”<sup>49</sup> The phrase “this commitment” refers back to “the lordship of Christ” in the previous quote.

Frame is extremely steadfast in his commitment to the apologetic faculty of the Word of God. “Legitimate apologetic argument presupposes the truth of Scripture, and it renounces the

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<sup>46</sup> For Frame’s fuller discussion on this topic, see *DCL*, 899. On page 858 of *DCL*, he makes a very helpful and similar point regarding the totalitarian nature of world religions.

<sup>47</sup> *DCL*, 862.

<sup>48</sup> *AGG*, 3—4.

<sup>49</sup> *AGG*, 4.

idea of human intellectual independence or autonomy.”<sup>50</sup> In consequence, his apologetic calls us to pistical dependence upon Scripture. Nowhere is this fact more obvious than in his stance that the proof of the resurrection of Jesus is not based in the 500 plus witnesses to the resurrection, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15, but in the fact that it is central to the apostolic witness,<sup>51</sup> and that we can rectify the theoretical paradox between God’s love and the problem of evil by accepting that God does not feel he needs to provide us an intellectually satisfying answer to this dilemma, but he has solved the problem of evil *in us* by giving us new *hearts* through the power of his Word.<sup>52</sup>

The theologian believes that apologetics encompasses both the *defense* of the gospel and a potent *offence* against the challenge of secular thought to the claims of the gospel.<sup>53</sup> As is everything in Framian theology, presuppositional apologetics is perspectively related.<sup>54</sup> More will be said regarding Frame’s positions on apologetics in coming chapters. However, the distilled essence of his views is to take no prisoners. I recall quite vividly a day, when as a student of Dr. Frame’s he remarked to a group of us students, “Everything Van Til ever said can be reduced to two ideas: that all men undeniably know God, and that the only way to approach them is to pull the rug right out from under them.” Frame’s Van Tillian reduction takes as its cue that withstanding principle of presuppositional apologetics: “no neutrality.” This principle is grounded in the Divine inspiration, infallibility and authority of Scripture.

### *Relationship of Lordship and Culture*

Frame’s has much to say on the church’s relationship to its contiguous culture. His treatment of the subject is, as are all areas of his thought, a natural outcome of the larger

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<sup>50</sup> *AGG*, 86.

<sup>51</sup> See *Idem.*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter 7 of *AGG* covers this issue in full.

<sup>53</sup> He speaks to the dual nature of apologetics in *AGG*, 2, 57f.

<sup>54</sup> The perspectival nature of apologetics is addressed in *AGG*, 3.

imperative of lordship. Frame deciphers this connection in the primitive account recorded in the Genesis narrative (Genesis 1:26-28; 3:15), in which God gives the original couple a cultural mandate. The Lord “commands Adam and Eve to make it. Culture is not a creation, but something that God has commanded, or ‘mandated,’ us to make...”<sup>55</sup> According to H. Richard Niebuhr’s now famous 5-tier breakdown of the historic Christian positions on Christ and culture, Frame supports the “Christ, the Transformer of Culture” model. At the end of his solid critique of the first four models of Christ and culture, found in his own, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, he admits, “So, by process of elimination, but not only that, I find myself supporting the fifth view, that Christians should be seeking to transform culture according to the standards of God’s Word.”<sup>56</sup> “By process of elimination” should not be taken to suggest that Frame arrives at the transformer of culture position because he cannot find a better one. Though these reasons are inferred rather than explicit, my research elicits positive reasons for his affirmation of the fifth position. For one, Frame notes a clear corollary between the universal claims of God and the comprehensive response of obedience that God expects in his human subjects. This response is one that is missional in nature with its objective the changing of increasingly pluralist and multicultural societies for Christ; to self-reflectively appropriate and interpret present cultural norms in the scales of Scripture, and also to apply the conditions of our Christian faith to all of the elements that together constitute culture. Frame succinctly clarifies his transformationist approach. “Similarly, the Christian should seek to bring biblical standards to bear in all areas of society and culture. Our motive is not to try to make non-Christians live the Christian life, but simply to work out the implications of our faith in all areas of life.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *DCL*, 855.

<sup>56</sup> *DCL*, 874.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem.*, 873.

