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'A theology more trinitarian than any I know of' : Wolfhart Pannenberg's doctrine of the triune God

Taylor, Iain Buchanan

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"A THEOLOGY MORE TRINITARIAN THAN ANY I KNOW OF": WOLFHART PANNENBERG ON THE TRIUNE GOD

Iain Buchanan Taylor
King's College London
PhD Thesis

BIBL. LONDIN. UNIV.

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the trinitarian theology of the contemporary German theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg. It notes his stated ambition to write 'a theology more thoroughly trinitarian than any I know of,' and evaluates it by answering two questions: (1) what does Pannenberg mean by his theology being thoroughly trinitarian; and (2) how far has his subsequent work, especially *Systematic Theology*, been successful in realising his stated goal.

In addition to setting out the subject matter and approach of the thesis, the introduction argues for a reading of Pannenberg's theology as one whose ultimate concern is the centrality of God and whose indebtedness to German idealist philosophy, and Hegel in particular, is not as great as others have thought. It is shown that, for Pannenberg, 'thoroughly trinitarian' applies both to what one says about God and to what one says about his entire economic activity. The answer to the first of the questions the thesis poses, therefore, must include both what Pannenberg understands by the doctrine of the Trinity and how all other theological topics are understood in the light of the trinitarian God.

Part One "Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology" offers a critical analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in answer to both our stated questions. The first chapter deals with Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity proper. It is shown that Pannenberg advocates a view of the divine Trinity based on God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ, and for this reason makes revisions to many traditional treatments. The following chapters, two to eight, discuss how Pannenberg treats other doctrines in a trinitarian way. They cover, in order, the doctrine of God's essence and attributes, creation, anthropology, christology, reconciliation, the doctrine of the kingdom and the church, and eschatology. Part One ends with a concluding chapter, which, in addition to surveying the content of the previous chapters, both offers reasons to suggest that Pannenberg's ambitions might be realised and outlines points of criticism to be laid against his trinitarian theology.

Part Two "On Being a Trinitarian Theologian" is a piece of constructive theology written in the light of Pannenberg's trinitarianism. It takes up the most important point of criticism, namely that there are several points in his theology where, despite his stated aim, Pannenberg fails to employ trinitarian thinking. The common theme to these points of trinitarian reticence is that Pannenberg offers insufficient account of how the Trinity affects the practice of theology. An alternative account is offered that demonstrates that a trinitarian construal of the task of theology is incompatible with the theologian taking a position of neutrality or impartiality, but requires her humility, prayer and faith.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IJST	International Journal of Systematic Theology
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KuD	Kerygma und Dogma
LW	Luther's Works
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopaedie
WA	Luthers Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe
ZTK	Zeitschrift fuer Theologie und Kirche

INTRODUCTION

In 1981, Wolfhart Pannenberg wrote an autobiographical piece in *The Christian Century*. Included in it were these words:

> In recent years, the doctrine of God has taken more and more definitive shape in my thought...Hence today I feel much more confident to develop a doctrine of God and to treat the subjects of Christian dogmatics in that perspective. That doctrine will be more thoroughly trinitarian than any example I know of.[1]

This thesis is an examination of these remarks, especially the ambitious claim of the final sentence that his doctrine of God would be more thoroughly trinitarian than any example he knows of. In short, it answers just two questions: (1) what does Pannenberg mean by his theology being thoroughly trinitarian; and (2) how far has his subsequent work been successful in realising his stated goal? It would be possible, of course, to consider Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in comparison with other trinitarian theologies, and so judge whether his doctrine was 'more thoroughly trinitarian' *than them*. That task we leave to others. Here we are not making the comparative point, but are considering how adequately trinitarian Pannenberg's theology in fact is.

Two assumptions are being made here, neither of which should raise any controversy. The first is that, since 1981, Pannenberg has kept to this goal. The second is that 'the most *trinitarian theology*' means not just that within a systematic presentation of Christian doctrine Pannenberg should include a section on God's triune nature that conforms to the highest standards of trinitarian orthodoxy, but also that an account of God's triunity should inform every part of his theological system. As for the first assumption, we need only note the wealth of publications Pannenberg has offered on trinitarian themes since he wrote those words. As well as a trio of important articles offered just before these autobiographical remarks[2] and the later *Systematic Theology*[3] that has a basic trinitarian structure, there have been a significant number of articles

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[1] "God's Presence in History," *The Christian Century*, 11 March 1981, p.263.
[2] These are "Die Subjektivitaet Gottes und die Trinitaetslehre. Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels","Christologie und Theologie" and "Der Gott der Geschichte", which can all be found in W. Pannenberg *Grundfragen Systematischer Theologie: Band 2* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980) (Hereafter *GST2*).
[3] 3 vols, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988-1997) (Hereafter "*ST*", and references in main text).

dealing with the Trinity since the early 1980's.[4] As for the second Pannenberg states at one point in *ST* that

> 'under the sign of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity the rest of dogmatics in the doctrine of creation, christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology will be part of the exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Conversely, the doctrine of the Trinity is an anticipatory sum of the whole content of Christian dogmatics' (1.355).[5]

We are still, then, dealing with 'a doctrine of God and...treat[ing] the subjects of Christian dogmatics in that perspective.'

This study will be taken up with a detailed examination of the trinitarian theology contained within *ST*. It is this work, which not only provides the most detailed, as well as the definitive, presentation of Pannenberg's understanding of the being and identity of the trinitarian God, but it also demonstrates more than any of Pannenberg's other works how the Trinity shapes his treatments of the other topics of Christian doctrine.

Before embarking on this, however, we need to make clear some of the interpretative decisions that inform the approach adopted here. In the remaining part of this introduction, therefore, we shall answer three questions. Firstly, has Pannenberg's theology always been trinitarian? Second, why focus primarily on *ST*? And finally, what is the special contribution of *this* study in particular?

Has Pannenberg's theology always been trinitarian?

> *'It is a fact that what is lasting and reliable, and in this sense true, comes to light only in the future' (1.54).*

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[4] These include: "Der Geist und sein Anders" in D. Henrich and R-P. Horstmann (eds.) *Hegels Logik der Philosophie in der Theorie des absoluten Geistes* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), pp.151-159; "Probleme einer trinitarischen Gotteslehre" in W. Baier et al (eds.) *Weisheit Gottes – Weisheit der Welt: Festschrift fuer Kardinal Ratzinger zum 60. Geburtstag* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1987), vol 1, pp.329-342, which was also published in English as "Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God" in *Dialog* 26 (1987), pp.250-257; "The Christian Vision of God: The New Discussion of the Trinitarian Doctrine" in *Trinity Seminary Review* 13, 1991, pp.53-60; "La Doctrina de la Trinidad en Hegel y su recepcion en la teologia alemana" *Estudios trinitarios* 30 (1996), pp. 35-51; "Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God" in *Dialog* 39 (2000), pp.9-14, expanded in C. E. Gunton (ed.) *Trinity, Time and Church. A Response to the Theology of Robert Jenson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 62-70.

[5] Pannenberg also says that in dealing with the issue of 'the specific form that the unity of the divine life takes in the relation between the immanent and the economic Trinity... our dogmatics will have to traverse the various areas of the creation, reconciliation, and redemption of the world' (1.447).

Pannenberg's theological career has among other things emphasised '[t]he awareness of the provisional form of all our knowledge of truth.'[6] Of course, by this Pannenberg intends the general point that one requires a certain hesitancy in advancing truth claims, since they can only be provisional hypotheses to be verified or not by the course of history. As for the general validity of this notion, we leave that to others, but we may perhaps see an instance of why it might be true by seeing how it applies to just a small part of universal history, namely, the field of Pannenberg scholarship. In a book of many valuable insights, Allan Galloway could have provided the most startling hypothesis that has subsequently been falsified. 'Pannenberg's approach to theology,' he once wrote,

> 'signals the end of the great "prima donnas" in theology – the age of the multi-volume monograph in which a whole system of theology was elaborated as the achievement of an individual.'[7]

For the purposes of this study, we note another of Pannenberg's interpreters who has offered another hypothesis that in hindsight we can see is in need of correction. This is one of the first articles in English on Pannenberg's doctrine of God by Herbert Burhenn, which otherwise has some more perceptive comments. '[T]he paucity of references here to the doctrine of the Trinity,' he writes, is entirely consistent...with Pannenberg's own procedure.' He continues, 'The Trinity cannot function for Pannenberg...as a structural principle of theology.'[8]

Against Burhenn, it must be stated at the outset that the Trinity has always been present in Pannenberg's theology. We take as examples two of his most substantial early works. The first is the 1961 collection *Revelation as History*, in which Pannenberg writes,

> 'In the fate of Jesus, the God of Israel is revealed as the triune God. The event of revelation should not be separated from the being of God himself. The being of God does not belong just to the Father, but also to the Son. The Holy Spirit also shares in the being of God by virtue of his participation in the glory of God that comes to life in the eschatological congregation.'[9]

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[6] *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), p.54 (Hereafter "*IST*"). On what Pannenberg means by doctrinal statements being hypothetical see *ST* 1.48-61, esp. p.56, as well as *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (London: DLT, 1976), pp.332-345.
[7] *Wolfhart Pannenberg* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p.133.
[8] "Pannenberg's Doctrine of God" *SJT* 28 (1975), pp.535-536.
[9] *Revelation as History*, (London: Macmillan, 1968) (Hereafter *RaH*).

The God whose historical self-revelation is the object of Pannenberg's concern in this work, therefore, is none other than the 'triune God' of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The second is *Jesus – God and Man*, the original German edition of which was published in 1964.[10] In this work there are certain criticisms of how other theologians have articulated trinitarian doctrine. As we shall note in chapter 5 of our study, the criticisms are not of the doctrine of the Trinity or of trinitarian theology, but of when the Trinity is presupposed. Pannenberg, then, is motivated not by a dismissal of trinitarian doctrine but by a deep concern for it. As in the later *ST* the criticisms are offered as a plea for a trinitarian theology that is grounded in God's historical revelation, for the doctrine of the Trinity is present in *JGM* too. This has been well brought out in *The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* by Herbert Neie. Although in that work Neie's purpose is not to refute views like Burhenn's, he nevertheless notes statements in *JGM* that 'construct the basis of a trinitarian doctrine.'[11] These include the following:

> 'If Father, Son and Spirit are distinct but coordinate moments in the accomplishment of God's revelation, then they are so in God's eternal essence as well.'[12]
>
> 'That the distinctiveness of Father and Son is a distinction in the essence of God himself is the beginning point for the doctrine of the Trinity systematically as well as historically.'[13]
>
> 'The Spirit...[is] a person over against the Son and the Father, because he leads us to glorify the Son and the Father, and thus demonstrates himself to be distinct from both.'[14]

And there can be no suspicion that these are proof-texts, since within *JGM* there is also a whole sub-section entitled "The Unity in the Trinity."[15]

Furthermore, the doctrine of the Trinity is not just present in Pannenberg's early work, but it is also operative in a way that presages its later importance in *ST*. For instance, in *The Apostles Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, the work of Pannenberg's early career that most resembles a mini-systematics, he writes:

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[10] (London: SCM, 1968) (Hereafter *JGM*).
[11] (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979) p.219.
[12] *JGM*, p.180.
[13] *JGM*, p.169.
[14] *JGM*, p.179.
[15] *JGM*, pp.179-183.

'Is the description of God as Father not an obvious reflection of a patriarchal order of society? And if that is the case, can this word still be considered the natural expression of our experience of God in the altered conditions of present-day society? In answering such questions we must first notice that the creed does not simple make the baptismal candidate state that God is his Father; it talks about the Father *per se*, namely the Father of Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly it is not, primarily speaking, important whether we can most appropriately talk about God in relation to ourselves through the image of fatherhood; the name 'Father' identifies the God about whom the creed is talking as the God of Jesus'[16]

Contra Burhenn, then, the Trinity *is* structurally significant to his theology.

Of course, as we shall see, there is expansion and development in what Pannenberg has to say about the Trinity. And there is not the same detail in the presentation in 1961 as there is in the *ST* of 30 years later. It is none the less the case, however, that the Trinity is present at each stage of Pannenberg's theological development, and significantly so.

Why focus primarily on *Systematic Theology*?

It is wrong to say that Pannenberg did not always hold to the doctrine of the Trinity, nor was he unconcerned about trinitarian theology and only later adopted it as something wholly new. He did not just discover the Trinity in 1981 when he wrote that piece for *Christian Century*, nor does his later work on the Trinity represent a fundamental change of orientation to his theology. Having said this, as we investigate Pannenberg's understanding of the triune God we shall nevertheless have as our primary focus the latter period of his theology. In particular we shall devote most attention to his *ST*, which is the culmination and comprehensive treatment of the topics that have occupied Pannenberg throughout his theological career. We offer three reasons in particular for this choice.

Firstly, *ST* gives the most complete and detailed presentation of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of God. When Pannenberg handles the topic of the Trinity elsewhere than in *ST*, the treatments are either brief remarks or sections within books devoted to a quite different topic, or articles that address particular issues within trinitarian theology. In neither case is there the sustained attention accorded the Trinity in *ST* chapter 5.

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[16] *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions* (London: SCM, 1972), p. 31 (Hereafter *AC*).

Often what we have in those other sources can nuance or supplement this primary account, but to understand the doctrine that shapes that 'most trinitarian of theologies' it is to *ST* we must go.

Second, *ST* comes at the conclusion of the development of Pannenberg's trinitarian thought. As we have already noted, to say that the Trinity is present in Pannenberg's later theology, but absent in his earlier work is inaccurate. To say instead that there is a development and increasing prominence of the Trinity in Pannenberg's theology when one compares the earlier and later writings is closer to the mark.

That there has been such a development is evident from Pannenberg's own autobiographical remarks. He says that since his appointment as professor of systematic theology in 1958, 'In my experience the most difficult subject to deal with was the doctrine of God.' He continues, that although he had addressed the question of God in a number of his earlier publications,

> 'In fact, not until the early 1980's did I begin to feel solid ground under my feet in this area...It is only in a little book on metaphysics and in the first volume of my systematic theology...that I have published an argument that deals with the idea of God in its own right. Everything else, however, remains insecure in theology, before one has made up one's mind on the doctrine of God.'[17]

What are the developments that led to this confidence in treating the doctrine of God? There is barely any suggestion explicitly given within Pannenberg's written works, and we must await either further comment from Pannenberg or the results of future research for further clarity on the matter. Nevertheless, we note at least two developments that specifically affect the presentation of the trinitarian God, rather than the doctrine of God in general, which contributed to this increased confidence in approaching the task of a comprehensive systematic theology.

The first is his understanding of the mutual dependence of the trinitarian persons. In a recent article, "Divine Economy and the Immanent Trinity," Pannenberg writes of a dilemma he had faced in trinitarian thought. Western and idealist treatments of the Trinity seemed to him to exhibit

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[17] "An Autobiographical Sketch" in Braaten and P. Clayton (eds.) *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Responses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p.16 (Hereafter "Autobiographical Sketch").

'a one way traffic from the Father to Son and Spirit, a conception that easily gives the impression of an ontological subordination of Son and Spirit to the Father. There is certainly an *ethical* subordination of the Son in his obedience to the Father, and in a similar way the Spirit glorifies, not himself, but the Son and the Father, but there is no ontological inferiority on the part of the Son and the Spirit as compared to the Father. Does not that require that as the Son and the Spirit are dependent on the Father, so also the Father [should] be dependent on his Son and the Spirit, though not in the same way?'[18]

In part Pannenberg had already guarded against this as early as *JGM* by adopting the concept 'self-distinction' to express the Son's difference from the Father such that both persons are active subjects, rather than just the Father. But this further step of seeing an ontological dependence to exist *reciprocally* between the persons only appears in Pannenberg's later work.[19]

Pannenberg himself states that it was John Zizioulas, who had called his attention to Athanasius' argument in the first treatise *Against the Arians.* There Athanasius states that even the Father would not be Father without the Son, even venturing 'to say that Jesus' claim that he is the truth and the life implies that he is the truth and the life of even the Father himself, so that the Father would have no truth and no life, if he were without the Son.' This enabled Pannenberg to achieve a new emphasis on the mutuality in the personal relations within the Trinity. Therefore, 'the Fatherhood of God depends on there being a Son. This seems to entail that even the divinity of the Father is not independent of his relationship to his Son.'[20]

The second development is his appropriation of field theory to explain the being and action of the triune God. In *ST* there are two primary ways in which Pannenberg uses notions of field taken from modern science. The first is to provide a concept of the divine essence as spirit that does not understand it in terms of the human mind. Field theory is used to articulate a concept of the divine being that avoids the allegedly modalising drift of intellectual notions of spirituality in favour of one that does not threaten the divine Trinity. This first use will be taken up in our second chapter on Pannenberg's trinitarian understanding of the divine essence and attributes. The second is to explain the work of

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[18] pp.2-3 (Hereafter "DEET").
[19] The reciprocity of the triune relations is clearly set out at least as early as *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.40-41.
[20] "DEET", p.3. Pannenberg refers to Athanasius *Contra Arianos* 1.14, 20, 29, 34.

the Holy Spirit in creation. Pannenberg thinks that the concept of field is better suited than that of mind to explicate how the third divine person is active in the created realm, i.e., how he is neither dualistically set against the natural order nor materialistically made part of it. This second use of field theory, and its use in explicating a trinitarian doctrine of creation, will be taken up in our third chapter.

Although this thesis will frequently refer to Pannenberg's earlier works, it is right for our primary focus to be on the works published since 1980's, when he began to feel 'solid ground.' What we have in the years leading up to *ST* is an increasing concern, focus, and ability to write an extended and in-depth theology with the trinitarian God at the centre. With *ST*, therefore, we see the culmination of Pannenberg's interest in and thinking on the Trinity.

The third reason for our specific focus on *ST* is that it, more than Pannenberg's other writings, shows how the Trinity fits within, and shapes the rest of Christian theology. His other major works do include references to the Trinity, but mostly they remain fairly brief. Even after 1981 the two most substantial works other than *ST* devote little direct attention to the doctrine. In *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* there are a few short remarks, although there is also an interesting short passage we shall investigate later that suggests social trinitarianism.[21] In *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* there is a short critique of certain Western and idealist views of the Trinity,[22] but not much else. What influence on the presentation the doctrine of the Trinity has in these works can be no more than implicit. For an explicit presentation of Pannenberg's trinitarian thought we must turn to *ST*. Just as its chapter 5, "The Trinitarian God," represents the most sustained and detailed of all Pannenberg's treatments of the Trinity, so also chapters 6 to 15 demonstrate a more rigorously trinitarian outworking of his theological programme than do any of his other publications.

What, then, is the structure and argument of this study as a whole? Broadly speaking, there are three parts to it. There is this introduction in which we outline our general approach to Pannenberg. We not only introduce the topic and set out the basic outlines of the subsequent chapter. We also argue for a reading of Pannenberg, whose

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[21] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) (Hereafter "*ATP*"). See esp. pp.183-4, 235-7, 484. The apparent social trinitarianism is most evident on p.531, and will be treated in chapter 4.
[22] pp.39ff (Hereafter *MIG*).

centre is to be found above all in his doctrine of God, and whose reliance on German idealism is not as great as many other commentators have suggested.

The rest of this study is divided into two parts. "Part One," which is entitled "Pannenberg on the Trinitarian God," is by far the longest part is the second section. It deals with the content and use of the doctrine of the Trinity following the structure of *ST.* We devote the first chapter of our study, "Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity" to the treatment of the Trinity outlined in *ST* chapter 5 and in other places. The subsequent chapters trace how the rest of Pannenberg's theology is affected by his understanding of the triune God. In general we follow the order and content of the rest of *ST.* So, for instance, our second chapter "Pannenberg's Trinitarian Doctrine of God's Essence and Attributes" corresponds to *ST* chapter 6, "The Unity and Attributes of the Divine Essence", and our eighth chapter "Pannenberg's Trinitarian Doctrine of the Final Consummation" to *ST* chapter 15, "The Consummation of Creation in the Kingdom of God". The intervening chapters deal with creation, anthropology, christology, soteriology and ecclesiology from the point of view of the Trinity. The emphasis in this second part is on both the explication of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology and critical analysis of the positions he adopts. This section has a concluding chapter which both summarises the content of the second section and, on the basis of our findings, evaluates in what ways and to what extent Pannenberg has succeeded and failed to offer a theology more trinitarian than any other.

In "Part Two" we move beyond the analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology. "On Being a Trinitarian Theologian," is a piece of constructive theology written in the light of the analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian thought offered in the second section. Here we take up the theological criticisms we have made regarding Pannenberg's trinitarian theology and suggest a proposal that does better justice to his high trinitarian ambitions. Specifically, we pinpoint the issue of how one goes about the task of theology, and the doctrinal topics of revelation, christology and faith that shape, or are shaped by, how one conceives how the theologian fits within the theological scheme. We query whether Pannenberg's account allows the Trinity genuinely to affect the practice of theology, i.e. the *habitus* of the theologian, rather than just theology's content or the conclusions it reaches. On this matter at least Pannenberg's claim to write the most trinitarian of theologies does not seem to be met.

What is the special contribution of *this* study in particular?

In addition to the reading of Pannenberg adopted here and the various theological judgements made of his work that are given during the course of the presentation, broadly speaking there are three ways in which this study aims to make a contribution to contemporary systematic theology. In particular it seeks to develop the field of Pannenberg studies by offering the first work in English of this length devoted exclusively to his trinitarian thought and by suggesting a particular reading of his theology, and to contribute to the field of contemporary trinitarian theology in one important respect.

1. A comprehensive treatment of Pannenberg's mature trinitarian thought

There already exist several treatments of Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity, which fall into four broad types. Firstly, there are works, which, though not devoted to Pannenberg specifically, discuss his thought within a more wide-ranging study of trinitarian theology in general. Ted Peters' *God as Trinity* and John Thompson's *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*, for example, fit this category.[23] Secondly, there are works that offer an overview of Pannenberg's theology, which do treat his trinitarian thought, but only as part of a general treatment. Examples of this group include Stanley Grenz's *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*,[24] Frank Tupper's *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*[25] and Christiaan Mostert's *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Eschatological Doctrine of God*,[26] as well as two shorter contributions by Christoph Schwoebel.[27] Third, there are articles devoted to expositing aspects of Pannenberg's trinitarianism. There are a large number of such articles, probably the most interesting of which are Anselm Min's "The Dialectic of Divine Love: Pannenberg's

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[23] T. E. Peters *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), esp. pp. 135-144 and 166-168, and J. Thompson *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), esp. pp.34-36 and 136-139.
[24] (Oxford: OUP, 1990).
[25] (London: SCM, 1974).
[26] (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).
[27] "Rational Theology in Trinitarian Perspective: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Trinitarian Theology" in *JTS* (October 1996), pp.498-527 and "Wolfhart Pannenberg" in D. Ford (ed.) *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, both the 1989 and 1997 editions).