One might argue that the avowal of God's lordship is fully consistent with the underlying tenets of Niebuhr's forth model of Christ and culture—"Christ and Culture in Paradox." This exemplar, also known as the Lutheran "Two Kingdoms" view of Christ and culture, has been recently and aptly defended by Gene Edward Veith, Ken Myers, John Muether, Dave Van Drunen, and Darryl Hart. Certainly these men would argue in favor of God's supreme magisterial lordship. But, predicated on his lordship doctrine, Frame sees inconsistencies with the cultural view normally associated with the Lutheran tradition.

He charges it with promoting an unwarranted "sacred/secular distinction" not found in Scripture or supported by nature. "The heart of this view is that, as Gene Veith puts it, God exercises a 'double sovereignty.'<sup>58</sup> He has 'two kingdoms.' He rules one way in the church and a different way in the world in general...Veith also describes these two sovereignties or two kingdoms as gospel verses law and spiritual verses secular. Luther used the metaphor of the spiritual as God's 'right hand,' and the secular as God's 'left hand.'"<sup>59</sup> Frame counters the double sovereignty view of Christ and culture. "In Reformed theology, God's sovereignty is comprehensive. All things come to pass according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:11)."<sup>60</sup>

A more serious problem with the two-kingdom doctrine is that it

...claims a duality, not only in God's providence, but also in God's standards.

There are secular values and religious values, secular norms and religious norms.

Secular society is responsible only to follow natural laws, the morality found in

nature...The church, however, is subject to the whole Word of God....Secular

society is governed by the principle of justice, and therefore by the sword. The

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<sup>58</sup> See Gene Edward Veith, "Christianity and Culture: God's Double Sovereignty," from *Modern Reformation*, 6.1 (January—February, 1997: 15—19, also available at <http://www.issueset.org/resource/archives/veith2.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> *DCL*, 870—1.

<sup>60</sup> *DCL*, 871.

church is governed, not by the sword, but by God's Word and Spirit. Veith argues that we should not ask civil governments to show forgiveness to criminals, but to punish them according to justice. Justice is the natural morality; forgiveness is found only in the church. So there is some inconsistency between the secular ethic and the ethic of the church. ”<sup>61</sup>

Antipodally, Frame offers nine reasons the two kingdom view is in error—all of which will be fleshed out in far greater detail in coming sections of this book. To abbreviate these nine points, he states, “It is true that the state has the power of the sword and that the church does not. But that is not because there are two different moralities, one secular and one Christian. Rather, that distinction comes out of the Word of God. God tells us in Scripture that the state has the power of the sword and the church does not. This doctrine is what we earlier called ‘sphere sovereignty’...So the use of the sword by the state is not an alternative to Christian morality, but part of Christian morality.”<sup>62</sup>

### 3. The significance of the lordship principle for academic theology

The nature of European theology has undergone radical change in the last centuries. A primary presupposition of the theology of the medieval period was the presence of an archetypal structure in the universe that provides cohesion for the whole of human life. It is this structure which supplied the underlying premise of “Christendom.” Despite the magisterial Reformers quarrel with High Scholasticism, they too believed that Christian theology articulates holistic implications for the whole of life. Luther and Calvin's doctrines of vocation, in particular, did much to facilitate this message. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, the *Virtuosi* and men of letters were seeking to substitute what they perceived as the darkness, unawareness, and

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<sup>61</sup> DCL, 871. Here, Frame is interacting with Veith, “Christianity and Culture,” 6.

<sup>62</sup> DCL, 872.

authority of Christianity that had ruled men's minds from the Middle Ages to the Thirty Years War with the "light" of natural reason, self-sufficiency, and broadmindedness. The "Age of Reason" exposed a dominant trust in the twin pillars of science and human reason that jointly could exploit nature to realize nothing less than a new world.

Since the Enlightenment, European theology has worked hard to find a voice which again heralds Christianity as a complete way of life, but with a modern twist. The concern turned to striking a chord with Europeans that balances the insular concerns of faith with the objective claims of science, reason, and culture. In the eighteenth century, Kant's critical limitation of reason did more to regain this ascendant voice and also to provide the basis for the modern articulation of "worldview": the idea that life and all things in it can be seen holistically and interconnected. Friedrich Schleiermacher expresses this concept in *Reden über die Religion* where the Divine is expressed in the most encompassing of terms. But the Romantic attempt to regain an overarching context for theology was somewhat hampered by the fact that religious scholars, following Kant, sought to identify and to justify a continuing role for the Christian faith in an intellectual context that had become inhospitable. In that sense their efforts were mainly apologetic rather than transforming.