Hegelian Trinitarianism"[28] and Juan Martinez-Camino's "Wechselseitige Selbstunterscheidung? Zur Trinitaetslehre W. Pannenbergs."[29]

The fourth and final group is of those books that are largely devoted to discussing Pannenberg's trinitarian thought. Two such books have been published in continental Europe over recent years. They are Michael Schulz's *Sein und Trinitaet*[30] and Klaus Vechtel's *Trinitaet und Zukunft.*[31] The former is an immense work which covers a number of Christian thinkers in detail, including Pannenberg, and the latter a study with a more limited focus on Pannenberg's philosophy and how it relates to his doctrine of the Trinity. We shall have occasion to use both these works in our presentation, but our study has a different aim. For one thing, it tends to be rather more sympathetic to passages within Pannenberg that to Schulz and Vechtel appear to offer a deterministic picture of God and suggest a residual Hegelianism. In this regard, we refer to Pannenberg's own published defence against their criticisms, "Divine Economy and the Immanent Trinity." For another, both works are content just to study the doctrine of the Trinity outlined in *ST* chapter 5, rather than to investigate how Pannenberg develops a comprehensive trinitarian theology covering the whole sweep of the divine economy.

Within English theology the last significant book length treatment was Timothy Bradshaw's *Trinity and Ontology: A Comparative Study of the Theologies of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg,*[32] which we must also include within this fourth category. Admittedly, this is a work that dedicates roughly equal attention to the trinitarian theologies of Barth and Pannenberg, but it is nonetheless a detailed analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian thought. The chief drawback to using Bradshaw's work as a guide to Pannenberg's trinitarian thought is that it predates the publication of *ST,* written as it is in the mid-1980's.[33]

There presently exists, therefore, no book length treatment of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology in English that is up to date.

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[28] In *IJST* 6/3 (July 2004), pp.252-269.
[29] In H. L. Ollig et al (eds.) *Reflektierter Glaube* (Frankfurt: Haensel-Hohenbach, 1999), pp.131-149.
[30] (St. Ottilien: EOZ Verlag Erzabtei, 1997).
[31] (Frankfurt: Knecht, 2001).
[32] (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).
[33] This book was the result of Bradshaw's doctoral research, which was first published under the same title by Rutherford House Books in 1988, and whose writing predates the publication of *ST* volume 1

2. *A particular reading of Pannenberg's theology*

In addition to providing a fuller understanding of Pannenberg's theology, we also offer a particular interpretation of it. What we have to say about his trinitarian theology arises from definite understandings of the general thrust of Pannenberg's theology and its relation to other streams of contemporary thought. In particular, we note two areas in which our study hopes to offer some general guidelines to interpreting Pannenberg's work. These are, firstly, the question of the organising centre of Pannenberg's theology, and second, the issue of Pannenberg's indebtedness to idealist thought, especially Hegel.

Already within secondary literature on Pannenberg's theology there has been debate on its key theme or topic. The risk of such a strategy is to put the complex thought of an intricate and nuanced thinker into the straightjacket of a rather rigid concept or narrow agenda, and readers of Pannenberg can be grateful to Shults for highlighting false trails of commentators' attempts to find the lynch-pin of his thought.[34] Notwithstanding such reservations, however, attempts to delineate something like an organising centre to Pannenberg's thought can help the reader penetrate into the heart of his theological project and offer insight into his deepest concerns.

The key theme or concern at the centre of Pannenberg's theology, in our view, is the doctrine of God. One should see Pannenberg's whole *ST* as a detailed and articulate statement of the centrality of God, the Christian God, for understanding the world, our place in it and its salvation in the work of Jesus Christ. For as he writes in the first volume, 'God is the one all-embracing theme of theology as also of faith. Neither has any other theme beside him' (1.59).

The centrality of God is a point that Pannenberg makes in many places, but it is made most pithily in *IST*. 'In theology,' he writes,

> 'the concept of God can never be simply one issue among others. It is the central issue, around which everything else is organized. If you take away that one issue nothing would be left to justify the continuation of that special effort that we call "theology."'

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and the discussion of the Trinity therein. The 1992 work shows no substantial alteration to the 1988 publication.

[34] F. LeRon Shults *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), see especially introduction and chapter 1.

It was central for the message of Jesus which otherwise 'might at best be remembered as a somewhat eccentric contribution to the cultural history of mankind. But without the reality of God, Jesus' teaching would be deprived of its core.' The same applies to the church, for 'though churches might continue as institutions that offer cheap substitutes for psychotherapy and occasions for moralistic advocacy and exhortation ***.' And this is no less true for theology. Pannenberg continues:

> The reality of God is crucial if one is serious in talking about a specific calling of the church as well as of a special task assigned to theology. Therefore, the concept of God cannot be exchanged for other concepts. It needs interpretation, but it is not a metaphor for something else, nor a symbol to express the changing desires of our human hearts, though certainly an entire dimension of what it means to be human falls into oblivion where the word "God" disappears.[35]

That theology needs to take up this task can be seen, Pannenberg argues, by viewing the situation of contemporary society and the contemporary church. In society there has been increasing scepticism about both the worth or meaning of the term "God". In Pannenberg's opinion,

> 'the word "God" is not taken for granted, or if so, it is taken as a token of religious language, valid only within the enclave of religious discourse. The word is not self-evident as pointing to the ultimate reality that embraces, governs, judges, and explains everything else. The spirit of secularism keeps in suspense whether there is any such ultimate reality.'[36]

And in the church, too, there is a 'more serious problem.' For,

> 'many in the clergy seem to feel insecure about the reality of God, and consequently they are even more desperate to adapt their message to the changing mood of the time...Within the setting of a secularist culture it is even more important than in a religiously informed culture to urge the ultimate reality of God upon the hearts and minds of the people, and there are no other agents to do it than the preacher and the theologian.'[37]

This is the challenge for the contemporary Western church as it lives in and against the surrounding culture.

> 'To insist upon the ultimate reality of God and its rightful claims upon our lives is to compensate for the basic deficiency in secular culture rather than to comply

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[35] pp.21-22.
[36] p.22.

> with its spirit....Thus the theologian is required to restate the doctrine of God in terms of rational argument.'[38]

What we see in *ST*, we contend, is an example of a theologian restating the doctrine of God in terms of rational argument, speaking to and for the church in a society that senses God is absent.

This restatement of the doctrine of God requires some hard thinking in the face of a number of difficulties. Pannenberg mentions two in *IST*. The one is that 'the concept of God which was developed by medieval and early modern theology in close contact with classical metaphysics is in need of rather radical revision.' And the other is that 'the theological effort at reconstructing the Christian doctrine of God has to meet is the desolate state of metaphysics in modern philosophy.'[39] Given such concerns, we should not be surprised by the importance of philosophical treatments of the concept of God for Pannenberg's theology, or by his efforts to offer some initial concepts or criteria for the truthfulness of any God-talk, as he seems to offer in the early chapters of *ST*. This is part of his prescription for the spiritual ills of modern Western society, but it is also suffering from neglect by theologians within that society. In modern theology (unlike earlier generations), he thinks, such rigorous conceptual argument 'has often been disregarded or even openly dismissed, to the detriment of the intellectual seriousness of the theological argument.'[40]

Our topic here, Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity, is part of 'a revised doctrine of God,'[41] which he offers to modern Western society and to the modern Western church. So if, as we claim, the doctrine of God lies at the very centre of Pannenberg's theological enterprise, his doctrine of the Trinity is therefore to be accorded a place of high importance. It does not have the highest importance, since the doctrine of the Trinity is part of Pannenberg's doctrine of God and does not exhaust it, so there does exist the risk of exaggerating its significance. Another book would be required to deal with that topic. Nevertheless, as the Trinity occupies a pivotal and central position within this revised doctrine of God, the subject of our study here is nonetheless very important in getting to the heart of Pannenberg's theology.

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[37] p.22.
[38] pp.22-23.
[39] p.22.
[40] pp.24-25.
[41] p.25.

To risk offering an over-simplification, we may say that the basic message of *ST* is that the trinitarian God is the true God. There are at least two ways in which this is so. Firstly, the trinitarian God is the true God, since from His revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ we know that the one God is the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, and it is as such that He is the power that determines the world and everything in it. Second, the trinitarian God is the true God, since 'only the doctrine of the Trinity could basically clarify the question of the union and tension between transcendence and immanence' (1.415). According to Pannenberg, 'imagining God as a *merely* transcendent being *also* mistakes him for a finite reality.' If He is really to be the infinite God, He cannot be understood as the opposite of finitude, and thus be imprisoned in his transcendence. Rather, he says, 'the reality of God is not simply set over against the finite, but at the same time contains it in itself."[42] It might be difficult to resolve this issue of God's infinity with a divine monad, but, 'The doctrine of the Trinity made it possible...to link the transcendence of the Father in heaven with his presence in believers through the Son and Spirit' (1.415).

Since the centrality of God is, in our view, the organising centre of Pannenberg's theology, in his eyes alternative theologies fail at this point. What sets the agenda for them – or at least, there is the risk of this – is ultimately not God, but some human conception. For this reason Pannenberg cannot follow some dominant lines of modern thought. An important instance for his doctrine of God is his increasing distance from German Idealism. He writes,

> 'It is only since the early 1980s that the limitations of Kant's critique became clear in my understanding. At the same time, while writing my anthropology book, I became more confident that the principle of self-conscious subjectivity need not be accepted as the final basis of every discussion of metaphysics, as was the case in the entire tradition of German idealism' ***.

Even on the philosophical level, then, German idealism is not the only matrix within which to understand Pannenberg's thought.[43]

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[42] *GST*2, p.140.

[43] This may well have a lot to do with the reading of Descartes that he has held in recent years, which is also a possible candidate for the developments in Pannenberg's theology that has enabled his more sustained focus on the doctrine of God. Following some French interpreters, Pannenberg understands Descartes' approach not as the basing of all certainty on the human ego, but on the Infinite without which we cannot conceive anything finite. Such an interpretation fits with Pannenberg's own concern that divine reality, i.e. the Infinite, should be at the centre of our view of the world rather than human

A similar emphasis is evident not just in his philosophical judgements, but in his theological judgments too. Insofar as they fail to put God in the centre, this is the problem with many modern treatments of Christian doctrine which make religion, and therefore subjective belief, the basis of dogmatics.[44] 'Then,' he writes 'it could become a question whether one would ever arrive at a concept of God as [the] proper subject of theology.'[45] It is also the problem with Barth, since in his case 'the foundation of theology is still anthropocentric, because it is based on a subjective decision.'[46] It is the problem too with German idealism's conceptions of the Trinity, including Hegel's, that view the Trinity after the model of the human consciousness.[47] That Pannenberg can find fault here with Hegel takes us to our next point.

We now take up the second general guideline to Pannenberg interpretation. This study will tend to lay less emphasis on the influence of philosophical idealism on Pannenberg's thought. In Bradshaw's work, for instance, German philosophical idealism is said to be the important context for understanding Pannenberg's trinitarian thought, as it is for Barth's also. For Bradshaw, 'such areas of similarity' between Pannenberg and Barth 'stem from a common influence exercised by the idealist tradition.'[48] 'There is no doubt,' he writes, 'that Pannenberg's theology does not belong to the family of Process theology, but to the subtler school of absolute idealism.'[49]

In particular Pannenberg has often been termed a Hegelian. Again we cite Bradshaw, who states 'Pannenberg claims to renew Hegel's thought,'[50] a remark whose context in *Trinity and Ontology* would seem to be a general description of his theological programme. And again we seek to question the ease with which Pannenberg's interpreters apply this epithet. Throughout the following exposition we shall come across

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consciousness. This interpretation of Descartes has been outlined in a number of works dating from the mid-1980's, e.g., *MIG*, ch. 2 "The Problem of the Absolute" pp.22-42, *ST* 1.83ff, 113ff, 350ff, and *Theologie und Philosophie: Ihr Verhaeltnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996) (Hereafter "*TuP*"), pp.142-156. A more extended reading of Descartes along these lines can be found in P. Clayton *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp.51-144.

[44] See 1.26-48.

[45] "Theology examines its status and methodology", unpublished paper., p.1.

[46] *ibid.*, p.2. This same problem afflicts Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in Pannenberg's view. See 1.296 and *Problemgeschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997), pp.176-204.

[47] 1.294ff.

[48] p.1.

[49] p.343.

[50] p.337.

elements of Pannenberg's theology that either adopt some of Hegel's ideas or at least make significant reference to them. We shall also come across aspects of Pannenberg's thinking which have been termed "Hegelian" inaccurately. Given the frequency with which this claim is made, we should devote some detailed attention to the validity of this epithet when used of Pannenberg's theology, especially his trinitarian thought.

As a preliminary point, we should remember from earlier remarks that Pannenberg says he became increasingly aware that 'the entire tradition of German idealism' was wrong to posit self-conscious subjectivity as the foundation of all metaphysical schemes. This, at the very least, should arouse suspicion about calling Pannenberg either an 'idealist' or a 'Hegelian.' Yet we should be more than merely suspicious about the frequency of this classification of Pannenberg's theology.

Much of Pannenberg's theological development took place in Heidelberg, where from the years 1950 to 1958 he completed both his doctorate and Habilitationsschrift, and gave lectures. In discussing this period in an autobiographical piece, Pannenberg deals directly with the idea that he is a Hegelian. This is worth quoting in full:

> 'My lecture courses at Heidelberg were repeatedly devoted to the history of medieval theology and I could easily have continued in that particular field for the rest of my life. But I also had to teach courses concerned with the Lutheran Reformation and, especially, with the modern history of Protestant theology. It was *in this connection* that I came to appreciate the importance of Hegel's thought in the development of modern theology, but mainly as a challenge to theology. *I never became a Hegelian*, but I decided that theology has to be developed on at least the same level of sophistication as Hegel's philosophy and *for that purpose* I studied his writings carefully and repeatedly. Because my publications also gave evidence of this, the tenacious prejudice of my alleged Hegelianism developed, and it effectively concealed the more important philosophical roots of my thought.'[51]

So, Pannenberg is not a Hegelian. His reading of Hegel is not foundational since his appreciation of Hegel arose only when he came to realise his importance for a proper conception of modern Protestant theology. His interest in Hegel is not consuming, since he sees it not as the lifeline for theology but as a challenge to it. And he sees descriptions

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[51] p.16, emphasis added.

of his theology as Hegelian as guilty of a 'tenacious prejudice' that prevents a true appreciation of the content and roots of his theology.

It is worth contrasting this remark with some important lines of Pannenberg interpretation, which consider him in predominantly, or at least misleadingly, Hegelian terms. Among the numerous examples of interpreters who understand Pannenberg along these lines, we note two that represent both the earliest and most recent in the secondary literature.

The first example is Allan Galloway, someone who would become a leading advocate and interpreter of Pannenberg's thought in the English-speaking world, in particular his 'The New Hegelians."[52] In this review article Galloway sets up the following framework. On the one hand there is 20th century theology, represented by Barth and Bultmann, which divorces Christianity from both history and reason; and on the other there is 19th century theology, which in the spirit of Hegel understood the Christian religion in historical and rational terms. The 'only point of common ground' shared by Barthians and Bultmannians, Galloway claims, 'was the conviction that the whole of nineteenth century theology from Hegel onwards was an elaborate waste of time and energy.'[53] And once modern theology is understood in these terms, the significance of Pannenberg and Moltmann, he says, is that 'both take this unwanted child of faith unhesitatingly into the bosom of their theology.'[54] After a brief summary of one of Pannenberg's works, in which he cites no references to support this supposed retrieval of Hegel, Galloway writes of Pannenberg:

> 'This is essentially a re-establishment of the Hegelian marriage of theology, philosophy and universal history – but with a difference! The difference is intended to accommodate the individual, the contingent and the open future in a way that Hegel failed to achieve.'[55]

Galloway is right to note Pannenberg's criticism that Hegel left insufficient room for contingency within his thought. But to interpret his work in such exclusively Hegelian terms gives a one-sided picture of Pannenberg's theology. One might note the relative paucity of references to Hegel within Pannenberg's works, even in the works published by the time of Galloway's article, since thinkers such as Bultmann, von Rad, Heidegger,

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[52] *Religious Studies* 8 (1972), pp.367-371.
[53] p.367.
[54] p.369.

Dilthey and Gadamer are cited more often. One might also note the fact that Pannenberg criticises, even in his early work, more than just Hegel's insufficient account of contingency.[56] And, of course, the later autobiographical remarks suggest that more careful reading would have recommended a different matrix for understanding Pannenberg.

At least from the time of Galloway's article the tendency of scholars to appeal to Pannenberg's reliance on Hegel has often been assumed rather than considered, alleged rather than demonstrated. And this has continued even after Pannenberg's cautionary remarks. We see this in our other example.

The second example is Samuel Powell, whose book *The Trinity in Modern German Thought*[57] offers one of the more careful interpretations of Pannenberg's thought, and whose charge of Hegelianism among the most sophisticated. Yet, as with Galloway, Hegelian idealism is the suggested matrix for understanding Pannenberg, at least in the matter of trinitarian thought that is Powell's concern. He states that, as with Moltmann and Barth, 'Although not often mentioned by [him], Hegel is in many ways the unacknowledged guide to [Pannenberg's] thought.'[58]

Powell mentions two points, at which Pannenberg is indebted to Hegel, namely 'his understanding of personhood as an intensely relational phenomenon' and 'his emphasis on the historicity of God's being.' Unfortunately Powell provides no references to back up the claim, but the care with which he lays the charge shows more attentive reading of Pannenberg than do either Galloway or most others who consider Pannenberg to be Hegelian.

Powell is certainly correct to point to the importance of Hegel for Pannenberg's understanding of personhood. It is in the 1964 work, *JGM*, that the influence of Hegel is most apparent. 'Hegel,' Pannenberg writes, 'was the first to so elaborate the concept of "person" in such a way that God's unity becomes understandable precisely from the reciprocity of the divine persons.' He continues:

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[55] p.371.

[56] See, for instance 'Analogy and Doxology' in *Basic Questions in Theology* vol. 1 (London: SCM, 1970), pp.220ff for another example of Pannenberg correcting Hegel's thought. '[T]he fundamental doxological feature that belongs to all speech about God can also be indicated by referring to its character as an act of mediation. The concept of mediation points to an understanding of God which does not allow him to be comprehended in concepts, as in the case of Hegel's God, but which instead, like the Kantian doctrine of analogy, remains attentive to the infinite sublimity of God' (p.221).

[57] (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

> 'Through [his] profound thought that the essence of the person is to exist in self-dedication to another person, Hegel understood the unity in the Trinity as the unity of reciprocal self-dedication...[This idea] constituted the high point up to now of the conceptual clarification of the doctrine of the Trinity with respect to the relation between unity and threeness.'[59]

Insofar as it expresses Pannenberg's agreement with Hegel on this point, then, he can rightly be called 'Hegelian.'

Regarding the historicity of God's being, however, the reliance on Hegel is more ambivalent. The first substantial contribution on this topic by Pannenberg – and the seminal one – was *RaH,* in which he criticised what he considered the unhistorical conceptions held by the followers of Barth and Bultmann. In that work he refers to Hegel at three points, none of which is pivotal for Pannenberg's presentation. At one point he suggests that 'the strictly defined concept of revelation as the self-revelation of the absolute' was first developed by Hegel.[60] At another, Pannenberg argues that a notion of history that demonstrates the deity of God should be broadened to include the totality of events. Pointing out the peculiarity of contemporary theological views, he writes, 'This concept of history determined the Western philosophy of history up to the time of Hegel and Marx,' and then takes a sentence each to explain briefly how the different approaches of both thinkers.[61] Third, Pannenberg notes that the idea of history as the totality of God's revelation, which he is advocating, was articulated in Schleiermacher's fifth discourse on religion.[62] Then, Pannenberg says, 'Hegel gave systematic formulation to the concept of universal history as an indirect revelation of God in connection with his explication of the concept of self-revelation.'[63] He goes on to note the similar contribution of Schelling, and then how the reaction against Hegel initiated by Strauss rested on a misunderstanding of Hegel's position. Indeed, on this matter, Pannenberg has cause to correct Hegel in *RaH.*[64]

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[58] *ibid.*, p.193.
[59] *JGM*, p.197
[60] pp.4-5.
[61] p.133.
[62] F. D. Schleiermacher *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (tr. R. Crouter) (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp.95-124.
[63] pp.16-17.
[64] On p.18 Pannenberg writes. 'If history is the totality of revelation, then there is further progress that must be made beyond Jesus Christ...In Hegel this departure was understood only as one of comprehending the revelation that came about in Jesus. But it also appears necessary to reckon with a development in the facts themselves.' See also p.152 on Hegel's view of the incarnation.

It is, we think, too much to call Hegel the 'unacknowledged guide' to Pannenberg's trinitarian thought. Not only is it the case that – with the notable exception of the critique of Hegelian derivation of the divine threeness from the idea of a unitary subject – Pannenberg's account of the trinitarian God in *ST* can be understood perfectly well without any knowledge of Hegel. Also, Pannenberg has not been so silent as Powell suggests on the extent of Hegel's influence on his thought, as the above-mentioned autobiographical essay bears witness. Whereas Powell seems justified in calling Pannenberg's understanding of personhood a Hegelian influence, this is not the case with the historicity of God's being. Moreover, Powell's emphasis on Pannenberg's Hegelianism is not counterbalanced by references to other philosophical or theological motivations to his trinitarian theology. For, when one reads what Pannenberg says about his own theological development the attribution to Pannenberg of Hegelianism, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, whether explicit or implicit, becomes problematic.

There exists a fairly large body of literature that deals with the relationship of Pannenberg and Hegel, especially the extent of the dependence of the former on the latter.[65] This does provide some helpful insights to Pannenberg's thought, but often the

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Again, we cite an extended account of Pannenberg's own words, which offer further confirmation to our reading: 'In a way that is materially mistaken [*RaH*] has been rated as theological Hegelianism. Many statements in the Introduction perhaps gave rise to this misunderstanding, but materially the concern was to solve the difficulties in Rothe's formulation of revelation as manifestation and in Rothe's formulation of revelation as manifestation and inspiration by returning to the idealistic thesis of all history as the revelation of God, but in such a way that the idealistic view of history undergoes decisive correction by the thought of the anticipation of the totality of history in the light of its end as we find this in the eschatological thrust of the teaching and work of Jesus' (1.228-229).

[65] See for instance M. Pagano *Storia ed escatologia nel pensiero di W. Pannenberg* (Milan: Mursia, 1973), pp.188-194; P. Eicher *Offenbarung. Prinzip neuzeitlicher Theologie* (Munich, 1977), pp.438f; M. Fraijo *El sentido de la historia. Introduccion al pensamiento de W. Pannenberg* (Madrid: Christiandad, 1986), pp.102-122; P. Clayton "Anticipation and Theological Method" in C. E. Braaten and P. Clayton (eds.) *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Responses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), pp.132ff, 138f; S. Greiner *Die Theologie Pannenbergs* (Wuerzburg: Echter, 1988), pp.200-203; K. Koch *Der Gott der Geschichte. Theologie bei Wolfhart Pannenberg als Paradigma einer Philosophischen Theologie in oekumenischer Perspektive* (Mainz: M. Gruenewald, 1988), pp 103ff; and E. Juengel "Verweigertes Geheimnis? Bemerkungen zu einer evangelischen Sonderlehre" in J. Rohls and G. Wenz (eds.) *Vernunft des Glaubens* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1988), pp.488-494. We add to this list the recent article of Anselm Min "The Dialectic of divine Love: Pannenberg's Hegelian Trinitarianism". Pannenberg's, Min states, is a 'Hegelian dialectical approach' (p.252), and his application of the Hegelian dialectic results in a attempt to describe the triune God that is 'deeply flawed' (p.253). Min demonstrates a broad and deep knowledge of the argument of *ST* chapter 6, and in this he offers an account that is much more informative than the remarks of Galloway. Min notes nine innovations in Pannenberg's theology, all of which are "Hegelian." Unfortunately, other than some very general remarks on 'Hegel's constitutive notion of mediation and relation' (p.253), Min offers no evidence to demonstrate that it is either Hegel, or Hegelian ideas, that Pannenberg is relying on here. We wonder whether what he calls 'the assumptions of the Hegelian dialectic on which Pannenberg's trinitarian theology is based' (p.261) are not Min's own assumptions.

impression is created that this influence is somehow more important and more enlightening than any others. In our opinion it is no coincidence that the most illuminating of the secondary works on Pannenberg's theology tend not to make so much of the Hegelian elements, even to downplay them.[66] Furthermore, we suggest that there are potentially more fruitful avenues of enquiry into Pannenberg's intellectual context and inheritance. In particular, one could take up Pannenberg's own suggestion and investigate how far Pannenberg's theology is influenced by the tradition of German Protestant dogmatics of the modern period, especially in its Lutheran form. It would be interesting to discover how far the debates in *ST* and his other works are aimed at discussions surrounding the work of recent Lutheran theologians such as Bultmann and Ebeling, and even further back to Ritschl and von Harnack. Epithets that help us get to heart of Pannenberg's theological project are more likely to be ones such as "German" and "Lutheran" than "Hegelian".

As for the epithet "Hegelian" when used of Pannenberg, it is a label to which it is difficult to give significant substance. It is useful when made about specific points where Pannenberg takes up particular ideas or concepts directly from Hegel. As a general description of Pannenberg's theology it is problematic both exegetically and polemically. It is problematic exegetically, because analysis both of his intellectual biography and of his published work will not provide corroboration. All three of our examples do not pay attention to his own autobiographical remarks and state a reliance on Hegel beyond what the relevant texts will allow. And it is problematic polemically because an assessment – whether positive or (usually) negative – of Hegel's philosophy is first assumed, and Pannenberg's own theology is then defended or (usually) condemned by association with the German idealism on which it allegedly depends. Our first two examples especially have their own purposes for citing this alleged Hegelianism, which is based more on their opinion of Hegel than on what Pannenberg says. For Galloway it signifies a welcome return to the union of theology with reason and history. For Min it means a flawed understanding of God as determined by finitude. 'The basic problem with Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology as a whole,' he writes, is

> 'its underlying Hegelian philosophical model of the dialectic of self-manifestation itself,' which 'is taken from the world of finite experience and finite being where

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[66] Among such interpreters we note F. LeRon Shults, Stanley Grenz and Svein Rise.

> indeed the essence of a thing, necessarily composite and potential, *has to* manifest itself externally in an essentially interdependent world.[67]

At best, we believe, the breadth of the claim is inversely proportional to how enlightening it is. And given that Pannenberg himself says he 'never became a Hegelian' our study will acknowledge Hegelian influence when evidence in the text may be found, but will not assume that he is one, even sub-consciously so.

3. The practice of trinitarian theology

The third and final way that this study seeks to contribute to contemporary systematic theology is in its application of the doctrine of the Trinity to the practice of theology. In the recent interest in the doctrine of the Trinity relatively little attention has been paid to this matter. Yet it is important, and if a theology is heralded as 'the most trinitarian I' – or any else – 'know of', then it must be trinitarian in this respect too.

It is this matter in particular, as we shall see, where we believe Pannenberg's trinitarian ambitions fail to be realised. Pannenberg has a number of commitments about the task of theology in modernity and its responsibility to adopt a position of open intellectual impartiality in its discussion of the truth of Christianity. Whatever the merit of these concerns, they nevertheless are in tension with Pannenberg's stated desire to put the trinitarian God at the centre of his theological project. Indeed, we suggest there is a fundamental incompatibility between, on the one hand, the commitment to an open and impartial account of God in the modern age, and, on the other, the commitment to rigorous application of the triune God of Jesus Christ to all parts of Christian thought.

There will be hints of this issue throughout the presentation of Pannenberg's trinitarian account of Christian doctrine, but it will be addressed directly and at length only in Part Two. The trinitarian God of Jesus Christ is known in a trinitarian way, so there has to be a trinitarian account not just of the content of revelation, but also of the reception of revelation. Knowledge of God, even if it is enjoyed by the theologian, is the work of the triune God alone, and so must be conceived as a spiritual matter through and through. It is a knowledge that is not accessible without the sanctification of the Spirit who bestows it, and so it requires humility. It is a divine reality that is only conferred by

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[67] Min p.268.

divine grace, and so it requires prayer. And it is insight into what is in itself invisible and unapproachable for us humans, and so it requires faith.

The lack of trinitarian rigour on this topic in Pannenberg's theology is not an isolated matter. It also affects the treatment of several doctrines within *ST*, and so its effects can be seen throughout Pannenberg's presentation. These doctrines include those of the person of Christ, revelation and faith as well as how one understands both the tasks and methods of theology and the work of the Spirit. Sometimes when Pannenberg is addressing these topics trinitarian language and conceptuality is employed, but in ways which are questionable. Often it is on these matters that trinitarian language and conceptuality is not employed at all, and so it is here that Pannenberg's claim to write the most trinitarian of theologies looks at its least convincing.

Conclusions such as these will presuppose that we know both what Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity is and how it affects the rest of his theology. Our second question – to what extent has Pannenberg's systematic theology has been successful in realising his trinitarian ambitions? – can only be answered once we have tackled the first question – what does Pannenberg mean by his theology being thoroughly trinitarian? So it is to this first question that we now turn.

PART ONE:

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

Chapter One

PANNENBERG'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

1. **The doctrine of the trinitarian God must be rooted in God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ, according to which the Father is the loving Creator God of Israel and Lord of the eschatological kingdom, the Son is the one who distinguishes Himself in loving obedience from the Father to establish the kingdom, and the Spirit is bond of love between Father and Son that enables their reciprocal fellowship.**

'To find a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity', Pannenberg says, 'we must begin with the way in which Father, Son and Spirit come on the scene and relate to one another in the event of revelation' (1.299). Granted that he believes all God-talk by necessity presupposes some idea of God, Pannenberg explicitly adopts a starting point in revelation rather than one of empirical or rational self-evidence.[1] Moreover, in *ST* chapter 5, as we shall see, Pannenberg is critical of approaches that he considers are built on the sand of pre-trinitarian ideas of God or lack foundation in the Christ-event. It is exegesis of the biblical material that starts off his discussion and forms the basic frame of reference for what is said later on, and it is to be the rational explication of *this* God, the God of Jesus Christ that is the foundation and frame of reference for what Pannenberg considers a properly developed doctrine of the Trinity.

This is the case for all three persons of the Trinity, whom we shall consider in turn. The *Father* is the God whose coming kingdom Jesus proclaimed and identified Himself with, so that 'the differentiation of God as Father from his own person,' Pannenberg writes, 'is...constitutive for Jesus' message and attitude' (1.263). Primarily the Father Jesus proclaimed is Israel's God, the Creator God of care and compassion, who is bringing in His kingdom. He is 'none other than the God of Jewish faith according to the witness of the OT'

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[1] Shults has rightly regarded Pannenberg's method as distinct from that of foundationalism, at least in its classical form. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus a prime instance of how far off the mark is the classification of Pannenberg as a classical foundationalist, for it is revelation, not self-evident propositions that provide the basis for our understanding of the trinitarian God.

and it is He, rather than the divine essence or Trinity as such, who is the prime referent of the word "God" in both testaments.[2] And on 1.259 Pannenberg notes many scriptural references from Jesus' ministry demonstrating that 'God shows himself to be Father by caring for his creatures.' And this generous concern is evident in His answering prayer, in particular the Paternoster with its focus on the coming of His kingdom.

That this Father, the loving, coming, Creator God of Israel is an essential ingredient in understanding Jesus leads Pannenberg to distance himself from other assessments of talk of God as Father as either culturally inappropriate or dispensable. It is not culturally inappropriate, Pannenberg believes, since while noting that the 'description of God as Father in the prophecy of Israel must undoubtedly be related to the patriarchal constitution of the Israelite family,' he denies it is a projection of human gender in either Old or New Testament. He writes,

> 'The aspect of fatherly care in particular is taken over in what the OT has to say about God's fatherly concern for Israel. The sexual definition of the father's role plays no part' (1.261).

Hence Pannenberg both denies theories such as Freud's interpretation of Judaeo-Christian religion in terms of the Oedipus complex,[3] and rejects proposals to revise the concept of God as Father in the light of changes in gender roles and family structure. As for the latter, Pannenberg writes:

> 'Such a demand would be justified only if the idea of God were simply a reflection of the prevailing social relationships. This is a view which ultimately presupposes a projection theory of ideas of God after the manner of Feuerbach.'

Yet the biblical understanding of God 'confronts the changing concept of fatherhood as a norm' (1.262).

And it is not dispensable, which Pannenberg believes is the view of the "death of God" theologian Herbert Braun. For Braun 'the term "God" is simply "an expression for the radical obedience and the radical grace" of conversion, an expression for the authority of Jesus'

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[2] Here Pannenberg is relying on Rahner's "'Gott' als erste trinitarische Person im NT," *ZKT 66* (1942), pp.71-88.

[3] Pannenberg is here taking issue with the argument of S. Freud *Moses and Monotheism* (London: Hogarth, 1939).

(1.263).[4] Yet, Pannenberg states, Jesus expressly differentiated God the Father from himself, as shown in the Lord's prayer, and love for God is not just an expression for love of neighbour, but is its basis.

The *Son* is the one who lovingly submits to the Father, and, as Jesus of Nazareth, not only is both the herald and the presence of the divine kingdom, but brings it to fulfilment by his life, death and resurrection. 'Jesus,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'is the Son inasmuch as it is in his message of the nearness of the royal rule of the Father, his subjection to the Father's will, and especially the function of his sending as a revelation of the love of God, that this God may be known as Father' (1.264).

This submission is the self-distinction from the Father, from whom He differentiates Himself as the one God, to whom he prays, and whose obedience is His all-consuming concern.

But it is more than this, since it is precisely by this absolute submission to the Father and the kingdom, whose establishment is His commission, that He has His majesty as the Son. 'From the primacy of the divine lordship he claimed for his message an authority which far surpasses all human authority' (1.263-264), since it was with and in Him that that the kingdom was coming. And with this Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. For since Jesus

> 'proclaimed that the Father's kingdom is not only imminent but also dawning in his own work, no room is left for any future talk about God which will replace his. The heavenly Father whom he proclaimed is thus so closely related to Jesus' own coming and work that it is *by this* that God is identified as Father' (1.264).

It was, Pannenberg says, 'by his resurrection from the dead' that 'Jesus was instituted into the dignity of divine sonship.' And this is the epistemological basis for seeing Jesus as the Son of the Father God whose kingdom he proclaimed. For, as Pannenberg adds,

> 'As the resurrection of Jesus was seen as a divine confirmation of the claim implied in his earthly ministry, Jesus in the light of Easter had to appear as the Son of the Father whom he proclaimed' (1.264).

How this is so we shall examine in more detail in later chapters, especially the one devoted to christology. Yet here we should at least note that from this vindication in His raising from

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[4] Citing H. Braun *Jesus der Mann aus Nazareth und seine Zeit*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Kreuz Verlag Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 160-61.

the dead Jesus is seen as always having been the Son, the one eternally identified with the Father (and so really pre-existent) and to be addressed as "Lord" (and so truly divine).[5]

As for the *Spirit*, unlike theologies which make the church's experience the basis for theological reflection on the third divine person, it is the event of revelation in Christ's first coming that is primary. It is His involvement 'in God's presence in the work of Jesus and in the fellowship of the Son with the Father' that 'is the basis of the fact that the Christian understanding of God found its developed and definitive form in the doctrine of the Trinity and not in a biunity of the Father and the Son' (1.268). And unlike theologies which make the church's experience the basis for theological reflection on the third divine person, it is the event of revelation in Christ's first coming that is primary. Though scripture does point to the experience of the Spirit's working within the church,

> 'the source of the specific mode of the Spirit's presence in the church is to be sought...in his function of mediating the fellowship of the Son with the Father. If the Spirit were not constitutive for the fellowship of the Son with the Father, the Christian doctrine of the deity of the Spirit would be a purely external addition to the confession of the relation of the Son to the deity of the Father' (1.268).

It is this foundation of trinitarian dogma on the historical revelation in Jesus Christ that Pannenberg believes is, and always has been, its original and normative basis. Against other explanations of the rise of the early church's doctrine of the Trinity, he believes the importance of either Hellenistic philosophy or the baptismal formula to be exaggerated. 'We are not,' he writes,

> 'to seek the setting of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity primarily in baptism, but in catechizing, i.e., in the development of the church's teaching. The starting point for this teaching is not simply in a three-membered formula but in all that the NT has to say about the relation of the Son to the Father on the one side and to the Spirit on the other' (1.268-269).

God's historical revelation in Christ was, then, always the most important datum for the early church's discussions on the Trinity, rather than traditions, philosophical assumptions, creeds or the baptismal formula. Indeed, for Pannenberg, trinitarian theology has floundered when

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[5] See 1.266ff.

this basis in revelation has been marginalised and it has relied on the sand of bare traditional formulae. Hence in his judgement,

> 'The Socinian Crellius was fully justified in arguing that nowhere in Scripture does the term Father refer to the whole Trinity, and Calov's arguments against him sound very artificial to modern readers and lack cogency unless one takes into account a thesis which is read into scripture, namely, that of the indivisibility of the outward works of the Trinity. Might it not be that this rule itself stands in need of revision?' (1.326).

To be trinitarian is to follow the path of the 4th century rather than the 17th and to be rooted in the sole criterion of the Christ event.

2. **A truly trinitarian theology needs to be liberated from the pre-trinitarian conceptions of God's unity that have afflicted theology since the time of the Cappadocian Fathers, in particular the trinitarian analogies after the likeness of the individual subject and the derivation of God's trinity from His unity.**

It was, Pannenberg says in the foreword to *ST*, 'only reluctantly' that he concluded that he could not 'concentrate solely on the essential coherence of the dogmatic themes, leaving to one side the confusing profusion of historical questions' (1.x). For,

> 'Reflection upon the historical place of dogmatic concepts and the related identifying and relative weighting of the essential themes of Christian doctrine are indispensable to an impartial judgment of their fitness and scope in expressing the universal significance of the history and person of Jesus Christ' (1.xi)

A key example of how such a procedure affects his presentation of trinitarian themes is the thesis here, as Pannenberg believes a proper contemporary articulation of the Christian God requires a revision – both in terms of examining again and in terms of alteration – of the standard accounts of the content and development of trinitarian doctrine in the history of theology.

Our way in will be some remarks on the most important event in that history, the 4th century debates surrounding the composition of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan creed of 381:

> 'There can be no doubt as to the monotheistic intention of the Cappadocians or of pre-Nicene theology. Only with reservations, however, can we say that their line of thinking did justice to their intention. There are thus material reasons why later theology saw that it had to engage in new and more extensive investigations at this point' (1.280).

As we shall see, Pannenberg believes that from the time of the Cappadocian Fathers there has been a conceptual pull in mainstream theology stifling a fully trinitarian understanding of the Christian God due to reliance on unitarian conceptuality.

Pannenberg offers prolonged and involved discussion of how the theological tradition has related the doctrine of the trinity to that of the one God, which in another context could be the matter of greater attention. Here we shall note only three points salient for our topic: Nicene and pre-Nicene views of the divine unity; the derivation of the Trinity from the unity; and the structure of the Christian doctrine of God.

Let us deal first with the Nicene and pre-Nicene understandings of the divine unity. According to Pannenberg, although the NT statements are the foundation for the trinitarianism of the early church, they lack clarity on the interrelations of the three, whether it be a definition of the relation of the Son to the Father, the differentiation of the Spirit from both Father and Son, or how the deity of Kyrios and Spirit is compatible with monotheistic belief in the unity of God.[6] Various strategies were adopted by subsequent theology to resolve these matters, with differing success. Rightly, Pannenberg believes, the church eventually rejected both the hypostatic distinction of Father, Son and Spirit on the basis of different spheres of operation, as in Origen,[7] and the ontological subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father, as in the Monarchians. Instead, 'Athanasius and the Cappadocians emphasized the participation of all three hypostases in all divine activity as a consequence and condition of their unity of essence' (1.271), and the three equally

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[6] See 1.269.

[7] *De principiis* 1.3.5-8 according to which 'The Father works in each and all things, the Son only in rational creatures, and the Spirit only in the saints, i.e., the church' (1.271).

participated in the divine nature and were all distinguished on the basis of immanent relations.

It is here that Pannenberg detects an ambiguity in the Nicene legacy, namely how accounts of the intra-trinitarian relations fit with the statements of equal deity. The ambiguity is not there, he believes, in Athanasius, who set the unity of the Son with the Father on the logic of the relation that is posited when we call God "Father."[8] 'The Father cannot be thought of as Father without the Son' (1.279). Yet the ambiguity does arise in the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers.

This rather long quotation expresses Pannenberg's misgivings:

> 'The idea of the Father as the source and origin of deity so fused the person of the Father and the substance of the Godhead that the divine substance is originally proper to the Father alone, being received from Him by the Son and Spirit. In distinction from Athanasius this means a relapse into subordinationism, since the idea of the mutual defining of the distinctiveness of the persons does not lead to the thought of an equally mutual ontological constitution of their personhood but is interpreted in terms of relations of origin, of which it can be said that strictly they are constitutive only for the personhood of the Son and Spirit if the Father is the source and origin of deity' (1.280).

It became more difficult, therefore, to view the trinity of the three persons as the real God *in se* and to speak of the divine essence in trinitarian terms, since the Cappadocian formulation tended, in Pannenberg's view, to fuse the divinity with the person of the Father.

A consequence of Nicaea, then, was a lack of clarity about how to conceive the unity of the triune persons. Hence, what Pannenberg terms the 'material reasons' for later theology's further investigations, whether fruitful or misguided. Our two further points are illustrations of approaches Pannenberg considers misguided that he will avoid in *ST*, namely, the derivation of the Trinity from the divine unity, and the structure of the doctrine of God.

One traditional answer to the alleged ambiguity of the Nicene legacy, Pannenberg believes, is the attempt to derive the trinity from the divine unity. This approach inevitably meets a dead-end. 'Any derivation of the plurality of trinitarian persons from the essence of

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[8] Athanasius makes this argument in, e.g., *Contra Arianos* 1.29.

the one God,' Pannenberg writes, '...leads into the problems of either modalism on the one hand or subordinationism on the other. Neither, then, can be true to the intentions of the trinitarian dogma' (1.298).

In Christian theology Pannenberg believes the chief examples of this derivation of the divine threeness from the unity are spirit or mind on the one hand, and love on the other. Both of these, the mental analogy and the love analogy, are to be found in Augustine's *De Trinitate* and have been variously adopted by subsequent theology.[9]

Key in the development of the former derivation was Anselm, who in his *Monologion* took the Trinity directly from the concept of *summa natura* as *spiritus*. 'The trinity is derived from the unity and embraced by it. The thinker and the thought, and the love which connect them, are one spirit' (1.286). Materially this approach forms a line of continuity, which Pannenberg traces through Aquinas and later in Melanchthon, Lessing, Hegel and even Barth. Yet in all its manifestations it is, he says,

> 'a psychological interpretation [which] ultimately involves a reduction to nontrinitarian monotheism. For all the differentiation in the self-consciousness, the God of this understanding is a single subject. The moments in the self-consciousness have no subjectivity of their own' (1.295).

Hence for all his praise of the trinitarian ambitions of his *Church Dogmatics*, Pannenberg feels he has to go beyond Barth, who in his view,

> 'simply derive[d] the doctrine from the formal concept of a self-revealing God. Barth did not develop the trinitarian statements out of the contents of the revelation to which scripture bears witness but out of the formal concept [of the individual revealing subject]' (1.304).