Many years later, Europe witnessed a brilliant (though controversial among more conservative-minded theologians) response to the Enlightenment's displacing of theology in the form of the Neo-Reformation theologians. Barth, Brunner, and Bultmann offered a much more moderate and needed response to the Enlightenment's delimiting of faith by remaining committed to the transcendent acts of God while acknowledging the use of modern historiographical methods and by not devaluing modern culture. Nevertheless, the Neo-Reformation theologians claimed theology as one academic discipline among others and thus

failed to make theology the queen of the sciences once more. Of further disappointment is the fact that in reacting harshly to the decentralization of God in European thought before Kant, the Neo-Reformation theology swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme, whereby it replaced the radical anthropocentric syllabus with an equally unbalanced stress on the transcendent nature of God – the “wholly other,” making the transition to how Europeans could think culturally very difficult.

Pannenberg and Moltmann, hoping to imbue theology with a quickening reaction among Europeans, turned the emphasis in theology from a transcendental view of God toward its eschatological future; from a theocentric, otherworldly starting point to the concrete processes of culture. While the “theology of hope” – a rubric which itself was pregnant with meaning among Europeans on the heels of two world wars – was well intentioned, in the end it influenced more thinkers in America than it did among continental European theologians and philosophers where its impact was limited.

During the early twentieth century, Hegel saw a renaissance among some theological guilds; and despite its continuing struggle to adequately bridge individualism and multiculturalism, many academics today view postmodern thought as holding out hope for Europe’s civilizing paradigm. But overall, the jury is still out on postmodernism, whereby the European scene still awaits a central character and thought-system to rally around.

Enter John M. Frame. An introduction of Frame’s lordship theology could very well provide a fresh assessment of theology, one in which even competing interests in European theology can find renewed inspiration. On the one hand, Frame reaffirms the archetypal structure of theology which enabled medieval thought to create a basis for Christendom and the Reformers to speak of Christianity as embracing the whole of life. Yet, like Kant, his lordship criterion

limits reason, reminding us that all knowledge of God is “creaturely.” But contra Kant, Frame presents us a unified worldview that is able to dialogue with science, and culture, without leaving the realm of faith to enter the phenomenal—thus demonstrating the applicability of faith to the concrete processes of our living environment.

Like the Neo-Reformers, he affirms the high role of Scripture, but unlike them is not burdened by a philosophical view of God’s transcendence that is sometimes at odds with scripture and with God’s immanence. So Frame’s theology shows us the linkage between God’s transcendence and our need to live culturally.

Further still, Frame’s historical position is like Pannenberg and Moltmann on one level only: it is proleptical. But whereas these men sacrificed God’s transcendence and his acts in history for the vindication of faith at the end of history, Frame maintains both emphases, creating much needed balance between the two. Frame’s consistent obsequiousness to God’s lordship in the processes of history provides us a proleptical view of history in which history is not seen merely as hopeful events, but as descriptive events which anticipate a coming reality.

In all, I believe that to the extent European’s are exposed to Frame’s theology they will find in it a treatment of Christianity that is rigorous in theory yet consistent and practical. It may be an important step toward furthering the return of Christian theology from the edges of marginalization to a central and high place among other academic disciplines.

The subject of God’s lordship has not, however, been without controversy. In Christian theology, divine lordship has engaged a vigorous debate. Modern evangelicals in America, especially, continue to dispute the soteriological significance of the lordship of Christ. This fact is most palpably seen in the protracted and intensifying battle between the representatives of free

grace salvation and the exponents of lordship salvation.<sup>63</sup> In addition to this theological debate, American evangelicalism is also demonstrating a growing antipathy toward the practice of lordship. Why is this? The different cultural and religious constituencies that comprise our pluralistic culture worked to create disparity between the public affirmation of Christ as Lord and the lack of empirical proof regarding its evidentiary value in American evangelical life. The challenge has always been to live out in practice what one confesses doxologically. But the inherent conflict between belief and its embodiment in action has intensified with the demands and temptations of different cultural and religious pressures that comprise our pluralistic culture, resulting in a deepening of competing loyalties. No doubt, the inclusion of business, psychological, and social theories in the related areas of church growth, evangelism, and missions, beginning in the 70s, did little to reverse this trend, but only hastened the modernization of American evangelical life and the devaluation of lordship values.