The latter derivation, namely from the concept of love, the *summum bonum*, finds its classic presentation in Richard of St. Victor and with modern dress in Eberhard Juengel, God being the one who loves of himself. In some respects Pannenberg prefers this procedure to

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[9] Note that Pannenberg has in mind, not the analogies themselves, but their abuse. He writes:
> 'the psychological analogies that [Augustine] suggested and developed in his work on the Trinity were simply meant to offer a very general way of linking the unity and trinity and thus creating some plausibility for trinitarian statements' (1.284).

Notwithstanding his judgement that there is in *De Trinitate* an undue emphasis on the divine unity at the expense of the reciprocity of the divine threeness (see 1.283-284 and 323-324), it is the use of these

the derivation from the concept of mind, since it enables a stronger profiling of the personality of the trinitarian persons and their communion, since God is the lover, the beloved and their love.[10] Yet this too relapses into a pre-trinitarian unity of the subjectivity of the one God as the one who generates the other persons. God is presented as the one who loves, rather than as love. Both analogies, then, exhibit unitarian tendencies, which cannot pay full justice to the trinitarian dogma.

The second false trail in response to the Nicene legacy is structuring the doctrine of God so that the Trinity is treated as an appendix, 'added to the existing idea of the one God as the specifically Christian revelation.' At least since the time of Protestant dogmatics this approach was often adopted due to a feeling that the OT, as well as Jesus' statement that God is spirit, justifies a prior presentation of God as the Supreme Being and also of His attributes. And in the course of dogmatic presentation 'the attributes of God were derived from the concept of God as the Supreme Being or spirit' (1.281-282). Hence this is a structural correlate to the logical deduction of God's threeness from His oneness, and reinforces a pre-trinitarian view of the unity.

For Pannenberg this is a problem affecting the West more than the East. For, even though the Trinity is treated in John of Damascus and Gregory of Nyssa[11] *after* the nature and unity of God, it is explicitly the trinitarian God who is in view right from the start, and what derivation there is does not determine the systematic treatment of the doctrine of God as much as it would later do in the Latin theology of the Middle Ages (1.289). Pannenberg's key figure in this development is Aquinas, who, he says, 'gave the structure of the doctrine of God its classical form for the age that followed.'

> Basic to this structure is the derivation of the trinity of persons from the concept of the unity of substance. The arrangement of themes gives appropriate expression to the basic structure: the existence of the one God, his substance, his substantial

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analogies from the time of medieval Western theology, which translated these illustrations into logical derivations from the concepts of mind and love, that is Pannenberg's target.

[10] See Richard's *De Trinitate* 9.2ff., and E. Juengel *God as the Mystery of the World: on the Foundation of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1983), pp331-342.. A more recent discussion of the trinitarian God along these lines, which provides an even more striking example of deducing the Trinity from the idea of a loving subject is R. Swinburne *The Christian God* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

[11] See John of Damascus *Orthodox Faith* 1.1ff., and Gregory of Nyssa *Catechetical Oration.*

> attributes, the Trinity. But without a derivation of the trinity from the unity this sequence, which puts the unity first, would make no sense' (1.288).

Yet in Pannenberg's view this basic structure left untouched by trinitarian revelation the concept of the divine unity, and the whirlwind was reaped in the post-Reformation period. In that period, building on some medieval precedents, Protestant scholastics such as Calov asserted the Trinity as a postulate of faith but did not think the matter through conceptually. This fateful omission gave rise to the strength of anti-trinitarian criticisms in Socinianism and Enlightenment theology. As Pannenberg states,

> 'the moment it appears that the one God can be better understood without rather than with the doctrine of the Trinity, the latter seems to be a superfluous addition to the concept of the one God even though it is reverently treated as a mystery of revelation. Even worse it necessarily seems to be incompatible with the divine unity. Only in this setting can biblical exegesis and historical criticism be used to destroy trinitarian teaching.'

What is needed therefore is 'a full and self-consistent presentation of the unity of the God who reveals himself in Christ' (1.291-292), a presentation less likely if the Trinity is either derived from the unity or is an appendix to an otherwise sufficient account of the one God.

It is perhaps unreasonable to expect absolute historical accuracy in a theology that is primarily systematic or dogmatic – particularly so, perhaps, if the account ranges over nearly two millennia of theology. Yet given the importance of this discussion in Pannenberg's approach in going beyond traditional treatments for being not trinitarian enough, if there are significant historical misjudgements, possible sources of wisdom within the tradition can be unnecessarily overlooked.

The two key instances Pannenberg gives of insufficient accounts of the trinitarian God (and the ones to which he devotes most time), Barth and Aquinas, do not fit his description. Barth does not, *contra* Pannenberg, base his Trinity on a pre-trinitarian concept of the revealing subject taken over from Hegel. This argument Pannenberg maintains from the time of "Die Subjektivitaet Gottes und die Trinitaetslehre: Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels"[12] (which is probably taken from Trutz Rendtorff's

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[12] *GST2*, pp.96-111.

equally off-beam argument in "Radikale Autonomie Gottes: Zum Verstaendnis der Theologie Karl Barths und ihrer Folgen"[13]), and remains operative in *ST.* As I have shown elsewhere[14] the common reading of Barth's treatment of the Trinity as either modalising or reliant on philosophical idealism will not do, for he not only shows a constant concern to state the doctrine of the Trinity according to scripture, repeating the very doctrine, not of Hegel, but of Augustine and Calvin,[15] but also explicitly explains why his doctrine is based on the *content* of revelation and not, as his less perceptive critics claimed, on the structure of the speaking or revealing individual subject.[16] Pannenberg, therefore, is just wrong to say:

> The structure of Barth's argument is in fact...the self-relation of God as it is grounded in his self-consciousness. In this regard the more precise definition of Hegel was normative for Barth...Barth in fact bases his own doctrine on the supreme vestige, the image of the Trinity in the human soul, and not, as he demanded, on the content of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (1.304).

And Pannenberg is relying on an account of Aquinas' theology that recent scholarship has shown to be highly questionable. Pannenberg describes it thus: 'We...have a chain of logical deductions from the concept of the first cause of the world to statements about the trinitarian persons' (1.288). But this will not do. It might be enough to raise objections on the basis of Nicholas Lash's convincing argument that Aquinas' talk of God as "first cause" Aquinas is 'a matter of controlled metaphorical usage and not, as it were, a straightforward extension of the language of causality as we employ it to speak of things and processes in the world,'[17] or on Rowan Williams' demonstration that the doctrine of the Trinity was

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[13] Pannenberg citations in the above article show his dependence on this piece to be found in Rendtorff's *Theorie des Christentums: historisch-theologische Studie zu seiner neuzeitlichen Verfassung* (Guetersloh: G. Mohn, 1972), pp.161-181.

[14] See my "In Defence of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity" *IJST* 5/1 (1993), pp. 33-46, which though historical in nature and taking up criticisms offered by Rowan Williams, was also – and indeed (in perhaps too bashful a way) primarily – intended to defend Barth from the readings of e.g., Gunton, Moltmann, Alan Torrance and Pannenberg.

[15] See especially my remarks on Barth's 1927 *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf.*

[16] See the comment in small print in *Church Dogmatics* I/1, pp.296-297 (Hereafter "*CD*").

[17] See his *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (London: SCM, 1988), pp.228. It is unfortunate that Pannenberg chooses to make many of his points in contrast to Aquinas, since he adopts a contestable reading of him: 'The argumentation of his theological *Summa* develops as a systematic reconstruction of the statements of Christian doctrine on the basis of the thought of God as the first cause of humanity and the created world' (1.22).

materially normative throughout Aquinas' theology and not a mere appendix to *de Deo uno*.[18] Rather, an observation of Gilles Emery will suffice. Emery has shown there is a 'redoublement of language' in Thomas' doctrine of God in the Prima Pars.[19] The divine being is viewed from two perspectives, first what is *commune* with reference to the divine essence, then what is *proprium* with reference to the divine persons. The one is not derived from the other, but both are preserved since the persons are the eternal relations of God that determine his whole being and action. 'A relation is in God not as an accidental entity in a subject, but is the divine nature itself.'[20] Aquinas, then, would seem to be an example of the very approach Pannenberg exonerates in Eastern thinkers.

3. Instead of the traditional use of relations of origin, the basic means of distinguishing the trinitarian persons must be self-distinction, which better expresses the diversity and reciprocity of the intra-trinitarian relations.

Pannenberg's basing trinitarian dogma on the historical revelation in Jesus Christ affects not just his method and the structure of his presentation. It also means a change in content and terminology. 'If,' he says,

> '...the doctrine of the Trinity is an exposition of the relation of *Jesus* to the Father and the Spirit, this has some incisive implications for the terminology which the classical presentation of the doctrine worked our to describe the relations among Father, Son and Spirit' (1.305).

Yet, for all the revision that this entails for traditional trinitarian terminology, Pannenberg is here aligning himself with what he considers the original approach of Christian reflection.

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[18] R. Williams "What does Love Know? St. Thomas on the Trinity" *New Blackfriars* 82, pp.260-272.
[19] "Essentialisme ou personnalisme dans la traite de Dieu chez saint Thomas d'Aquin?" *Revue Thomiste* 98 (1998), pp.5-38, esp. p.37. See also J-P. Torrell *St. Thomas Aquinas vol. 2 Spiritual Master* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2003), pp.157-161, and N. Healy *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) pp.68-74.
[20] *Summa Theologica* 1.29.a4.

'The self-differentiation of the Son from the Father on the one side and the Spirit on the other forms a basis for the thesis that there is a threefold distinction in the deity. The reason why Athanasius and the Cappadocians did not follow this line of thinking is as follows. No one in the Arian controversy denied the distinction of three hypostases. The issue was how to define their unity with the deity of the Father' (1.272).

What Pannenberg is getting at here is that it is wrongheaded for *relations of origin* (the "processions") such as generation and spiration to function as the sole and basic way to differentiate the persons, as they came to consequent to the 4th century trinitarian debates. It is not that Pannenberg thinks they have no place, but that their place is not determinative for distinguishing the divine persons. And it is their *determinative* role in many dogmatic treatments that is the problematic aspect, which the use of the term "self-distinction" is meant to rectify.

The focus within much of the tradition on relations of origin has, in Pannenberg's view, overlooked the diversity of relationships between the triune persons that we encounter in revelation. So, for instance, the analogies of mind and love noted above tend to view the relational traffic one way, i.e., from the first person to the other two. Pannenberg, however, notes any number of instances of intra-trinitarian reciprocity not taken account of on this model. For instance,

> 'In the handing over of lordship from the Father to the Son, and its handing back from the Son to the Father, we see a mutuality in their relationship that we do not see in the begetting.'

Hence Pannenberg uses the term self-distinction to denote what is both a more rich and reciprocal understanding of the inner-triune relations. As he continues,

> 'The self-distinction of the Father from the Son is not just that he begets the Son but that he hands over all things to him, so that his kingdom and his own deity are now dependent upon the Son' (1.313).

It would be wrong, therefore, to mistake what Pannenberg means by self-distinction for how the term is used in other modern doctrines of the Trinity, especially those influenced by German philosophical idealism. As Pannenberg says, the term has been used

> 'almost always in the sense of the bringing forth of a second and third divine person by the Father. Starting with the self-distinction from the Father, however, we can use the term in a different sense, namely, that the one who distinguishes himself from another defines himself as also dependent on that other' (1.313).

In Pannenberg's trinity, then, we have to deal neither with three instances of an undifferentiated nature nor with three moments of the development of a single consciousness, but with three entities that are genuinely other.

Hence, Pannenberg claims that what is meant by self-distinction is not 'exactly the same thing for each of the three persons' (1.321). So, for instance, on the self-distinction of the Son Pannenberg writes, Jesus

> 'is the Son of God as in his own person he at the same time honours on behalf of all others the claim of the first commandment by giving God the lordship that he demands in his proclamation' (1.310).

This, he thinks, does better justice to the biblical texts expressing Jesus' subordination to the Father that does the notion of an undifferentiated divine nature, as in, e.g., Christ's ignorance of the time of the end and his subjection of His own will to His Father's in Gethsemane.[21]

The Holy Spirit distinguishes Himself by His glorification of the Son on the one hand, and by His glorification of the Father on the other. And it is precisely by thus pointing away from Himself but to the other person that He shows Himself to be distinct (1.316). In addition, since He is the fellowship of the Son and the Father He can be seen, as in Augustine, as 'the love that unites the Father and the Son' (1.317). Given both by the Father to the Son in Christ's baptism, and by the Son to the Father at the cross, He is the indispensable medium of their fellowship, who also incorporates believers into this eternal fellowship.

The most remarkable step Pannenberg takes, however, is to apply self-distinction to the person of the Father. As we noted before, Pannenberg has taken up John Zizioulas' insight into patristic theology, in particular Athanasius' arguments against the Arians,

> 'that the Father would not be the Father without the Son... [T]he relativity of fatherhood that finds expression in the designation "Father" might well involve a

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[21] Pannenberg considers this a far more effective retort to Socinian criticisms of the doctrine than the older dogmatics achieved, which 'by its evasive answer...was missing the point that Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God precisely in his self-distinction from God' (1.310). See also "DEET," pp.1-2.

> dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true reciprocity in the trinitarian relations' (1.312).

Pannenberg then differs from the traditional understanding of the Father's monarchy, namely

> 'that the Father alone is without origin (*anarchos*) among the three persons of the trinity, that he is the origin and fount of deity for the Son and Spirit...He alone, then, is in *every* respect God of himself' (1.311).

Monarchy, on his interpretation, is the result, rather than the presupposition, of the being and activity of the Son and Spirit. For,

> 'through the work of the Son the kingdom or monarchy of the Father is established in creation , and through the work of the Spirit, who glorifies the Son as the plenipotentiary of the Father, and in so doing glorifies the Father himself, the kingdom or monarchy of the Father in creation is consummated' (1.324).

The Father, then, does not have his monarchy without the Son and Spirit, but only through them, and there is genuine mutuality.

Pannenberg sees this approach as fruitful in rectifying difficulties within the tradition, as demonstrated here by two examples. The first has to do with the terminology used in the doctrine of the Trinity. Classical theology differentiates "generation" and "spiration", as eternal processions in God, from "sending" the Son and "giving" the Spirit, as temporal missions that refer to the relationship of the eternal God to the world in the economy of salvation. Pannenberg, however, states, 'The biblical statements about the begetting of Jesus relate no less to his historical person than do those about his sending' (1.307), and there is a similar application to pneumatological terminology. Hence Pannenberg avoids the perceived impasse in the separation of the temporal missions from the eternal processions.

The second relates to the question of the legitimacy of the *filioque*. Pannenberg like many contemporary thinkers in trinitarian theology takes issue with the catholicity of the West's inclusion within the Nicene creed, yet his specific critique arises from his understanding of the divine relations of self-distinction. Not only does this clause add to John 15:26 something that was not there originally, but more importantly the Son also receives the Spirit, as shown in Jesus' baptism, and so what is a more multifaceted relationship in revelation suffers in a reductionist way in the dogmatic formulation. So Pannenberg

recommends a correction at once both less antagonistic and more radical than standard Eastern critiques. It is not that the *filioque* is heretical, but inappropriate, for

> 'the mistaken formulation of Augustine points in fact to a defect which plagues the trinitarian language of both East and West, namely, that of seeing the relations among Father, Son and Spirit exclusively as relations of origin. With this view one cannot do justice to the reciprocity in the relations' (1.319).

Thus Pannenberg formulates the distinction of the three. With the next thesis we see his treatment of their unity.

4. The trinitarian God-in-Himself is not made up of three persons who have divinity-in-themselves, but the persons depend upon each other reciprocally both for their personal identity and for their deity.

The flip side of the thesis of self-distinction is that of their mutual dependence. In particular it takes up some of the points we have just noted, namely that with Pannenberg's more extensive account of the intratrinitarian relations, there is a mutuality in their fellowship that occasions greater elucidation than traditional accounts offer. What seems to be the target of Pannenberg's thesis of the mutuality of the persons of the Trinity is Augustine's argument in *De Trinitate* books 5 to 7. There Augustine attacked the idea that the mutuality of the persons has the relation of each to the one Godhead and its attributes as its content

> 'because it would force us to the conclusion that the Father does not have wisdom of himself, and is not, therefore, wise of himself, but only through the Son...Instead he insisted that each of the persons has alone and directly a share in the one deity and its attributes rather than indirectly by way of the personal relations' (1.323-324).

According to Augustine's formulation, then, the persons, at least those of the Son and Spirit, are dependent as regards their personhood, but not as regards their deity.

Yet in a point taken up from the work of Robert Jenson,[22] Pannenberg thinks this is a retrograde step from the 4th century debates, which undermines the very point of the inner-triune self-distinction he has outlined. 'The self-distinction of each of the persons from the others,' he says, 'relates also to the deity and/or its attributes. This is indeed the theme and point of the self-distinction of one person from one or both of the others' (1.321). Instead, Pannenberg develops the line of argument present in Athanasius' *Contra Arianos* noted before, which he thinks the tradition subsequent to Augustine has obscured. 'Athanasius,' he says,

> 'argued forcibly against the Arians that the Father would not be the Father without the Son. Does this not mean that in some way the deity of the Father has to be dependent on the relation to the Son, although not in the same way as that of the Son is on the relation to the Father? The Father is not begotten of the Son or sent by him. These relations are irreversible. But in another way the relativity of fatherhood that finds expression in the term "Father" might well involve a dependence of the Father on the Son and thus be the basis of true reciprocity in the trinitarian relations' (1.312).

Developing such insights Pannenberg how the three persons both depend upon each other mutually and do so for their unity.

As for the persons' *mutual dependence*, this is not quite so surprising when stated as either the dependence of the Son and Spirit on the Father or that of the Spirit on the Son, used as we are to talking of their sendings. Yet key for Pannenberg is the point that the dependence is mutual. So the Son is referred to the work of the Spirit. As is seen in Christ's conception, baptism and resurrection, the Son relies on the work of the Spirit for the completion of His commission. He is indeed the Giver of the Spirit, but is so only as the Recipient.

More strikingly the Father Himself is made dependent on the work of the other two persons, this again being another of Pannenberg's corrections of the tradition's tendency to make the dependence one way, with the Father coming first in order as the origin and fount

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[22] 'An important insight of R. W. Jenson is that here Augustine was not simply rejecting an inappropriate formulation of Nicene doctrine but missing one of its points, namely, that the relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also for their deity' [*The Triune Identity*, p.119: 'Augustine's description of Nicene teaching is accurate. But what he regards as an unfortunate

of deity. So, since the Son is not merely the representative of the rule of God, but is the holder of lordship, Pannenberg writes,

> 'the Father makes his kingship dependent on whether the Son glorifies him and fulfils his lordship by fulfilling his mission. The self-distinction of the Father from the Son is not just that he begets the Son but that he hands over all things to him, so that his kingdom and his own deity are now dependent on the Son' (1.313).

And the Father's dependence on the Spirit is seen most clearly in Christ's resurrection. Following insights from Moltmann's *The Crucified God*,[23] Pannenberg asserts that 'the cross throws doubt not merely on the divine power but also on the deity of the Father as Jesus proclaimed him' (1.314). Yet the Son's glorification and vindication in the resurrection reaffirm the Son's lordship and deity and therefore the Father's as well. According to Pannenberg, as the creative origin of all life the decisive significance for Jesus' resurrection attaches to the Spirit, and to that extent we may say that here the Father and the Son depend on his working (1.315).

The other key point regards the fact that the persons depend upon each other *for their deity*. Here we refer to what Roger Olson has referred to as "Pannenberg's principle," namely: 'God's being is his rule'.[24] This aspect of Pannenberg's theology will recur at several key points of our treatment of his trinitarian theology, and we shall see that it is one of the most complex as well as problematic aspects of his trinitarian theology.

In sum, Pannenberg means by this that God can only be God if He is lord, and that His lordship is not so external to His deity that He could be God without it. Within the triune life God already has this lordship and therefore His deity, but with the event of creation His deity is only realised with His complete governance over that area too. As he puts it in *ST* chapter 5:

> 'The self-distinction of the Father from the Son is not just that he begets the Son but that he hands over all things to him, so that his kingdom and his own deity are now

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consequence of the Nicene doctrine was in fact the doctrine's original purpose. The original point of trinitarian dialectics is to make the relations constitutive in God.'

[23] (London: SCM, 1974), pp.206ff. Pannenberg nevertheless denies that it is proper to speak point-blank of the death of God on the cross (1.314).

[24] See *Theology and the Kingdom of God,* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp.55-56 (Hereafter "*TKG*"). Olson coins the nomenclature in "Wolfhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity" in *SJT* 43 (1990), pp.196ff.

dependent upon the Son. The rule or kingdom of the Father is not so external to his deity that he might be God without his kingdom. The world as the object of his lordship might not be necessary to his deity, since its existence owes its origin to his creative freedom, but the existence of a world is not compatible with his deity apart from his lordship over it. Hence lordship goes hand in hand with the deity of God' (1.313).

And it is on this basis that Pannenberg says that God's deity is in question or at stake in the events of Christ's incarnation.

The point, it should be noted, is not just that each person requires the others to be Himself. That obtains only in God's immanent life before and without the creation of the world. Importantly, the point is also that each person requires the others' actions *within the economy of salvation* to be Himself. The other persons depend in turn upon the Father's sending, the Son's incarnation and temporal obedience, and the Spirit's raising Christ – otherwise they would be God. And such is the further point included within Pannenberg's talk of the persons' mutual dependence we noted above. It is one thing to say, for example, that the Father would not be the Father without the Son, as do Athanasius and Zizioulas. It is another to say, as Pannenberg does, 'The cross throws doubt...on the deity of the Father' (1.314). The place for critical comment on this point will be after we have analysed his understanding of the relation of economic and immanent trinities, which is the topic of the next thesis.

Now that the twin theses of self-distinction and mutual dependence have been introduced, we can see how Pannenberg goes on to reformulate two more examples of traditional terminology, i.e., monotheism and *perichoresis*, just as we have seen him do with monarchy and the *filioque*. Here again we see him make a distinctive contribution to contemporary debate, since in both he differs from the positions deriving from one of the key works of recent theology, Moltmann's *Trinity and the Kingdom*.[25] Notwithstanding their common criticism of the tradition's frequent relapses into more unitarian rather than trinitarian conceptions, Pannenberg refuses to follow Moltmann's lead in rejecting the monotheistic description of the Christian God, and by seeking the divine unity in the persons'

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[25] (London: SCM, 1981).

mutual *perichoresis.* His positive assessment of the monotheism advocated both by the scriptural witness and by the tradition of philosophical theology leaves no alternative for him other than monotheism – not, of course, the pre-trinitarian "monotheism" that finds the unity in the Father with no necessary reference to Son and Spirit, but the "concrete monotheism" of the one trinitarian God in His one act (1.335-336).

And this concrete unity he will not account for by the concept of *perichoresis*, as does Moltmann.[26] Although he grants that this concept does express the persons' reciprocity (1.319), he thinks it 'presupposes another basis of the unity of the three persons. It can only manifest this unity. On its own, its starting point is always the trinity of persons' (1.334), and would thus still be guilty of the tritheism he detects in Basil's 38th letter,[27] which describes the divine unity as a unity of genus, the threeness already preceding the persons' common outward activity.

5. **As a doctrine of revelation, the doctrine of the Trinity states that the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are identical, but not in such a way that either the integrity of the three persons or the priority of the immanent Trinity is threatened.**

In the recent renaissance in trinitarian theology a particular stimulus is what has become known as "Rahner's Rule." The rule is this: 'The "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity, and the "immanent" Trinity is the "economic" Trinity.'[28] Pannenberg too adopts this axiom. But lest there be a mistaken confusion of Pannenberg's use of the axiom with other theologies, we shall spend some time on why and how he follows Rahner in this.

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[26] *Ibid.* pp.174ff.
[27] Although critical consensus (which we have no desire to criticise) deems this letter to be the work of Gregory of Nyssa, we shall nevertheless retain Pannenberg's attribution of it to Basil, since the theological point does not rest on questions of authorship. See Sarah Coakley's ' "Persons" in the social doctrine of the Trinity: current analytic discussion and "Cappadocian" theology', in *Powers and Submissions. Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
[28] K. Rahner *The Trinity* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1970), p.22. The determinative important of this thesis for contemporary trinitarian theology can be seen clearly in, e.g., C. M. LaCugna *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), and Peters (1993).

In *ST* chapter 5 the key motivation for Pannenberg identifying economic and immanent trinities, and the context in which it is introduced, is the point adumbrated in the first thesis, namely that the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity lies in revelation. For on Rahner's Rule he writes:

> This thesis means that the doctrine of the Trinity does not merely begin with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and then work back to a trinity in the eternal essence of God, but that it must constantly link the trinity in the eternal essence to his historical revelation, since revelation cannot be viewed as extraneous to his deity (1.328).

And he sees it as a sharpening both of the place of the economic sendings in discussing trinitarian relations (1.307), and of Barth's demand to base the doctrine on revelation (1.327-328).

Pannenberg's key argument, however, like Rahner's, comes from christology.

> 'The starting point for Rahner's thesis is the assertion that Jesus Christ is in person the Son of God, so that the incarnation is not just ascribed to the Son, as distinct from the other persons of the Trinity, by external appropriation. The man Jesus is a real symbol of the divine Logos. His history is the existence of the Logos with us as our salvation, revealing the Logos' (1.328).[29]

It is not then something accidental that the Son should have become flesh, but there must be some corresponding feature of the inner structure of the divine essence that would lead Him in particular to become incarnate.

Yet, while adopting Rahner's Rule Pannenberg adopts two revisions, which follow naturally from the trinitarian doctrine he holds, and adds one important qualification. The first revision has to do with Rahner's own formulation, which he believes is still prey to some of the unitarian tendencies noted under the second thesis

> 'Rahner's exposition does not work out his doctrine in terms of the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father but chooses as the key concept that of the self-communication of the Father by the Son. Closely related is Rahner's rejection of the idea of three subjectivities in God in favor of a single divine Subject within the Trinity' (1.308).

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Hence Pannenberg quite definitely speaks of 3 "persons" in the godhead, who are 'living realizations of separate centres of action' (1.319).

The second revision is that, for Pannenberg, the economy is decisive for the immanent life of the Father, not just the Son and Spirit. For Pannenberg, then, the identity of economic and immanent trinities is the window into the identity of all three persons, and it is only with the inclusion of the Father in the matrix of mutual dependence for the persons' deity – a step he does not detect in Rahner – that Pannenberg believes his rule can be given life (1.329-330).

The qualification is that this identity of economic and immanent trinities is potentially open to abuse. Following the caution of Walter Kasper,[30] Pannenberg disavows any simple equation of the two which would mean 'the absorption of the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity', thus stealing from 'the Trinity of salvation history all sense and significance'. Pannenberg refutes 'the idea of a divine becoming in history, as though the trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with its eschatological consummation', for 'the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity' (1.331).

This qualification is important to note, though how decisive its importance is a less obvious matter. The most thorough-going critique of the reciprocal identity of economic and immanent trinities in contemporary theology has been forcefully made by Paul Molnar in his recent and important book *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In dialogue with Karl Barth and contemporary theology.*[31] There Molnar delineates a syndrome in much contemporary trinitarian theology that relies on an identification of economic and immanent trinities along the lines of Rahner's Rule, that is when mere lip-service is paid to the primacy of the immanent Trinity. When this occurs, he argues, strain is put on the

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[29] On 1.307 as well Pannenberg notes that the basis for Rahner's formulating this thesis was 'the insight that the immanent divine Logos is strictly the same as the economic Logos, i.e., the historical person of Jesus Christ' in the work known best in English as *The Trinity.*

[30] See his *The God of Jesus Christ* (tr. M. J. O'Connell) (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

[31] (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002),

dogmatic matrix, one result being that God tends to be seen as dependent on, or indistinguishable from the course of history.[32]

Concerning the tendency to see God as dependent on, or indistinguishable from the course of history, Molnar states elsewhere:

> 'While Pannenberg insists upon God's freedom and upon the fact that his eternity is not grounded in the historical process his method will not allow him to maintain the character of this insight...[A] God who depends upon the course of history is in fact conditioned by the outcome of history; his freedom is compromised.'[33]

It is difficult not to agree with Molnar. The particular problematic in Pannenberg is that the identity of economic and immanent trinities is coupled with the axiom that God's lordship is God's deity – or at least the particular interpretation he gives it. Here we resume the criticism held over from the previous thesis, for it seems that, whatever his intentions, making God's deity dependent on the establishment of the kingdom on earth does tie the hands of the trinitarian God *in se*. For with such an understanding of "Pannenberg's principle" in place, the identity of economic and immanent trinities becomes no longer the mere correspondence of trinitarian doctrine to the contents of revelation, which is the stated intention, but is in danger of becoming a requirement of God's being.

One therefore has to take issue with the equation of immanent and economic trinities as Pannenberg presents it in *ST* chapter 5, for not least does the very subheading to the section "The World as the History of God" highlight the unease. Pannenberg is on firmer ground when he states, 'the immanent Trinity is to be found in the Trinity of salvation history. God is the same in his eternal essence as he reveals himself to be historically' (1.331). The ground is less firm when he expresses himself thus: 'the progress of events *decides* concerning his deity as well as the deity of the Son' (1.329).

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[32] Molnar notes three other points. The second, that Christology becomes prey to imprecisions, notably the idea that Christ's humanity as such is the revealer, and the fourth, that theology tends to begin with experiences of self-transcendence, with the result that it is experience, rather than the object of faith, that determines the truth of theology, Pannenberg is guilty of. On this see the third thesis of our final chapter. The third, that there is not the proper distinction between human spirit and the divine Spirit, is not a problem, we believe, in *SY*. On this see our chapter 4.

[33] "Some Problems with Pannenberg's Solution to Barth's 'Faith Subjectivism'" *SJT* 48 (1995), p.331

Whether Pannenberg's qualification is enough to quieten the misgivings aroused by Rahner's Rule, at least in a sophisticated treatment like Molnar's, is far from certain. Nevertheless, it is seriously meant, since there are in his view genuine instances of theological trespass. Take, for instance, his critical remarks on Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology*:

> 'In Jenson's presentation, the difference between the "immanent" Trinity – the eternal communion of Father, Son, and Spirit – and the "economic" Trinity almost vanishes. It is certainly true that the trinitarian God in the history of salvation is the same God as in His eternal life. But there is also a necessary distinction that maintains the priority of the eternal communion of the triune God over that communion's explication in the history of salvation. Without that distinction, the reality of the one God tends to be dissolved into the process of the world.'[34]

In our concluding remarks we shall take up these critical issues and offer a more profound explanation of Pannenberg's thinking here. In particular we must have to consider why despite his desire to maintain the priority of the immanent Trinity, he states that the eternal God depends on His temporal activity and that His economic action decides for His immanent being; why despite the undoubted importance of the qualification, it seems to be overrun by other elements of the argument, namely Rahner's Rule and Pannenberg's principle; and how the problems here with regard to the formulation of the *doctrine* of the Trinity are a result of failing to be trinitarian enough at a key point in his theological system.

We have considered the doctrine of the Trinity Pannenberg is working with in his most trinitarian of theologies. It is a doctrine founded on God's historical revelation that treats the Father, Son and Spirit insofar as they disclose themselves in the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth, the Father the loving Lord of the kingdom, the Son the one who distinguishes Himself in loving obedience from the Father, and the Spirit the bond of love and fellowship between the two. Since the doctrine is rooted in revelation, it cannot, then, be based on the rational self-explication unfolding of a pre-trinitarian monotheism, as Pannenberg thinks has too often been the case in Western theology when it views the Trinity after the likeness of the individual subject. For this reason Pannenberg's trinitarian prefers 'self-distinction' –

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[34] *First Things* 103 (May 2000), pp.49-53.

rather than relations of origin – as the basic means of distinguishing the trinitarian persons, and 'mutual dependence' to denote how the persons depend upon each other reciprocally both for their personal identity and for their deity, and are thus the one God. And since the triune God should be understood from revelation rather than from pre-trinitarian conceptualities, the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity must be considered identical, with the proviso that this identity should threaten neither the integrity of the three persons nor the priority of the God's *in se* to His being *pro nobis*. This is the doctrine of the Trinity operative in *ST*. But what this trinitarian *theology* is we explore in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF GOD'S ESSENCE AND ATTRIBUTES

> 'Only on the basis of a differentiated concept of the unity of the divine essence can there finally be also a definition of the trinitarian persons' (1.336).

In his "Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise *De Trinitate*"[1] Karl Rahner wrote 'it is now generally taken for granted that the treatise *De Deo Uno* must be divided and placed before *De Deo Trino*.' Yet, he claims,

> 'then one really writes, or could merely write, a treatise *De divinitate una*, since the unicity of the divine being justifies this procedure, and makes it very philosophical and abstract in development – which is of course what happens – with very little concrete reference to the history of salvation.'[2]

Whether or not Rahner's arguments have won the day, they definitely have many followers, so that four decades on such a procedure is not as 'generally taken for granted' as he thought in his day.

A gauntlet has been laid down for theologians, then, to discuss God's essence and attributes *after* discussion of the Trinity. Yet there are relatively few examples of such a treatment of the one God. Despite Rahner's clarion call (as well as Barth's extended discussion of the divine perfections after the material on the Trinity[3]) the recent fashion for trinitarian theology has not provided many examples of what a detailed examination of the one God, his essence and attributes, would look like.[4] Pannenberg is a theologian who has

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[1] *Theological Investigations* vol. 4 (London: DLT, 1966), pp.77-102.
[2] *Ibid.*, p.83 Rahner sees this phenomenon as typical of the treatment of the one God preceding that of the Trinity, but not as inevitable.
[3] *CD* II/1, pp. 257-677.
[4] Other treatments of the divine essence and attributes from an avowedly trinitarian perspective include C. Gunton *Being and Act: Towards a Doctrine of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002), and in a quite unique way R. Jenson *Systematic Theology* vol. 1, (Oxford: OUP, 1997) pp.207-236, esp. p.223.

consciously sought to respond to Rahner's challenge:[5] *ST* chapter 6, "The Unity and Attributes of the Divine Essence" is devoted to explicating the *trinitarian* essence and attributes in accordance with the doctrine of the Trinity he has outlined. How his understanding of the Trinity affects his treatment of the divine essence and attributes we now examine with five points.

1. **God's trinity has been revealed but His unity now remains hidden.**

Following the words of John's prologue, "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known," Pannenberg states that 'to know the incomprehensible God, therefore, we must hold fast to the Son' (1.339). The Trinity, therefore, is not only part of the content of God's revelation; it is also its formal possibility. Also, it is no part of the hiddenness of God, since in God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ we see the three persons of Father, Son and Spirit.

But although, according to Pannenberg, the triune distinctions are not hidden, the unity of the essence is. This arises from our temporal situation, living as we do between God's revelation of his triune action in the events of the first 30 years of the common era and the final revelation of Himself in the *eschaton*. Pannenberg here wants to maintain a certain tension in our knowledge of God, but it is not what he terms "dialectical" or "dualistic". Whatever the tensions between God's revealedness and hiddenness in this age, they will all be resolved in the *eschaton*, when, with the taking up of time into eternity, the process of God's manifestation will be complete. Then the contradictions of historical experience will all be over and there will finally be revealed the unity of God, that is 'the unity of the God who works in world history and the God whose love is revealed in Jesus Christ' (1.340).

What Pannenberg is arguing *for* can only be appreciated fully when we are aware of what he is arguing *against*. Pannenberg's procedure is a self-conscious correction of, and significant departure from, some traditional approaches. In particular, it differs from the supposition he detects in traditional theology 'that the existence and essence of God are

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[5] See 1.280ff., esp. footnote 72.

accessible to rational knowledge through the works of creation, but that we may know the trinitarian distinctions only by special revelation' (1.341). Pannenberg traces this procedure in both sides of the Reformation divide, following as they do what he takes to be the classical form for the structure of the doctrine of God since Aquinas, namely 'the derivation of the trinity of persons from the concept of the unity of substance' (1.288). He cites the typical examples of Hollaz on the Protestant side and Matthias Joseph Scheeben on the Catholic, who maintains:

> 'the natural knowledge of God extends to all the characteristics of God...[including] all the attributes which appear in supernatural revelation and which belong to him in and in virtue of the essentiality and nature that is common to all three persons...In contrast, the Trinity is absolutely as well as relatively beyond the reach of natural knowledge' (1.341).

Such an approach is problematic, Pannenberg argues, not just because it assumes a straightforward natural knowledge of the one God, but also because it neglects the problems of a conceptually satisfactory definition of God's triunity to which the conceptual rigours of theologians of the 4th century were devoted. The heated debates that led to the belief in a trinity of divine *hypostases* and their consubstantiality are clear evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a peculiarly simple truth of revelation. What Pannenberg is wary of is that in much of the tradition all the conceptual work of the theologian seems to be focussed on the unity of the divine essence, not on God's triunity, so that scarcely any room is left for the divine threeness in the doctrine of God

Even if one were sympathetic to Pannenberg's general concern, one might wish to take issue with him here. This is so, even if one overlooks two questionable points: firstly, the impression given that, when the *eschaton* comes, God will have ceased needing to reveal Himself to us for us to know Him; and second, the failure to account for the fact that scripture does present a certain sort of pre-trinitarian monotheism, since the Old Testament presents the one and only God and it is in the New Testament that this is revealed in its trinitarian fullness, the two of course not being in contradiction.

A more telling objection is that Pannenberg is working with a very reduced conception of the divine unity, and thereby confuses the issue. In postponing the revelation of God's

unity to the *eschaton*, Pannenberg requires a particular understanding of God's unity, i.e., the unity of the God of Jesus and the God of history. In the God of Jesus we can be sure, Pannenberg believes, that God is love, but in the God of history there are tensions and contradictions which make God's loving nature appear less than clear. But even if Pannenberg were justified in this particular point, his point that God's unity remains hidden would need to be expressed with far more qualification than is the case. There are also two major meanings of God's unity, which would not fit his schema, those of God's uniqueness, that He is the one God, and His simplicity, that He is always consistent with Himself in the fullness of His attributes. From Israel's days it was revealed to them that Yahweh is the only God, and the revelation of the trinitarian fullness in the New Testament shows the three persons to be one in character, work and purpose. And as far as those theologies, to which Pannenberg takes exception, have been explicating these other senses of God's unity, the criticisms levelled against them lose much of their sharpness.

2. **God's essence, which comes to manifestation in the whole economy of God's trinitarian revelation, is to be conceived primarily as the infinite rather than as the first cause.**

Pannenberg addresses the question: 'how are we to think of the unity of the divine essence if room is to be let for the trinity of persons.' But 'a satisfactory answer' for Pannenberg, as we saw in the previous chapter, would have to eschew all pre-trinitarian conceptions of the divine unity, that is,

> 'neither by viewing the unity of God as grounded in the Father as the origin and fount of deity nor by deriving the trinity from the concept of the unity of God as spirit or love' (1.342).

The 'satisfactory answer' is one of the main preoccupations of the entirety of *ST* chapter 6. In particular it is the key issue underlying our second and third theses, concerning God's essence on the one hand and His personality and spirituality on the other. Here Pannenberg seeks to overcome traditional treatments of *de Deo uno* that suffer from the types of unitarian conceptualities we saw him outline in the previous chapter.

The 'satisfactory answer' involves Pannenberg's definition of the divine essence as infinity. Yet to understand the argument properly, and how the choice of this term is more fitting for the triune God, we should first investigate the part of our thesis which reads, 'God's essence, which *comes to manifestation in the whole economy of God's trinitarian revelation.*'

Here we touch on points that will be dealt with elsewhere in more detail – in particular the final thesis of chapter 8 – on how the Trinity for Pannenberg inevitably means that God's economic activity has to be understood as a *process* that embraces all of salvation history. For now we shall deal only with how this affects Pannenberg's argument for basing talk of God's essence and attributes on the one divine action.

'We can accept as *revelation* of the essence,' Pannenberg writes, 'only the sum total of the manifestations of a single manifestation that is constitutive for this total' (1.358).[6] Two points are being made that are directly relevant to Pannenberg's trinitarian construal. First, God's revelation is a process, for it is the result of the sum total of the divine manifestations. Attention must be paid then to the whole sweep of creation, reconciliation and consummation, i.e., the whole work of Father, Son and Spirit. For, as Pannenberg goes on to conclude this chapter:

> 'Only with the consummation of the world in the kingdom of God does God's love reach its goal and the doctrine of God its conclusion. Only then do we fully know God as the true Infinite who is not merely opposed by the world of the finite, and thus himself finite' (1.447).

Second, there is no separation between God and His actions in the economy, because God is *manifested.* As Pannenberg explained in *TKG,*[7] appearance or manifestation points to a transcendent being, yet is also more than seeming to be there – it means real (though not exhaustive) presence.

As Pannenberg goes on to explain, these are both trinitarian possibilities. God has from all eternity His existence as the Father in relation to the Son. So,

> '[t]he Father...has his existence in the Son, and the Son reveals the one God, the essence of God, by revealing the Father. But the Father does not simply stand in place of the essence of God that is manifest through the Son and that has its existence in

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[6] Emphasis retained.

> him. The Son also reveals the existence of the Father, and by the sending of the Son the Father reveals his essence, his eternal Love' (1.358).

Whether it be God's essence or existence, then, we come to know it ultimately in trinitarian terms. For, firstly, in the economic action of the Father and the Son, as well as the Spirit who unites them, the revelation that is proleptically present in the incarnate Son, is the complete and true self-explication of the eternal God. And second we do really come to know God, for God's trinitarian self-revelation is His genuine manifestation.

Now this trinitarian rationale, though explicit only towards the end of the second section,[8] is crucial for Pannenberg's reformulation of the doctrine of the one God. For he writes, 'the traditional doctrine of God's essence and attributes leads into such dead ends' for the very reason that 'a distinction is made...between God's essence and his causal relation to the world, since he brings forth the world freely and not by any necessity of his nature' (1.364). This affects much of Pannenberg's discussion of the divine essence. So, for instance, on the one hand he rejects the application of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories to the doctrine of God and embraces the modern emphasis on the importance of relation, since this teaches a definition of essence that takes better account of the relations between the trinitarian persons and between God and the world (1.365-366). And on the other he criticises both the Palamist doctrine of divine energies which implies an autonomy of the divine qualities from the divine essence, and Latin Scholasticism which implied only an apparent multiplicity of the divine attributes (1.361-362).

Yet, most importantly, on this basis Pannenberg outlines two fundamental approaches that theologians of previous generations have adopted in defining the divine essence, the one alleviating the quandries Pannenberg describes, the other producing and compounding them. The approach that meets with his disfavour is that of considering God as the first cause, and he illustrates this by considering what Thomas Aquinas has to say on the matter. Like Pannenberg, Aquinas stresses the unknowability of the divine essence and for this Pannenberg repeatedly praises his 13th century predecessor, but for Aquinas and Latin Scholasticism this derives from God's distinction from everything created. Yet Aquinas'

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[7] *TKG.*
[8] 1.358-359.

correct stress on the incomprehensibility of the divine essence was, according to Pannenberg, somewhat undone by his equation of God with the concept of first cause.[9] The fact that God is the first cause along with the apophatic procedure adopted by Aquinas in his discussion of the divine essence made possible 'positive statements about [God] as the cause of creaturely perfections' (1.343). One of the legacies of this procedure was the use continued well into the 19th century of Denys the Areopagite's threefold method of knowing God, the *via negationis*, the *via eminentiae* and the *via causalitatis*. The last two are closely related, in Pannenberg's view, 'for inferring the cause from the effects rests on the assumption that the perfections of the effects must be found to a higher degree in the cause, so that they may be predicated of it by a kind of ascent, whereas creaturely imperfections are denied it by negation' (1.344). God, on this reading, is not free to be himself but has to be described either positively or negatively in terms of a causal chain of being, the danger being that He is being portrayed after our image rather than His own.

In addition, identifying God as the first cause brings with it two other difficulties for a trinitarian construal of the one God. The one is the inevitable impasse in describing God's essence and attributes. Although the idea of God as the first cause was not guilty of ignoring the distinction between God's essence and His causal relation to the world, nevertheless, Pannenberg says, 'the qualities that are ascribed to him rest on his relations to the world which correspond to the relations of creatures to him' (1.364), even those like infinity and eternity which are negatively related to finitude. Of all the qualities which we ascribe to God on the basis of a relation to something else, therefore, it may be said that they cannot be God's in His essence if we think of the divine essence in its own unrelated and transcendent self-identity apart from all relation to the world. It becomes difficult, therefore, to say that what God is for us in his trinitarian action, He is in Himself, and our talk of God entertains the danger of anthropomorphic projections.