Then there is the European scene. There is little question that in the increasingly postmodern; indeed post-rational, European context, the very thought of a magisterial, personal Lord who evaluates our every move, is becoming more and more passé. Certainly, western societies, to one degree or another, continue to demonstrate religious belief. But the assent to the claims of an objective Lord is being progressively overshadowed by the collective religious

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<sup>63</sup> Lordship salvation teaches that holiness and attendant good works are a necessary outcome of regeneration. In other words, one cannot be a true Christian without simultaneously receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord. Proponents of Lordship salvation would not question the validity of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith, but urge consideration of the role of repentance and holiness as central aspects of the New Testament kerygma. Conversely, Free Grace Theology holds that redemption is by grace alone and that repentance is part of sanctification. Its proponents argue that Lordship salvation makes commitment to obedience a necessary antecedent to salvation. As early as 1948, Lewis Sperry Chafer denounced Lordship salvation in his *Systematic Theology*, Vol 3, 384—388. The Lordship Salvation controversy was later taken up in the prominent exchange between Everett F. Harrison and John R. W. Stott. See Everett F. Harrison, “Must Christ be Lord to be Savior? NO!” *Eternity*, 1959, 14. And John R. Stott, “Must Christ be Lord to be Savior? YES!” *Eternity*, 17-18). The centerpiece of this old debate, Lordship theology, is not to be confused with Frame’s theology of Lordship, which is not concerned with parsing the economic Trinity, but seeks to extrapolate the unity and simplicity of the God with the self-revelation of God as Yahweh at the forefront.

interest in the experiential aspects of spirituality, and often without clear definition. Gradually more pluralistic, the new cathedrals of Europe are no longer found in massive edifices of theology in art, but in the private world of sibylline mysticism. One thus searches for verification of a point of contact in European social and religious life for the authentication that “Jesus is Lord.”

If God’s lordship generates deep questions, and even visceral reactions, it also invites theologians to grapple with its import. If taken seriously, it forces one to think through the fundamental questions of life, which include meaning, existence, and salvation. How one comprehends the nature of God, and the world in which one lives, is fundamentally affected by one’s response to God’s lordship. Lordship is not an abstract concept. As Frame points out, it is practical. As a Calvinist theologian/philosopher, John M. Frame has dedicated his life’s work to grappling with, deciphering, and applying the all-importance of God’s lordship to the various forms of human existence. This integration is most evident in Frame’s work in the aforementioned areas of ethics, apologetics, and culture. How so?

### *Significance of Framian ethics*

A question that continues to beleaguer thinkers is, “Is it possible to speak theologically of a coherent moral vision?” Frame, argues that a coherent moral stance can be discerned in the range of the biblical witness. Rejecting the tradition since Locke, and developed much further in the Categorical Imperative of Kant that finds the source of morals and ethics in the standards of rationality, Frame turns a complex presentation of biblical ethics into a unified system by carefully distinguishing, but also coalescing, three different perspectives: the situational perspective, the normative perspective, and the existential perspective—all of which draw currency from his more fundamental lordship attributes: control, authority, and presence. It is

these perspectives that present a theological structure for seeking a qualitative answer to the age-old ethical question. A coherent moral vision can shape the life of the Church in its communal identity and cultural witness.

In search of a solution to the universal, ethical question, scholars have concentrated on either the teleological, deontological, or existential ethical task, though some have attempted a synthesis of two of the three specialties. The increasing specialization of academic interpretations in autonomy from divine lordship has produced what Frame calls a “rational/irrational” tension. The result is a plethora of ethical theories claiming absoluteness without relevance (e.g. Plato) or relevance without absoluteness (Wittgenstein). Frame addresses the problem by his perspectival proposal. He demonstrates how the integrative nature of the biblical worldview brings together absoluteness and relevance; abstract theory and content; objectivity and inwardness. Furthermore, until Frames’ work, no one had successfully brought together the teleological, deontological, or existential ethical tasks. The sophists, Hume and Rousseau, Marx and Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre, and the postmodern thinkers: Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty, and more, have spoken for the existential tradition. Epicurus, Aristotle, Bentham and Mill, and Dewey worked to advance the teleological tradition. And Plato, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Bradley, Bosanquet, Moore and Pritchard committed themselves to the deontological tradition. In Frame, all these traditions find ample and balanced expression.