The approach Pannenberg prefers is to consider God as the infinite. He claims that this better ensures the incomprehensibility of God in his essence and attributes, and not just that of the divine trinity. Here Pannenberg takes his lead from Gregory of Nyssa.

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[9] That Pannenberg characterizes Thomas's procedure in *STh* thus, and that he is wrong to do so, we have noted already in the previous chapter. See especially the comparison with Lash.

> 'If God is infinite, [Gregory] said, it follows that we cannot ultimately define his essence, for it is indescribable. The concept of infinity is also and not least of all the basis of the incomprehensibility of the unity of God in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity' (1.342).

This matter was worked out, in Pannenberg's view, in the trinitarian debates of the 4th century, in particular the Cappadocian's dispute with Eunomius. Eunomius held the opinion that the essence of God was His unoriginateness, that He is a being without origin, a conception that is uncomfortably close, as far as Pannenberg is concerned, to the idea of first cause. Gregory however maintained the incomprehensibility of the divine essence, the basis for this being not its causal relation to creaturely phenomena, but its being 'simply one example of the incomprehensibility which follows from the divine infinity' (1.342-343).

By maintaining the primacy of the divine infinity not just as an attribute but as God's very essence the incomprehensibility is maintained, since there is no positive identifying concept underlying all one might say about God. By being the first cause God is, in Pannenberg's view, inevitably regarded as a powerful, transcendent being outside the world. But if the root concept is infinity, one can avoid this impression. God is that undefined "something", which is not only above and beyond the world immune from its perishability, but also pervades it as an active presence, just as much "down here" as "up there". God's trinitarian nature for Pannenberg shows the untenability for the Christian theologian of a false transcendence and so better fits the designation of infinity, since already in this 'undefined mystery which fills all things and transcends all things and embraces all things, the Father is close to those things through his Son and in the power of his Spirit' (1.359).

3. God's spirituality is to be understood as a field rather than as a mind, and so His personality is to be located not in a single subjectivity or unitary essence, but in the three divine persons. God's action, whence we ascertain His attributes, is therefore irreducibly triune.

This point follows naturally from points mentioned above, in particular Pannenberg's concern to avoid anthropomorphism and the pre-trinitarian monotheism that tends to picture God after the likeness of a unitary thinking subject. He feels that this has happened in much of the tradition's discussion of common designators of God, namely that He is 'person' and 'spirit.' Interpretation of John 4.24 "God is spirit" is a key instance often equated with the idea of mental intelligence. Developing points we noted in the second thesis of the previous chapter, Pannenberg criticises much theological God-talk for conceiving Him as the single hypostatised mind or subject, and the concomitant understandings of God's personality and therewith contests the validity of much talk of the one God as person and as the ultimate and infinite rational being. Such ideas, Pannenberg maintains, were

> 'never an authentic expression of the personal character of God according to the witness of the biblical writings...Because as Father he is related to his Son in all eternity, he is personal in eternity in the unity of Father, Son and Spirit.'[10]

God is *tri*personal, not *uni*personal, and this affects how Pannenberg understands his spirituality, personality and action. And it is by a revised understanding of God's spirit that we arrive at a proper estimate of His personality and action.

The traditional understanding Pannenberg objects to so much first arose, he thinks, in the equation of *pneuma* with *nous*. *Pneuma* was the biblical term for God's nature, coming from the Hebrew *ruach* meaning not reason or consciousness, but the life force that proceeds from God. As Pannenberg reads the tradition, in the early years of the church Christian thinkers frequently took the understandable but wrong step of identifying the biblical *pneuma* with the Stoic view of the divine *pneuma* as a very fine substance that is invisible to us. From Origen onwards this conception was ditched given its implications of corporeality, divisibility, composition, extension and localisation, and in the *De Principiis*[11] it is argued that instead one properly speaks of God's spirituality as reason. It is, therefore, 'a widespread notion, and almost taken for granted, the God, if he is real at all, is a self-consciously acting and in this sense "personal" being' (1.370). Yet Origen's argument had its "Achilles' heel":

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[10] *IST*, p.35.
[11] 1.1.

> [Origen] had to take metaphorically all the biblical statements that ascribe bodily features to God but literally those that refer to him as a rational being, even though they may be ascribed to him only in the mode of undivided unity. But is this not to underrate the divine majesty that far transcends our own rational nature?' (1.372).

And this weakness was exploited in the modern period, since Pannenberg deems this understanding to be at the root of the modern atheist critiques of, among others, Spinoza, Fichte and Feuerbach. Violating the very divine infinity it was seeking to uphold, the traditional approach dating from Origen has likened God too much to the individual mind or subject and orthodoxy's critics have been right to highlight theological deficiencies within the tradition on this point.

So, instead of including God among the set of intellectual beings, Pannenberg's theological proposal is to talk of the Spirit, both God's essence and the third person of the Trinity, as a field.[12] There is more to say on the application of "field" specifically to the third divine person in the next chapter, but here we shall examine its role in discussion of the divine essence and attributes.

Note must first be taken of Pannenberg's goal in revising talk of God as spirit. Its specific context is Pannenberg's attempt to give an account of how one can ascribe attributes to God on the basis of His action in a way that is genuinely trinitarian and avoids the implication (detected not just in the Scholastic and older Protestant doctrine but also in the important modern treatment of Cremer[13]) of a single divine subject, with its modalising drift and anthropomorphic notion of a God who sets and realises goals. This is done by implementing here in the locus *de Deo uno* the conclusions of his *de Deo trino*, since he sums up the discussion of divine spirituality thus: its purpose was

> 'to understand the trinitarian persons, *without derivation* from a divine essence that differs from them, as centers of action of the one movement which embraces and permeates all of them' (1.385).

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[12] On Pannenberg's use of the term "field" to understand the divine spirituality see M. Muehling-Schlapkohl *Gott als Liebe: Studien zum Verstaendnis der Liebe als Modell des trinitarischen Redens von Gott* (Marburg: Elwert, 2000), esp. pp.218-224.

[13] See 1.367ff., esp. 1.370. Hermann Cremer's position is to be found in *Die christliche Lehre von den Eigenschaften Gottes* (Guetersloh: Bertelsmann, 1897).

And it is for such a purpose that Pannenberg employs modern field theory to explicate the divine spirituality. It allows for a genuine and underived trinitarianism in talk of God that he thinks other theological models cannot achieve. For,

> 'the autonomy of the field demands no ordering to a subject such as is the case when the Spirit is understood as *nous*. The deity as field can find equal manifestation in all three persons' (1.383).

The essence, then, need not be treated as a fourth divine hypostasis lying behind the three of salvation history, nor need it elide into the person of the Father as the sole source of deity. God is not a unitary intellectual self outside the world, but is the living God embracing and permeating the creation as befits the field of spirit. And the specifically Christian version of this fact that the one God is the living God comes to expression in the living fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit. 'The deity as field can find equal manifestation in all three persons' (1.383). That is, this notion of divine spirituality, the divine life force, permeates all that the persons do and are, so that the three persons are nothing other than forms, eternal forms of this life force, without derivation from a pre-trinitarian notion of *nous*.

On this basis Pannenberg draws two consequences for a trinitarian account of the one God. The first is a reinterpretation of talk of divine intention, in a way that does not pattern God's action after that of the individual human self-consciousness. So, God's knowledge means 'that nothing in all his creation escapes him' (1.379-380). And His will, or the goals of His action, does not as in human goals presuppose either a deficiency on the part of the agent, or a difference between the object of the will and its fulfilment. Rather, God in His eternal fullness already enjoys the fulfilment of His action, and what we mean by His will is the transcendent force that impresses itself upon us.[14]

The second, and more important consequence for the argument of *ST* chapter 6, is that there is a way to derive divine attributes from the content of divine revelation, i.e., the one economic action stretching from creation to consummation, that is the work of the three persons in their integrity. Pannenberg can now maintain both that '[t]he concept of action demands an acting subject,' and that '[t]he eternal essence of God is not itself a subject alongside the three persons' (1.384). That is because Pannenberg has attempted to purge talk

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[14] 1.380ff and 1.385ff.

of the divine essence from its unitarian talk of a single pre-trinitarian subject in order to make room for a trinitarian notion of the essence which fits the trinitarian nature of God's revelatory action. For, he says, 'The commonality of action of Father, Son and Spirit can be only a manifestation of the unity of life and essence by which they are always linked already' (1.385).

By thus refusing to identify the divine essence with first causality and by revising talk of divine personality and spirituality, Pannenberg believes he furthers understanding of a genuinely Christian, i.e., trinitarian, treatment of the one God, both in negative and positive terms. Negatively, in Pannenberg's view his approach avoids more easily anthropomorphic ideas of God and their deleterious effects on the rest of theology. For instance, he thinks that totalitarian views of predestination and providence lead to a perverted concept of God's rule over world occurrence as a tyranny because they see God after the pattern of a finite subject (1.388). Positively, it allows for the differentiated concept of the divine unity that is appropriate to the triune differentiations God has revealed in His economic action, and a treatment of the attributes of the God *in se* who is really as He is *pro nobis*. As Pannenberg puts it,

> 'By the common action of Father, Son and Spirit the future of God breaks into the present of creatures, into the world of creation, and on the basis of this divine action the attributes are predicated not merely of the trinitarian persons but also of the divine essence that is common to them all' (1.391).

And how Pannenberg outlines the trinitarian attributes of this triune essence will be our topic of the following two theses.

4. **The attributes of God's infinity are to be understood, not as the negation of creaturely limits, but as their overcoming, for they find their concrete form in the trinitarian God's loving approach.**

Pannenberg divides the divine attributes into two groups. There are attributes of the divine infinity, namely holiness, eternity, omnipotence and omnipresence; and the attributes of the

divine love, i.e., God's goodness, righteousness, faithfulness, patience and wisdom. Pannenberg understands both sets in trinitarian terms, but with an important qualification.

The qualification is the idea of infinity that is the ordering principle for the first set of attributes. To summarise at the risk of over-simplification Pannenberg's overall reasoning in his discussion of the attributes,[15] we may say this. Just as a general idea of God is the necessary presupposition for the understanding of the trinitarian God of Jesus Christ, for it is He alone who fulfils (though in a new way) this general idea; so the notion of infinity is the necessary presupposition to understand the trinitarian God of love who is Himself the perfect (and again new) fulfilment of the minimal requirements of true infinity. This is what Pannenberg means by saying that 'we must talk about two types of attributes, those that are ascribed to God on the basis of his action,' that is the attributes of love, 'and those that define the subject of the statements,' i.e., those of infinity. For, as Pannenberg continues:

> terms that explain the word "God" as such, e.g., terms like infinite, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal and omnipotent...are presupposed in order that we may understand the revelation of God in his action as the revelation of *God*. Of the God who is described thus we then say that he is gracious, merciful, patient and of great kindness (1.392).

So, in Pannenberg's classification, attributes that are 'ascribed to God on the basis of his action' are those of the divine love, and those that 'define the *subject* of the statements' (1.392) are those of the divine infinity.

God's infinity must be what Pannenberg considers a true one, one that is not limited by its negation but which transcends such a limitation. It is not, then, what Hegel would term "bad infinity" or a variety of the *via negationis* that was often part of treatments of God as first cause. Hence it would be wrong to conceive God's holiness as separation, eternity as timelessness, or omnipresence and omnipotence in negative terms in relation to finitude.

These aspects of God's true infinity find their proper form in the concrete revelation in the Christian God of the Trinity, as we shall see, taking them in reverse order. Firstly, Pannenberg says that God's omnipotence 'means first that [God's] power knows no limits' (1.416). Yet it would be wrong, he thinks, to believe that this entails an 'abstract idea of

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[15] We are summarising 1.392-396.

unlimited power.' Such views fit neither the biblical witness nor – and this is the point Pannenberg is most keen to stress here – the structure of the true Infinite. Along the lines of bad infinity they view God's power in antithesis to others who have power, since on this view that which rules is always tied to the antithesis to its object.

What is required, therefore, is an omnipotence that is not threatened by the existence of creatures, but enables and wills it. This is provided by the trinitarian construal. Pannenberg writes,

> 'The power of God over his creation as the transcendent Father finds completion only through the work of the Son and Spirit because only thus is it freed from the one-sided antithesis of the one who determines and that which is determined, and God's identity in his will for creation is led to its goal' (1.445).

Importantly, this trinitarian omnipotence is not tied to the antithesis to its object. But what is perhaps of even greater importance for Pannenberg is that this trinitarian omnipotence allows room for the independent existence of the creature. This is the case not only in the original production of the created world, but most strikingly in its deliverance where we see the intractable commitment of divine omnipotence to creaturely independence. For God's delivering encounter with the apostate creature is not 'with power and holiness', but

> 'through the eternal Son, who in consequence of his self-distinction from the Father takes the place of the creature and becomes man so as to overcome the assertion of the creature's independence in the position of the creature itself, i.e., without violating its independence' (1.421).

Second, God's omnipresence means neither the extension of the divine essence across the whole world nor corporeal limitation where God cannot be simultaneously present to things in different places. Rather, it is His presence that transcends all that He has made, permeating and comprehending all things, i.e., His presence 'to all things at the place of their existence,' His filling heaven and earth (1.410). For it to be a *divine* omnipresence it must be an omnipresence that is truly infinite or, in the words of the patristic dictum, God must comprehend all things without being comprehended by any.

According to Pannenberg, to say, 'Precisely as the one who incommensurably transcends his creation, God is still present to even the least of his creatures' (1.412), is to require a

concept of God that is trinitarian. For it is only the doctrine of the Trinity that 'permits us so to unite God's transcendence as Father and his immanence in and with his creatures through Son and Spirit,' so that 'the permanent distinction between God and creature is upheld' (1.445). This doctrine, with its notions of the consubstantiality and perichoresis of the three persons enables 'the Father, notwithstanding his transcendence [to be] viewed as present and close to believers through the Son and Spirit.' As with the other attributes we consider in this section 'the trinitarian life of God in his economy proves to be the true infinity of his omnipresence' (1.415)

Third, Pannenberg's understanding both of the nature of God's infinity and the scriptural witness leads him to a specific view of the divine eternity. He rejects the Platonic view of time as the antithesis to change of what is eternal and always the same. For, although it 'agreed with the one aspect of the biblical witness to God's eternity' i.e., that God is unchangeably Himself, nevertheless it did not agree 'with the thought that God as always the same embraces all time and has all temporal things present to him. Platonic eternity bears no relation to time' (1.403). Instead, he prefers the more positive relating of the two, advocated by Plotinus and Boethius, eternity being the presupposition of time.

This 'real relation of God to time,' Pannenberg states, 'demands the doctrine of the Trinity,' i.e., 'an "order and succession" in the trinitarian life of God which includes a "before" and "after"' (1.405). It is this trinitarian construal that provides 'paradigmatic illustration and actualization of the structure of the true Infinite [i.e., eternity] which is not just opposed to the finite [i.e., time] but also embraces the antithesis' (1.408). For, while many have asserted a positive relationship of eternity to time, Pannenberg claims that those who omit a trinitarian construal fall into difficulties. Either, like Tillich, they cannot express the difference of the eternal God from the temporality of creatures or the eternal movement of their incorporation into God's eternal present, and eternity and time are thereby collapsed. Or, like Plotinus, they can portray the emergence of time from eternity only mythically as the fall of the soul from original unity (1.407-408),[16] and so time loses its positive significance. God is eternal, therefore, because in His triune differentiation He is His own future and is not

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[16] Pannenberg here cites Plotinus *Enneads* 3.7.1.

subject to the march of time, and we who are bound to the temporal process can only look forward to the time when we shall share that future with Him.

Finally, God's holiness too should not, in Pannenberg's view, be considered as bad infinity, as mere separation from the world. It is 'truly infinite,' he says, 'for it is opposed to the profane, yet it also enters the profane world, penetrates it and makes it holy.' For, 'the holiness of God both opposes the profane world and embraces it, bringing it into fellowship with the holy God.' And to be this truly infinite holiness, it cannot be the mere separation or negation of creaturely profanity, but must transcend its own antithesis to what is not holy. And, according to Pannenberg, this invading and transforming holiness is actualised in the work of the Son and Spirit. That is, it too is a trinitarian possibility:

> 'According to the NT message the holiness that invades the world is mediated by Jesus Christ. It is also the work of the Spirit...who is called the Holy Spirit because he is the Spirit of the holy God. We also see the structure of the ...(1.400).

In discussion of this attribute at least, there are problems with the trinitarian construal. As regards the presentation in *ST* chapter 6, he does not seem to have demonstrated adequately that there is 'a structural affinity between what the Bible says about the holiness of God and the concept of the true Infinite' (1.400).

The first is a tendency to describe God as subject to some impersonal process, such as Webster has detected. As he puts it:

> The absence of language of holiness as willed relation is striking here; Pannenberg's talk of "the essence of God as Spirit" which expresses "the fact that the transcendent God himself is characterized by a vital movement which causes him to invade what is different from himself and to give it a share in his own life" moves in a rather different direction.'[17]

The uncritical reliance on Hegelian dialectic here – unlike most other references to Hegel in *ST* – compounds the problem here, which is intensified yet more by the second difficulty.

A key component of theological grammar is that it is specifically and only the *sinful* world that God is ever opposed to, not the *profane* world. Pannenberg is confusing two sorts of concepts here. On the one hand there are concepts from the OT, those of holiness and

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[17] J. Webster *Holiness* (London: SCM, 2003), p.110, quoting 1.400.

uncleanness where God's holiness is opposed not to creatureliness itself but only to creatureliness *in its sin*. On the other there are concepts from comparative religion, namely those of the sacred and the profane where there is no distinction made between fallen and unfallen. If it is the witness of Scripture that God's holiness was *never* in opposition to creatureliness *per se*, and if it is the case that God's holy opposition to sin is *never* transcended but it is sin itself that has been done away with on the cross, it would seem that at least this attribute is an ill-fitting match for the structure of the true Infinite.

Rightly we should draw attention to a weakness at this point, as has Webster, and seek a revision along the lines suggested here. Yet, is there an even more telling revision? For, may we even detect such a correction from Pannenberg himself later on in *ST*? He writes:

> The participation of creatures in the eternity of God is possible...only on the condition of a radical change, not only because of the taking up of time into the eternal simultaneity of the divine life, but also and above all because of the sin that goes along with our being in time, the sin of separation from God and of the antagonism of creatures among themselves (3.607).

There remains, however, no explicit criticism of these earlier remarks in any of Pannenberg's subsequent writing and a very generous reading might want to argue that the remarks in *ST* volume 3 may have nevertheless been intended in *ST* volume 1. Evidence for such a generous reading is exceptionally thin, however, and the discussion of the divine holiness would seem to be a peculiarly blatant example of how the structure of the True Infinite can be ill suited to the character of the trinitarian God.

Since God in his true infinity overcomes what separates us from him and brings us into free fellowship with him, all these attributes of the divine infinity are in the final analysis concrete expressions of the divine love. And herewith we come to the final point for consideration.

5. God is to be understood as being love rather than as merely having love, for it is as the trinitarian God of love that the divine spirit finds its actualisation.

In discussing the love of God at the conclusion of his treatment of the one God Pannenberg is seeking to show, at least in preliminary terms, how the trinitarian God of love is both the realisation of the truly infinite God and the proper and reasonable explanation for our experience of the world in all its travails. The former theme we have dealt with already, whereas the latter will have to be postponed in our study. Here we shall deal with another key element of the discussion, namely Pannenberg's trinitarian interpretation of the divine love insofar as it avoids pre-trinitarian conceptions of the divine unity and thereby answers Feuerbach's critique.

Pannenberg takes up Regin Prenter's interpretation of 1 John 4's "God is love", that the saying tells us more than merely that God loved the world.[18] The biblical saying is not describing a quality or attribute of God but his essence or nature of love, so the trinitarian persons do not merely *have* love as a common quality or mind; they *are* love. But, Pannenberg asks, 'what does this imply for the relation between the divine love and the personality of the three persons?' (1.425).

Developing points made in the derivation of the divine trinity from the *summum bonum*, Pannenberg believes that on this understanding Christian theology has to discard talk of God as the loving subject, or, as Eberhard Juengel puts it, "he who eternally loves himself." It is of course true, he argues that each of the trinitarian persons loves the other, but

> 'if the one loves self in the other instead of loving the other as other, then love falls short of the full self-giving which is the condition that the one who loves be given self afresh in the responsive love of the one who is loved' (1.426).

This ties in, of course, with a point we have seen Pannenberg making before, namely the eschewal of pre-trinitarian conceptions of the divine unity and of the idea of an omnipotent subjectivity floating free behind the God of salvation. By calling love God's very essence, not an attribute, Pannenberg feels he has found the necessary answer to Feuerbach's objection that Christianity gives love the rank merely of a predicate and not a subject:

> 'In Feuerbach's polemics this subject [who loves] is the omnipotent God as an infinite spiritual essence which is as such a person, the personal God...Does it not do this if it thinks of God as the one who is the trinitarian subject?'

'But', Pannenberg contends,

> 'Feuerbach's criticism was aimed precisely against giving the essence of love a subject instead of viewing it as itself essence or substance...In this regard Feuerbach's criticism is in line with the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, which does not make the unity of the divine essence a fourth hypostasis alongside Father, Son and Spirit' (1.425).

Like other elements of his treatment of the one God, Pannenberg presses his arguments far more than is necessary. To counteract those that say that God has love, rather than is it, one need not reply that God is love rather than has it. Defenders of the theologies Pannenberg is here attacking could offer the reminder that the tradition has invariably maintained that God is what He has, and what God is and has is according to His will and in His act. There would be no distinction therefore between on the one hand God's having love or being loving, and on the other His being love.

To retain this traditional affirmation would not only resist Feuerbach's critique, but it would also more clearly distance talk of God's love from impersonal processes than his talk of God's infinity achieved. It is, nevertheless, our view that despite the initial appearance of some of his language Pannenberg more successfully manages to avoid subjecting God to such universal processes. We therefore have to judge Paul Molnar's critique at this point as exaggerated. He writes:

> 'God is no longer the free subject of his own internal and external relations: "the divine essence overarches each personality" and "love is a power which shows itself in those who love...Persons do not have power over love. It rises above them and thereby gives them their self-hood...This applies especially to the trinitarian life of God." Here it appears that love is the subject, God's freedom to love is the predicate and God's love for us is conditional.'[19]

It is true that such references might suggest that what is being appealed to is, if not a fourth *hypostasis*, then at least a principle lurking behind the three persons of revelation. Indeed in other trinitarian theologies it would be – but not in the context of Pannenberg's account of the persons' ec-static existence and divine spirituality. That is, we have seen

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[18] See his "Der Gott der Liebe ist. Das Verhaeltnis der Gotteslehre zur Christologie" *TLZ* 96 (1971), pp.401-413.
[19] Molnar (2002), p.153, citing 1.430 and 426-427.

already that Pannenberg's thesis of the persons' mutual dependence for their deity differs from the notion that each person has a direct share in their common deity. And we have seen that the divine essence as spirit is a field that overarches each of the three persons considered as individuals, but nevertheless exists only in them. Hence in this respect at least Pannenberg has not lapsed into modalism. 'Love,' he says,

> 'is no more a separate subject than the Spirit apart from the three persons. As the one and only essence of God it has its existence in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (1.428).

Such a point might well be easier to articulate using more traditional trinitarian concepts. But nevertheless Pannenberg still makes the point.

When in *ST* chapter 6 Pannenberg devotes space to explicating what it means that God is love, it is in terms of the trinitarian act of salvation in Jesus Christ along the lines discussed in the previous chapter (1.428-432). In this way the way the three persons exist ec-statically, i.e., only in relation to one another, with their interrelations being constitutive for both their personality and the deity in which they are the sole participants. And the love that is their essence is played out in humanity's incorporation into the divine life through Jesus Christ. For,

> 'The thought of love makes it possible conceptually to link the unity of the divine essence with God's existence and qualities and hence to link the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity in the distinctiveness of their structure and basis. This is because the thought of divine love shows itself to be of trinitarian structure, so that we can think of the trinitarian life of God as an unfolding of his love' (1.447).

So then, just as God's spirituality is not a substance separate from the trinitarian persons but is the divine essence permeating all the persons do and are, in the same way too love is the concrete form of this divine spirituality. 'It is,' he writes,

> 'the eternal power and deity which lives in the Father, Son and Spirit though their relations and which constitutes the unity of the one God in the communion of these three persons' (1.428).

That God is spirit, then, necessarily implies that He is love. And since this love, which is the trinitarian essence, is concrete, it is realised and known in the action of the divine economy (1.448).

In our survey of Pannenberg's trinitarian handling of the divine essence and attributes, we have noted five implications that the priority of the Trinity has on how Pannenberg treats the divine nature. Firstly, we should think of His unity as hidden, since its revelation is not fulfilled until the completion of God's economic action. Second, we should think of Him as infinite rather than as first cause, since such a concept better allows God to be defined by his trinitarian action in and to the world, rather than by deductions from creaturely phenomena. Third, since we must understand God as the irreducibly triune agent, we should speak of Him as field rather than as a mind to describe how He is spirit. Fourth, the attributes of God's true infinity, i.e., one that is not the negation of creaturely limits but is their overcoming, find their concrete form not in a monadic divine other, but in the trinitarian God's loving approach. Fifth and finally, God is understood as being love rather than as merely having love, for it is as the trinitarian God of love – and not as a unitary subject – that the divine spirit finds its actualisation. And to this triune love which is actualised in the divine economy we now turn in the following chapters of our study.

Chapter Three

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF CREATION

'Any serious talk about God implies the requirement that we think of reality and the world as determined by God and established through him' (2.xv). It involves a twin task. Firstly, Pannenberg outlines the Christian understanding of creation and of humanity, which comprises the chapter 7's first section 'Creation as the Act of God.' Second, he investigates the explanatory power of the Christian teaching as he has presented it, given what we know about the world; we see this complementary task in the second section 'The World of Creatures.' For Pannenberg, both tasks are necessary, and what we learn about the one should influence our conclusions about the other. There is, then, a 'mutual conditioning,' according to which,

> If, in the light of the Christian doctrine of God, the world and human life are seen to be grounded in God, then conversely we have to consider a reformulation of the Christian understanding of God from the standpoint of experience of the world and humanity and the related reflection (2.xiv)

If the Christian account of the world and its origins is to have plausibility and persuasive force, both the world and the human being have to be seen as phenomena that are best explained by the existence and action of the Christian God, as being the product of this all-determining reality. As he writes in *AC*,

> For us, the Christian tradition's claim that the God of Jesus is true can only be decided...once we have settled whether the God of Jesus is able to shed light on the problems of our contemporary life, and whether the reality in which we live, and which we ourselves are, can therefore be shown to be determined by him.[1]

For 'the doctrine of creation in all its parts serves as a consolidation and corroboration of belief in God.'[2]

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[1] p. 33.
[2] *IST*, p.39.

Moreover, since for Pannenberg, the One who determines and establishes both the world and man is *trinitarian* God and not a pre-trinitarian monad, any serious talk about the trinitarian God implies also that we think of the reality of the world as determined and established by this same trinitarian God. It is this theme that we shall pursue in the next two chapters of this study, tracing how Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity informs and shapes his doctrines of creation and of humanity.

What effect the specifically trinitarian God has on the content of Pannenberg's doctrine of creation will be considered in the following five theses.

1. Because God as the triune God is already active in and towards Himself, creation is a truly free action of God

Pannenberg wishes neither to separate economic and immanent trinities nor to conflate them in such a way that God's action in history loses its significance. Similarly, he affirms creation as a real and free act of God. It is real because God for us is not a different God from God in Himself: if God is active in the economy, He is so also in His immanent life. And it is free because God does not need anything outside Himself to be truly Himself: God's act of creation therefore is not a necessary part of his self-realisation, as if without the world he was lacking something in his own inner life. It is, rather, the expression of free, spontaneous love.

Creation is an *action*

'Does there have to be a world of creatures for God to be thought of as active?' Such a question Pannenberg answers firmly in the negative. And his 'No!' arises from the fact of God's self-sufficient inner-trinitarian fullness. 'Christian doctrine denies [that God requires a creation to be active] by describing the trinitarian relations between Father, Son and Spirit as themselves actions.' God as triune is already active within Himself and the actions in the creation of the world 'are added as actions of a different kind, as outward actions' (2.1). Creation can be an action of God, therefore, because in creating,

the God who is already active toward Himself in His trinitarian relations becomes active in a new way outside Himself.

Here Pannenberg adopts a specifically Western approach to his trinitarian doctrine of creation. The Greek fathers, he notes, 'used the term "activity" (*energeia*) only for the common outward action of the three persons with reference to the world of creatures' (2.1), and not for the immanent relations between the trinitarian persons. The early Western theologians Ambrose and Augustine did not go so far as to call the inner-triune relations actions, but it became common at least from Richard of St. Victor onwards.[3] The latter 'made procession, which was until then used more specifically for the Holy Spirit, a general term for all the trinitarian processes' (2.2), and in Aquinas it was even used for God's outward action.[4]

Pannenberg notes the difficulty arising from using the term "action" for both God's inner life and His deeds in the economy, namely the suspicion that 'the trinitarian persons are independent of one another in their mutual acts in the same way that the Creator God is independent of the world that he creates.' Yet notwithstanding this, the Western approach is preferred.

On the one hand, 'it was a gain for the actual understanding of God that God should be thought of as active' (2.4), since it avoids the Palamist notion of uncreated divine works by linking the concept of God's eternal activity in Himself to the trinitarian relations. God's action in the economy therefore is not a change in God; rather, in creating the world God does not turn from inactivity to activity, but is active in a new way. On the other hand, the Western view better explains the economic actions of the individual persons. It does this

> by enabling us to think in trinitarian fashion of the relation of the one God to the world, i.e., as Creator, Reconciler and Consummator, so that the reciprocal action of persons always lies beyond the relation of the one God to creatures and the relation of creatures to the one God. The action of the one God in relation to the world is not wholly different from the action in his trinitarian life (2.5).

Rather, the latter is the source of and determinative basis for the former.

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[3] Ambrose *De fide* 4.8.90, and Augustine *De Trinitate* 1.4 affirm the inseparability of God's outward action. Richard of St. Victor's extension of the use of the term "procession" is to be found in his *De Trinitate* 5.6ff.

[4] *STh*1.27.1c.

Here as elsewhere Pannenberg seeks to define our knowledge of the triune God as far as possible by his actions within the economy, while seeking to resist any implication that before and apart from His economic action there is some lack within God. On Pannenberg's interpretation God is the active God in salvation history because He is this already in His immanent inner-trinitarian life, and thus the conflation of economic and immanent trinities is avoided. So, Pannenberg not only differentiates 'the inseparable unity of the trinitarian persons in their outward action relative to the world and the distinctiveness of their inner activities relative to one another,' but also adds Quenstedt's remark that 'we cannot equate inner and outer works of the Trinity because the latter, even though inner acts of the subject, relate to an outer object' (2.3).

If we should understand God's outward action as indissolubly trinitarian there arises the question concerning 'the unity and inner cohesion of the different phases of the saving economy of the divine action' (2.6). This is a relevant issue here, and indeed Pannenberg begins to discuss this explicitly with reference to creation in the very first subsection of chapter 7 within the discussion of the nature of God's external creative action. For our purposes, however, we shall postpone this discussion until thesis 5, where it is possible to show more clearly how what Pannenberg has to say here relates to his broader understanding of the creative action of the triune God.

The effect of this argument is to demonstrate a correspondence between God's inner and outer life that is both founded on and explicated in terms of God's triunity. In particular, this action has a real and active multiplicity that is proper to God's being, not only *pro nobis* but also *in se*.

Creation is a *free* action

'The world,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'is the product of an act of God. To say this is to make a momentous statement about the relation of the world to God and of God to the world. If the world has its origin in a free act of God, it does not emanate by necessity from the divine essence or belong by necessity to the deity of God. It might not have existed. Its existence is thus contingent' (2.1).

The act of creation, therefore, is not necessary; God did it freely.

This free act of creation of a world that need never have existed, 'derives,' Pannenberg says, 'from the freedom of God in his trinitarian life' (2.9). For, if God is already active *ad intra*, this 'of itself...means that God does not need the world in order to be active. He is in himself the living God in the mutual relations of Father, Son and Spirit' (2.4-5). So, as Pannenberg also writes, 'the origin of the world as creation by God's free action tells us that even if the world had not come into existence, nothing would have been lacking in the deity of God' (2.9). Also, despite the obvious incommensurability, this utter freedom of the external actions flows from the real freedom of the internal actions:

> 'The action of the trinitarian persons in their mutual relations,' he says, 'is also free, but not in the sense that the Father might cease to beget the Son, that the Son might reject the Father's will, or that the Spirit might glorify something other than the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father' (2.9).

God's trinitarian fullness is the ground for affirming creation as an act of pure love, rather than as a necessity or a making good of a lack within God. It is from this trinitarian context that Pannenberg understands, and offers a robust defence of, the early Christian formula "creation out of nothing", which rules out any dualistic or monistic view of the origin of the world. Rejected herewith are not only Plato's idea of the shaping of formless matter, but also process philosophy and process theology which are guilty of the former error, according to which the world is 'the result of any working of God with another principle' (2.15). Views guilty of the latter error, according to which 'the divine freedom...falls victim to an iron necessity governing the cosmic process subsequent to its origin' (2.17) included ancient views of *heimarmene*, Stoicism, Averroism, Stoicism, and – significantly - Hegel. As he summarises,

> The trinitarian explication of the concept of divine love avoids both these misconceptions. Hence the biblical concept of creation needs a trinitarian basis if it is to be proof against misunderstandings and shortsighted criticism (2.19).

And Pannenberg argues that when theologians have tended to undermine the utter freedom of God's creation, this has been closely connected to a deficiently trinitarian understanding. So, for instance, Pannenberg's defence of creation from nothing leads him to criticise Barth's equation of nothing with 'opposition and resistance,'[5] as well as Moltmann's different interpretation of "nothing," which identifies it as the space that God gives creatures as he himself withdraws. Pannenberg explicitly mentions that the latter

idea (and no doubt the former too implicitly) is a thesis which, with its dualistic overtones, 'the trinitarian explication of the doctrine of creation must replace' (2.15).[6]

No less than with notions of "nothingness", a rigorously trinitarian account of creation will not compromise the divine freedom with faulty accounts of election and of God's glory. As for election, Pannenberg criticises those who adopt the idea of a divine decree to avoid misunderstandings of creation as divine caprice. So, when Moltmann resurrects Reformed notions of 'the "union of nature and will in the concept of the eternal decree"' (2.20), Pannenberg worries that the creative act 'seems to be only the necessary expression of God's eternal nature' (2.21). Barth's doctrine of election fares better with its more explicit christological basis,[7] but for Pannenberg 'theology has to develop the thought that the creation of the world is an expression of the love of God...along trinitarian lines, and to seek here an answer to the question regarding the freedom of the divine act of creation' (2.21).

And as for seeing God's glory as the overriding motivation for creation, this too – at least in many of its traditional formulations – fails to respect the freedom of God's trinitarian fullness. Such ideas use teleological language that subjects God's creative action to a goal that He does not yet possess. This, Pannenberg says, 'is not in keeping with God's eternal self-identity as though his identity were the result of his participation in the life of his creatures.' Rather, 'it is only on the condition of the trinitarian God's participation in the life of his creatures' (2.57) that one can properly speak of any purpose or temporal extension in God's creation, because they are the mere overflow of the eternal trinitarian fullness.

2. Creation is to be appropriated to the work of the Father, but not in such a way as to compromise the distinct work of the Son and Spirit

By the term "appropriation" theologians have usually meant the attribution of particular divine actions within the economy of salvation to individual persons within the Trinity,

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[5] See Barth *CD* III/3, pp. 289-368.
[6] *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), pp.86-93.

even though such acts nevertheless are themselves indivisible acts of all three.[8] So, commonly, creation has been appropriated to the Father, reconciliation to the Son and consummation to the Holy Spirit. So Johannes Heidegger writes:

> According then to the order of subsistence and action, just as the Father is *a se*, exists and operates through Son and H. Spirit, the Son exists and operates *a Patre* through the H. Spirit, the H. Spirit exists and operates *a Patre et Filio*. So, suitably to this order of subsistence and action *ad intra*, there is also assigned to the Father *ad extra* the inauguration of things, or creation; to the Son their continuation, or redemption; to the H. Spirit their consummation, or sanctification and regeneration.[9]

Such appropriations, then, are "appropriate" to the person concerned because such actions befit their eternal relations to the other persons. So, creation is a fitting action for the Father because he is the source of deity, and so on.

Pannenberg also adopts this common practice, both affirming the indivisibility of God's outward works while also appropriating those same works severally.[10] Yet in expounding a trinitarian theology that eschews the unitarian tendencies of subordinationism and modalism associated with seeing God after the analogy of mind and love, these appropriations take on greater importance as Pannenberg profiles in greater detail the specific identity of all three persons.

Our present topic of God's creative activity Pannenberg understands – like traditional treatments – as especially the work of the Father.

> 'God is Father as the origin of creatures in their contingency by granting them existence, caring for them, and making possible their continued life and independence' (2.21).

Yet, his stress is different. So, whereas traditional treatments would emphasise the Father as the origin and initiator,[11] Pannenberg emphasises the Father's love and

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[7] Barth's doctrine of election is to be found in *CD* II/2, pp.3-506, which Pannenberg criticises in "Erwaehlung III. Dogmatisch," *RGG*, II [3rd ed. 1958], pp.614-621.
[8] For a typical definition see Aquinas *De veritate* qu. 7, art. 3.
[9] *Corpus Theologiae* (Zurich, 1700) IV, 45, cited in H. Heppe *Reformed Dogmatics* (ed. E. Bizer, tr. G. T. Thomson) (London: Harper Collins, 1950), p.118.
[10] See 3.551-555 on the Spirit. Perhaps surprisingly, in *ST* at least, there is no explicit endorsement of the idea of seeing the work of reconciliation as appropriated to the Son. It seems best, however, to infer that this appropriation to the second person is assumed throughout – this is after all the most obvious appropriation since only one of the Trinity became flesh, – albeit that the term is not explicitly used. This seems to be indicated on 2.6.
[11] Heppe, p.191, citing M. F. Wendelin, *Collatio Doctrinae Christianae reformatorum et Lutheranorum*, (Kassel, 1660). p.104: 'Usually along with the statement that "creation is the work of

care. 'From all eternity the Father loves the Son' (2.21) and is the free and loving origin of the Son, and so we are right to understand the free and loving origin of the created order as specifically His doing. As Pannenberg goes on to say,

> The love of the Father is directed not merely to the Son but also to each of his creatures. But the turning of the Father to each of his creatures in its distinctiveness is always mediated through the Son. The Father's love for his creatures is not in competition with the love with which from all eternity he loves the Son. The creatures are objects of the Father's love as they are drawn into his eternal turning to the Son (2.21).

Why is this? It must be said that this is a matter of emphasis, and Pannenberg is certainly not denying that the Father is the source of the created realm, nor even in any outright way that He is the source of deity either. But it would be wrong to think of this as merely a matter of emphasis, since at least two other reasons present themselves.

The first reason is Pannenberg's doctrine that the three persons depend reciprocally upon one another. As we have seen, he detects within the tradition an overemphasis on the Father as the source of deity, which both distorts the biblical witness and tends towards modalist and subordinationist notions. What Pannenberg considers to be an over-emphasis on the Father as the sole source of the divine life *ad intra* within much trinitarian theology, is reflected in his revision of statements concerning the Father as the sole source of the divine action *ad extra*.

The second reason, and the one to the fore in this context, is that Pannenberg wishes to make room for the distinct action of the second and third members of the Trinity in the work of creation, not just the first. At least in the context of Pannenberg's doctrine of creation this is the more significant reason. He writes:

> On the Christian view creation...does not derive from a necessity that flows one-sidedly from the Father...but from the free agreement of the Son with the Father through the Spirit (2.31).

And this greater profiling of the action of Son and Spirit is evident throughout the chapter, constituting one of its main themes.

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the entire Trinity" it is further insisted that "as God the Father is the *fons sanctae Trinitatis* or *divinitatis*, so too He is the *fons* of all the things which are from God and outside God".

Yet for all the attention paid to the other two persons, Pannenberg is clear that creation is primarily the work of the Father. The Son is not the prime initiator of creation, but is its mediator fulfilling the will of the Father – hence the Christian church

> 'confesses the Father as the Creator of the world, not the Son, for the only content of the work of the Son is to serve the Father and to bring in his kingdom. The Father thus acts as Creator through the Son' (2.29-30).

Just how that is, we now go on to discover

3. **The Son is the Logos and Mediator of creation, not as the timeless principle of wisdom, but as the one distinguishes Himself from the Father and is thus the basis for the existence of the creature. His self-distinction not only is free and gives rise to creation's independence, but also is its ontic basis and gives rise to its pluriformity.**

In both this point and the next it is very important to realise that Pannenberg is seeking to free trinitarian thinking from the intellectual understandings of God we have noted before. Such considerations underlie his remarks on the particular role of Son and Spirit in creation. So, we look first at the rival understanding he wishes to avoid.

'The theological tradition,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'has explained the participation of the eternal Son in the act of creation with the help of the idea that the Logos corresponds to the divine intellect, which from all eternity contains within itself the images of things, the ideas' (2.25).

The example Pannenberg refers to most often, is Aquinas. Aquinas writes,

> 'the Son proceeds as the word of the intellect' and according as the creature 'has a form and species, it represents the Word as the form of the thing made by art is from the conception of the craftsman.'[12]

So, in affirming that God is the exemplar cause of all things, Aquinas asserts that such an exemplar cause are none other than the ideas in the divine intelligence that are contained in the Son of God:

> [T]hings made by nature receive determinate forms. This determination of forms must be reduced to the divine wisdom as its first principle, for the divine wisdom devised the order of the universe, which order consists in the variety of things.

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[12] *STh* 1.45.7.

> And therefore we must say that in the divine wisdom [which is, according to qu. 45, art. 7 ad. 6, the Son, 'through which an intelligent cause operates'] are the types of all things, which types we have called ideas – i.e., exemplar forms existing in the divine mind. And these ideas, though multiplied by their relations to things, in reality are not apart from the divine essence, according as the likeness to that essence can be shared diversely by different things.[13]

Pannenberg detects significant problems with this approach. Not only does it imply 'a much too anthropomorphic distinguishing and relating of understanding and will in God,' but it also fails to do justice to the contingency and historicity of what God creates (2.27). And, at least since medieval Scholasticism[14] whose doctrine of divine knowledge led to a linking of the thought of ideas in God to the unity of the divine essence, it has tended to flatten out the trinitarian distinctions. So, although Aquinas 'did, of course, relate the creative action of God to the person of the Son, for God creates all things by his Word,' nevertheless,

> on his view...this means that the Son, like the Spirit, shares in the act of creation only inasmuch as the processions of these persons are linked to the essential qualities of the divine knowing and willing. The basic idea is that creation as an outward act is to be ascribed to the trinitarian God as subject, so that we need not differentiate the specific contributions of the individual divine persons.

Christ's creative mediatorship, then, while not denied, is stripped of all function (2.26).

Pannenberg's doctrine of creation retains the concept of Logos, but in a new way that articulates the distinct and important role of the Son. For Pannenberg, the Son is the Logos or mediator of creation, since as the One who distinguishes Himself from the Father He is the source, ground and principle of all that is different from God, i.e., creation.

In seeking to fill out this alternative version of the Son's mediation Pannenberg takes up Hegel's insight that the Son is to be understood as the principle of otherness, of difference in the Trinity.[15] For Pannenberg, such an account has distinct advantages over the classical intellectualist account. On the one hand, it does not restrict the Logos' action to the beginning of the creative process. Rather, he believes, it

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[13] *STh*1 qu.44, art.3.
[14] Pannenberg does not detect such drastic unitarian tendencies in earlier periods, even when intellectual analogies were used (2.25-26 on Maximus and Augustine).

> 'not only describes the transition from the divine life to the existence of the finite but also offers a reason for the multiplicity of the finite inasmuch as everything finite has the characteristic of being other vis-à-vis the other.'