### *Significance of Framian apologetics*

Because postmodern thought fundamentally rejects metaphysics, its ability to make available a unified elucidation of the universe remains an open struggle. Many have argued that because postmodern thought is unable to justify its interpretation of reality with reality itself, the

philosophy accordingly runs afoul of itself: it produces a mental split between *individualism and multiculturalism*. In this sense of promoting dualism, the postmodern dilemma actually predates Lyotard by centuries as it has materialized in different forms (e.g., the Platonic theory of particulars and universals). Because postmodern thought struggles to rectify a reasonably sufficient explanation of the universe, it has yet to offer us a philosophical context by which we can substantiate a claim for the Christian faith. In recent times, a postmodern apologetic has emerged that claims inspiration from the New Light emphasis of Jonathan Edwards, which, so it is thought, brought together the Enlightenment rationale in scientific method and rational empiricism with natural and revealed religion. In this case, Quantum spirituality is a hybrid: it seeks a new bridge between the deconstructive thought of Derrida and Christianity in the hope of synthesizing faith with science and philosophy. This “new” New Light emphasis is designed to function as an apologetic, demonstrating to modern people that the Church is biblically reformed, yet scientifically, culturally, and philosophically informed.

In contradistinction to postmodern apologetic solutions (the Quantum system representing one) the schema of Frame’s tri-perspectival apologetics presents us with an organic interpretation of the universe and thus a coherent presentation of the world in which we live.<sup>64</sup> It does so by fully avoiding cross-pollination between Scripture and art nouveau forms of philosophy/theology and science while maintaining close dialogue between Scripture and new developments in philosophy/theology and science. It is this explanation, which is of greater value in explicating the Christian faith to postmoderns, especially skeptics and atheists.

The further significance of Frame’s presuppositional approach to apologetics is seen in its association with the Christian ethics Frame espouses. Both draw from the Reformed doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Scripture. Since the Enlightenment, ethicists have deemphasized the

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed examination of Frame’s thinking on worldview, or metaphysics, as he calls it, see *AGG*, 34f.

interconnection between natural moral virtue and supernatural virtue as revealed in Scripture. The deontologizing trend in the field of ethics has precipitated an attack on the traditional Christian ethic by both modernists and postmodernists. The modernists charge Christians with irrationalism—of stating biblical ethics without sufficient reason. Postmodernists accuse Christians with rationalism—of the arrogance to claim sufficient knowledge of ethical content with certainty. The result is that both camps either reject outright the assertions of classic Protestant Christianity or they attempt to modify such assertions according to their own presuppositions. In the latter case, the result is a twisting of historic Protestant Christianity to a point of non-recognition. Frame’s presuppositional apologetics employs a central position that remands the modern debate over social ethics back to scriptural sources. On this ground, he reveals the “rational-irrational” dialectic inherent in both the modernist and postmodernist critiques. Further, he makes a persuasive case that we dare not embrace a view of conduct, or of an apologetic to defend that conduct, which finds its content and validity set by nature or reason alone. To give a full account of the rationale of belief, and of conduct, he employs a perspectival paradigm in support of the whole of the apologetic enterprise.

#### *Significance of the Framian view of culture*

As established by now, Frame’s perspectivalism is crucial for its accent on the lordship of God. It is this theme that supplies cohesion to his entire theology. Emerging from this cohesion is a precise, philosophical contour that prompts the reader to reflect culturally. It is not that the theologian treats culture adjacent to more centralized topics in theology. By accenting God’s lordship in and over the world the matter of culture inexorably comes to light as a *prima facie* consideration in theology. The archetype of lordship, more specifically that God is lord of the covenant, makes this undeniable as, for instance, his doctrine of God always begins, in spite of

the specific subheading in view, with the covenantal criteria, the effect of which is to necessarily entail the creation, and the cultural situation we fashion from the creation. The very arrangement of the theologian's work makes us think of culture as a principal issue. He never deals with culture as if it were an option of theological reflection, but always as an "ought" of theology and therefore of Christian participation.

More narrowly speaking, Frame's perspectival theology provides a coherent context for solving a modern cultural crisis. The fact is that we are living in a postmodern age that has rejected the idea of absolute truth. Truth is now seen as the function of social/political power. The ulterior motive, or subtext, for making a truth claim is said to be the manifestation of the collective desire to control an outcome by the means of language. Bypassing the urge to argue the merits of this theory, the overt and far-reaching secularization of society has produced an erosion of privately and publicly held values and has left people with a fragmented view of the world wholly unable to consistently interpret the times in which they live. Thus, many people ask, "Why 9-11?" "Why holocaust-like suffering in the Sudan?" With only a fragmented view of reality people conclude that either God is in control of human events, but is uncaring in the face of human suffering. Or, he is not in control and is thus powerless to help. Or, he does not exist at all. So they ponder, "I must be agnostic or atheist because I cannot comprehend these things."<sup>65</sup>

The result has been increasing confusion, alienation, and despair globally.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Most certainly the leading Universities and Divinity schools of the world that have abandoned any notion of the metaphysical in favor for humanistic subjectivism and doubt have nothing constructive to offer those who ask such questions.

<sup>66</sup> Mapping shifts in the philosophical/theological landscape that radically altered people's view of the world, and identifying the intellectual and empirical forces that have shaped the course of ideas, is always a bit of a subjective analysis. But I would argue that the present malaise finds a source in Kant's "Copernican Revolution," which left mankind with an unknowable, ultimate reality, a noumenal realm. From Kant's dualism we can trace the idealism of Hegel, the divinized ego of Fichte, the socialism of Karl Marx, the defiance of Nietzsche, the pragmatism of the American philosophers and theologians, the existentialism of the French atheists, the mysticism of Wittgenstein, and the structuralism of Foucault, followed by the deconstructionist program of Lyotard and others, which is largely responsible for the intellectual crisis of fragmentation.

The *tour de force* of Frame's tri-perspectival theology is found in his strong reply to the fragmentation and resultant confusion that is sweeping contemporary culture. His claim that everything in God is mutually reliant, and that this mutual dependence is manifestly indicated in the creation, including natural disasters, means that all things are related and therefore find purpose and meaning in God.<sup>67</sup> His discussion regarding God's "absolute presence" by which he means "that without him [God] there could be no meaning, no significance, no purpose in anything"<sup>68</sup> especially provides an answer to present-day alienation and despair. We find a similar theme in Frame's view that all theology is application.<sup>69</sup> It is about problem solving, something that stands at the forefront of Frame's whole system of theology. As he says, the intent of all theology "is not to reproduce the emphasis of Scripture...but to apply Scripture to the needs of people."<sup>70</sup>

On a different level of cultural consideration, we also find in Frame the genesis of an enabling theology of the arts. When we think about God's lordship perspectively, we think about it as servants within the covenant relationship. We will draw, paint, sculpt, or produce film as creatures, in creaturely ways and language, and thus by means of accommodation. In other words, our art will always remain relative to our position as covenant servants. It is our servant status that reminds us *both* of our freedom *and* of our limits as artists. Because God is lord of the imagination we are free to explore the subjective world of mystery, speculation and imagination. At the same time, we are will not attempt to explore the world of mystery, speculation, and imagination autonomously; beyond the limits of God's revelation.<sup>71</sup> This means we will create

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<sup>67</sup> See Frame's comment on this very fact in *DG*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> *DG*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> For this integration, see *DG*, 379.

<sup>70</sup> *DG*, 7. See also *DKG*, 81—85.

<sup>71</sup> Frame's offers an example of how subjectivity and objectivity come together in the phrase "God is love." He says that we understand that phrase subjectively—in its warmth and assurance to us as creatures. But the phrase also tells

from the standpoint of his reality, his creation, as he made it, a fact that will bring realism and objectivity to our creations.

More, the lordship principle reminds artists that visual art, music, and every other form of human creativity, are nothing more than an image of something that exists in the Lord's universe. The painter cannot paint anything more than what his eye can see, or his imagination can take from nature and elaborate upon. The composer of music cannot write using anything more than what his ear can hear, or his imagination can take from nature and elaborate upon. In any case, the painter and the composer; indeed all artisans, have at their disposal the existential, situational, and the normative perspective of God's Word; no more, and no less. An artist can create something of great indifference to God's lordship and be led down what Frame calls "blind alleys." Or, as a covenant child, he can complete a meaningful image that reflects God's creation and his gift of creativity. Choosing the latter course, the artist shows aesthetic deference to the Lord of all creativity and to his evaluation of our creativity in light of the existential, situational, and normative perspectives of God's great revelation.

4. The research question to be more fully addressed in the remaining chapter of the book.

We shall now embark on a more comprehensive exploration of these preliminary themes. The shape of the discussion will follow closely the outline of the introductory compendium already presented. The research question to be analyzed in far greater detail is this: "What does lordship' mean to John M. Frame with special reference to the areas of ethics, apologetics, and culture?"

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us something very important about the objective nature of God, apart from which we would have no real understanding into what it means that God loves us. For more on this point, see *DG*, 190.