For, unlike the static picture of mental ideas, Pannenberg finds here 'a productive principle behind the emergence of ever new distinctions and therefore of ever new and different forms of finite existence' (2.27-28). On the other hand, it does not restrict the Logos' mediation to the end of creation. This is an advance on the deficient trinitarian construals both of Barth, for whom it 'is simply... with a view to the Son that the Father created us' (2.30),[16] and of Pannenberg's own *JGM*,[17] which understands the Son's mediation primarily in a "final sense," i.e., 'creation will be consummated only in Jesus Christ' (2.24). Rather, any final ordering of creation to Christ

> presupposes that creatures already have the origin of their existence and nature in the Son. Otherwise the final summing up of all things in the Son...would be external to the things themselves, so that it would not be the definitive fulfillment of their own distinctive being (2.25).

There are four elements to Pannenberg's understanding of the Son's mediation in creation. Firstly, His mediation involves His free decision. Just as the Son freely acts in His eternal self-distinction from the Father so in His creative work He acts with genuine and distinct freedom. Creation does not proceed necessarily from the fatherly love of God that is oriented from all eternity to the Son, as can be implied by certain accounts of creation that work with an intellectual doctrine of the Trinity. Rather,

> The Father sends the Son but thereby lays on him no compulsion to follow a command of fatherly love as though by outer constraint. In a free act of fulfilling his sonship, the Son himself moves out of the divine unity by letting the Father alone be the one God' (2.30)

Hence, second, that creation's ongoing independent existence is grounded in the Son's self-distinction. Here we deal with some material that overlaps with the following thesis, but God's continuing preservation of the creature has a special ground in the Son's

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[15] Hegel develops this thesis in his 1832 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896).
[16] It is here that Salai Hla Aung's claim that Pannenberg has progressed beyond Barth's trinitarian view of creation is most convincing in *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: S. Roederer Verlag, 1998), pp.275-276.
[17] pp.390-397.

eternal trinitarian relations. Though Himself God and remaining ever in His eternal fellowship with the Father,

> nevertheless, in the event of the incarnation, in the relation of Jesus of Nazareth to his heavenly father, the Son moved out of the unity of the Godhead. In his awareness of being a *mere human*, a creature, in his self-distinction from the Father, Jesus recognized the Father as the one God *over against* himself. In so doing he gave validity to the independent existence of other creatures alongside himself. This was part of the humility of the recognition and acceptance of creatureliness (2. 29).

That is, the Son's eternal self-distinction whereby He recognises the Father alone as God makes possible the self-distinction from God of the creature He assumes, i.e. the "mere human" Jesus of Nazareth. And in Him, who is the Logos of all creation and the universal creature, all creation shares this self-distinction from the Father and enjoys independent existence "over against" God. Moreover, on the other side of the relation, as the Father loves the Son as the one who is distinct from Himself, so the creature finds its ongoing basis not in some abstract decree but in the Father's eternal love for that which, in His Son, is distinct from Himself. So, the creature's ongoing independent existence is a trinitarian possibility both because the Son draws creation into His own eternal relationship with the Father and because the Father loves the creature by its inclusion into His eternal love for His Son.

The third point requires a lengthier explanation. It is this: the relationship of Jesus to God His Father is not just the revelation of His eternal sonship, but it is also the *ontic* basis for the existence of the creature in its distinction from the Creator.

What does this ontic basis mean? By the term 'Logos' theologians have generally understood either the declarative word that reveals to us what God is like, or the rational order or structure of the universe. Pannenberg affirms both.[18] But he also intends a third meaning, namely that the Logos assumes a part of creation and in this obedience of the Son the structure and destiny of creation finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This third meaning we examine here.

Pannenberg writes:

> 'if the eternal Son in the humility of his self-distinction from the Father moves out of the unity of the deity by letting the Father alone be God, then the

> creature emerges over against the Father, the creature for whom the relation to the Father and Creator is fundamental, i.e., the human creature' (2.22).

The Son, then, who is other than the Father, is an Other that takes creaturely fleshly form in Jesus Christ. This inner triune possibility of the divine freedom, in Pannenberg's view, is the basis of the existence of creatures. The *Logos incarnandus* infinitely and eternally predates the *cosmos creatus*. Creation exists really and independently alongside God, not eternally but in the free external action of God, for the very reason that there already exists internally and eternally within God a real and independent being who freely assumes a creaturely form in the course of the history of creation.

And the creation's ontic basis in the Son comprehends much more than just its origin. The Son is also the eschatological ground of our creaturely reality, since it is in Him that we will achieve the fullness of our created destiny, namely to share in the Son's free and independent fellowship with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Our true being, which can only be constituted in the light of, and ultimately by, the consummation, is grounded in the eternal Son of God who has become the eschatological second Adam and who is thus the ontic basis of all creaturely existence. Pannenberg writes,

> The creaturely existence of Jesus actualizes in the course of his life the cosmic structure and destiny of all creaturely reality as in distinction from creation Jesus *assumes* his distinction from God the Father and totally affirms and accepts himself as God's creature, and God as his Father (2.23-24).

Our existence and that of all creation, therefore, is intimately connected to the taking shape of the Logos in the world. That is, it means the incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth.

For Pannenberg, then, this means that the creative working of the Logos is *concrete*, not hovering above our reality but entering it transforming presence. Creation means Christmas. Hence Pannenberg talks about the Logos 'taking shape' or 'taking form' in the act of creation. He does so in a general way, since the existence of the whole created order is always the continuing taking form of the One who is other in God, giving creatures continued independent existence according to His order of relations with God and with other creatures. He also does so in a specific way, since the cosmic structure and

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[18] 2.22, 2.29.

destiny of all creaturely reality is achieved by *this one man* Jesus of Nazareth. The Logos is not something to be discovered or located outside Jesus, but is the pre-existent Son who is *ensarkos*, really, powerfully and dynamically present in this individual historical human being. For,

> '[o]nly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth...is the Logos fully one with the particular logos of each creature, namely with the "flesh" of each individual person' (2.63).

The taking shape of the Logos in the whole sweep of creation, therefore, relies on and springs from this foundational and unique intra-trinitarian self-distinction, that became the taking form of the Son of God in the incarnation.

That Pannenberg sees the work of the Logos as concrete and not abstract has at least two consequences. Firstly, the work of the Logos in creation is not a static or abstract natural law. Such a scientific description must, he says, 'be distinguished from the way in which the divine Logos is the unity of creation in its plurality' (2.63). It also falls victim to a deficient christology, which sees the Son's creative work in creation abstractly – as a timeless universal principle –, and not concretely – the active, involved, dynamic actuality revealed in Jesus. For, 'in the concept of the divine Logos we cannot separate the eternal dynamic of self-distinction (the *logos asarkos*) from its actualization in Jesus Christ (the *logos ensarkos*).' The Logos

> 'is active in the world only as he brings forth the particular *logoi* of specific creatures. Only in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, of course, is the Logos fully one with the particular *logos* of each creature, namely, with the "flesh" of each individual person' (2.63).

Creation, then, is not in the grip of determinism's iron necessity or deism's regulated insulation. This is not to deny that there is in fact a natural law to the created universe, but it is to be understood in the light of the becoming Word, Jesus Christ. It is not a timeless structure or a theoretical system, but 'the principle of the concrete, historically unfolded order of the world, the principle of the unity of its history' (2.63).

Second, the natural order is anthropocentric. For the 'goal' of the creation is its reconciliation in Christ, which 'is achieved only at the human stage,' i.e., by the incarnation. 'All creation,' Pannenberg writes, is waiting

> 'for the manifestation of divine sonship in the human race, for thereby the corruptibility from which all creatures suffer will be vanquished...If, however,

> this suffering is overcome by the adoption of humans into the filial relation of Jesus to the Father, the relation of non-human creatures to their Creator thereby also comes to fulfilment (2.73).

So, because of the incarnation 'we humans can be called the goal of creation only because in us, or more precisely in Jesus of Nazareth, the fellowship of the creature with the Creator comes to fulfillment as the Son of God comes among us as a man' (2.74).[19]

Creation, therefore, requires humanity, before and without which its destiny of fellowship with God 'has not yet found direct fulfilment in the existence of each individual creature.' Rather it awaits 'the human stage in the sequence of creaturely forms' since only then 'did express distinction come to be seen between God and all creaturely reality.' Yet this is not man in general that is awaited, 'but only the last eschatological man who appeared in the person of Jesus Christ will be taken up by the Spirit into the fellowship of the Son with the Father (2.138). And the "sonship" of us humans is the expectation of creation only as He and we in Him distinguish ourselves from the Father in perfect, loving obedience.

Fourth and finally, the Son's self-distinction from the Father explains the plurality and unity within the created order. As the Son distinguishes Himself from God and can assume the conditions of finitude, so He is the principle of a creation that is finite and distinct. But necessarily, for Pannenberg, 'it belongs to the *finitude* of a thing, to be *limited by something else*, and not just by the Infinite, but also by other finite things' (2.61). This plurality is not without any order or unity, however, since the Logos is not only the productive principle of diversity but is also the origin of each individual creature in its distinctiveness and of the order of relations between the creatures.

Every part of creation is particular, since it originates from the eternal principle of difference and otherness. And every part of creation has a common source and destiny, since not only does it come from the Logos but also, in all its particularity, it is taken up by Him to share in the eternal glorifying of the Father. For,

> As the Son glorifies the Father by distinguishing himself from the Father, yet owing himself wholly to the Father even in his distinctiveness, so it is the destiny of each creature to honor the Father as its Creator in its own creaturely

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[19] Whence Pannenberg finds preliminary confirmation the "anthropic principle," whether in the weaker version of R. Dicke *Introduction to Quantum Mechanics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1961) or the stronger versions of J. Barrow and F. Tipler *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: OUP, 1986).

> distinctiveness. In this way each creature shares in the filial relation of the Logos to the Father (2.64).

Each creature thus shares in the filial relation of the Logos, who as the principle of otherness generates the rich and multifaceted otherness – from God and from other creatures – that is the natural universe.

Yet the Son is not just the principle of distinction, but is Himself the link with that which is distinct. He is the Logos, too as the 'interrelation' of creatures. For

> He gathers the[m] into the order that is posited by their distinctions and relations and brings them together through himself (Eph. 1:10) for participation in his fellowship with the Father (2.32).

As indicated above, this is a *concrete* order of plurality and unity. On the one hand, the Logos is not merely transcendent to the creatures, but His order inheres in the creatures themselves. This order of the Logos, therefore, is not detached from the plurality and individuality of creatures and does not treat creatures as 'interchangeable' or as 'no more than indifferent examples of the [natural] law' (2.62-63). On the other hand, this must involve the dynamic becoming of the concrete incarnation and destiny of the universal creature, Jesus Christ, in whom all of creation is taken up and brought to completion. For,

> The creaturely existence of Jesus actualizes in the course of his life the cosmic structure and destiny of all creaturely reality as in distinction from creation Jesus *assumes* his distinction from God the Father and totally affirms and accepts himself as God's creature, and God as his Father (2.23-24).

This plurality and order, then, is neither external nor atemporal, but is actualised as the Logos assumes creaturely existence in the human Jesus.

As the living One in whom all created reality finds its source and rich diversity, the Son is also the one in whom all things are to be gathered into their common destiny. As the One who pours out the Spirit the Father has given Him, this summing up of all things is the ultimate creative work of the Son. For,

> [The Logos] gathers the creatures into the order that is posited by their distinctions and relations and brings them together through himself (Eph. 1:10) for participation in his fellowship with the Father. But this takes place only through the Spirit, for the creative work of the Son is linked at every point to that of the Spirit (2.32).

The interrelation of all things in the Logos, therefore, has an eschatological dimension. It necessarily has a pneumatological dimension as well, since to participate in the fellowship of the divine life requires the One who is Himself the communion of Father and Son. But that would be to trespass onto the territory of our next thesis on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Yet before moving on to the Spirit, we shall note Colin Gunton's appraisal of this part of *ST*. Despite his praise for the marked trinitarian profile, Gunton is critical of Pannenberg's core notion of the Son's self-distinction:

> The chief question to be asked of this is whether it attributes too great a role to God the Son in initiating creation, rather than as the one through whom God creates the world. (Is there a trace of tritheism?) There is a danger that the idea of Jesus' self-distinction from the Father will override the more central notion of his being sent by the Father and being what he is in free obedience to his Father's will. In the latter case, Jesus Christ remains the mediator of the Father's act, but as the one who is the eternal object of the Father's love and so *other* than the Father, and accordingly the one who enables the created order, too, to be genuinely other, though also other in inextricable relation.[20]

Pannenberg can answer this charge. For one thing, *ST* does not minimise the Father's initiative, since despite the increased emphasis on the free and distinct role of the Son in creation, the Father remains the initiator and the Son the mediator – 'the Father sends the Son' (2.30). And for another, Gunton's distinction between Jesus' self-distinction and His obedience does not become in Pannenberg a separation. He affirms both. The Son, he says,

> 'moves out of the deity in execution of the mission that he is given by the Father...Nevertheless, the Son's moving out of the deity to become the Logos of a world of creatures must be regarded no less as an expression of his own free decision' (2.29-30).

Gunton's perceived danger, then, is averted.

4. The Holy Spirit, as the medium of fellowship of the eternal triune relation of God the Father and the Son who distinguishes Himself from Him, enables both the

> transcendent God to be present to His creatures and the creature to participate in the life of God as He causes them to share in the self-distinction of the Logos.

'Even as the Son moves out of the unity of deity, he is still united with the Father by the Spirit,' who 'links the two in free agreement' (2.30). The Spirit, we have learnt, is for Pannenberg the fellowship of the Son, who receives the Spirit, with the Father, who gives Him. He is therefore the communion of what is distinct, between the Son who distinguishes Himself from God and the Father Himself. He makes possible communion between what is distinct, and He is the medium of this dynamic and vital relationship. For Pannenberg ascribes 'to the third person...both the positive relation, in the sense of fellowship of what is distinct, and also the associated dynamic, whether in the trinitarian life of God or in creation' (2.84)

This internal activity of the Holy Spirit becomes external and takes form in the economy. It does so firstly in Jesus Christ, whose life in the Spirit has a double aspect. On the one hand, by the Spirit Jesus is in the most intimate fellowship with the Father, and on the other this intimacy occurs as Christ so radically distinguishes Himself from the Father. Since in Jesus we learn the activity of the Spirit both in the inner divine life and in the rest of God's creation, in the same way the creative work of the Spirit also has these two aspects, fellowship - the principle of the creative presence of the transcendent God with his creatures – and movement – the medium of the participation of the creatures in the divine life, and therefore in life as such (2.32).

For Pannenberg, this work of link and movement brings out the specificity of the Holy Spirit as a distinct centre of action within the Godhead. He is not just God's immanence within the created order or a field of divine essentiality, since this work of link and movement is distinct from that of Father and Son. 'Certainly the difference of creatures among themselves and from God,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'cannot be thought of without reference to the one who is thus distinct. But the same applies to the Son's own relation to the Father' (2.84).

That is, the Spirit's specificity holds both within God's immanence and in the economy

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[20] *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.157.

The creative work of the Spirit as fellowship means that creatures participate in the life of God, the life without which they would slip back into corruption. The Spirit is 'the life-giving principle, to which all creatures owe life, movement and activity' (2.76), for according to scripture animals, plants and humans, indeed all of creation,[21] are recipients of the Life-Giver. When He is given, there is life; when He is taken away, there is life no more (2.76-77). For, the creature is limited and finite, and to be maintained in existence and reach its fulfilled destiny, it must participate in the 'unrestricted duration,' who is God. 'This life of creatures as participation in God that transcends their own finitude is the special work of the Spirit in creation' (2.33). Pannenberg does not thereby deny creation's real distinction from God, for as the Spirit of the Father and the Son He is by definition the One who creates and maintains fellowship between what is distinct. Creation participates in the divine life 'only to the extent that self-distinction from God (and therefore the Son) takes shape in them' (2.34).

The Spirit's role in creation also means movement. Key for Pannenberg's thought here is his understanding of the semantic range of the biblical words for the Spirit, *ruach* and *pneuma*. He does not deny any reference to the divine Spirit and opt instead for "wind" or "breath", but he does not want to set the two in opposition either. So, then, for instance, 'as regards Gen. 1:2...we should not distinguish wind and breath. Plainly we must associate the reference to the Spirit of God with the creative speaking of God that immediately follows. What we have here is the breath of God that stands in affinity to his speaking' (2.78). The Spirit's action, therefore, means movement, reflecting the dynamic vitality of God's inner life.

This movement of the Spirit is the ground for the whole dynamic of all creation in its progress towards the divine destiny. It has two main aspects.

Firstly, the dynamic of the Spirit is to internalise the Logos in each of the creatures, which gives more precise and trinitarian form to the Spirit's work of fellowship. He enables the proper relation of self-distinction from God that is the taking shape of the Son within creation. So, as the one who became human in Jesus of Nazareth was Himself the Logos of all creation, so the Spirit enables all creatures to grow into the order, diversity and destiny purposed for them.

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[21] Pannenberg has in mind Ps. 104 and Gen. 1&2.

For Pannenberg, this means: 'The immanent dynamic of the life of creation may be more precisely described as a process of the increasing *internalizing* of the *self-transcendence* of creatures' (2.33). Pannenberg detects several traces of this internalisation of creaturely self-transcendence in the natural world. Not only does inorganic matter have 'inner relation to the future of its own changes and also to its spatial environment', but this can also be seen 'in the developmental thrust of plants and the instinctive life of animals' (2.33). Indeed, this "history of nature" in which the Spirit enables creatures to transcend their own finitude and to develop more complex and lasting forms is another way for Pannenberg to talk of evolution. The Spirit is the field of the future, who raised Jesus from the dead to new eschatological life; so also His life-giving work in creating is always in preparation for, and in anticipation of, the coming consummation.[22] This is not a power immanent to the creature, but requires an "ec-static" movement on our part as befits those who have to transcend themselves to participate in the divine life.

Second, Pannenberg considers the notion of "field" particularly helpful in articulating the dynamic nature of the Spirit's work in creation as the living breath of God. It is certainly preferable to intellectual understandings, which 'have been intellectualized in Christian theology under the influence of Platonic philosophy.'[23] Indeed, the whole presentation is an effort to recast the Spirit's work purged of this intellectualising Platonic inheritance.

Pannenberg's chief culprit is Origen. Hence, as in his discussion of the creative work of the Son, it is not surprising to find Pannenberg drawing on an understanding of the divine Spirit that was taken up by theologians before Origen's intellectualist turn. The main objection is that although Origen argued effectively against its materialist absurdities, in fact the Stoic conception of pneuma as a most subtle element like air was nevertheless 'much closer to the biblical language than Origen's identification of *pneuma* with intelligence.'[24] For, Pannenberg thinks that the idea of the field of force, which he goes on to advocate as a more appropriate concept for understanding the Spirit's creative working, can be purged of the material connotations it had in Stoic form and that scandalised Origen (2.81-82).

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[22] This point is made on 2.98 and 2.102.
[23] *IST*, p.43.
[24] *IST*, pp.43-44

Some remarks are necessary here on what Pannenberg means by field of force and second on what theological importance he accords it, not least because it has provoked controversy among Pannenberg's interpreters. So, firstly, by field of force Pannenberg is referring to the understanding in modern times (particularly associated with Michael Faraday) that nonmaterial forces cause material changes in the world. This view is contrary to earlier understandings of force, advocated by post-Newtonian physicists such as Ernst Mach and Heinrich Hertz, which reduced the concept of force to bodies and their inert mass. Naturally this had anti-religious ramifications, since, if any force can be sufficiently and solely explained by physical bodies, talk about God's activity in the world becomes meaningless superfluity. The conclusions of Faraday have particular significance in this context, because, Pannenberg says, 'Faraday regarded bodies themselves as forms of forces that for their part are no longer qualities of bodies but independent realities that are "givens" for bodily phenomena. He now viewed these forces as fields that occupy space in order to avoid the problems involved in the idea of force working at a distance' (2.80). This is the meaning that Pannenberg finds suggestive for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in creation.

As for its theological importance, Pannenberg states simply: 'The biblical idea of spirit as dynamic movement of air in the forms of wind, storm or breath is closer to the modern scientific concept of a field of force than to the notion of intellect.'[25] That is, he finds it to have more biblical warrant than the mainstream understanding of the tradition. And unlike the intellectualist approach, Pannenberg sees the notion of field as more fruitful for denoting the Spirit's active involvement in creation. The identification of Spirit and mind had, for Pannenberg, the 'fateful effect... that the relation of the divine Spirit to the material world and to the process of its creation was obscured.' In addition this led to a compartmentalising of the Spirit's action. So, in the same passage Pannenberg notes a second effect: the divine Spirit was also separated from the created Spirit, the human soul. Consequently, the divine Spirit could be reduced almost to a principle of supernatural experience and insight.'[26] And, given Pannenberg's stated aim to provide an account of the triune creation which will find hints of confirmation in the world as we know it, the understanding of the Spirit in terms of field has enlightening explanatory

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[25] *IST*, p.44.
[26] *IST*, p.44.

power. Such considerations, he writes, 'help to show that the theologically based idea of a dynamic of the divine Spirit working creatively in all events as the power of the future is by no means alien to a philosophy of nature' (2.101)

Innovative though it may be, it should be remembered that Pannenberg's use of field theory here is for a specific purpose and is to be accorded more modest significance than some of his commentators suggest. In particular one should note that this approach arises out of material theological reasons. He is insistent that this is not a mere case of 'bad apologetics.' Rather, it is the result of the biblical interpretation offered in the pages of *ST* that provide a theological rationale for such a revision of terms. 'Only then,' he says, 'is [theology] justified in developing such concepts in a way appropriate to its own themes and independently of scientific usage' (2.83). So, in the 1989 article reprinted in *Beginning With the End*,[27] Pannenberg detects an oversight in some of the comment on his scientific thinking by writers such as Philip Hefner and Jeffrey Wicken:[28]

> 'The theological use and reinterpretation of the field concept was not aimed at such applications, however. I decided to take the risk of using that concept in theology *for strictly theological reasons*; that is, in order to obtain a better understanding than the traditional one for the idea of God as spirit.'[29]

Such critiques as Pannenberg is answering here miss the theological context and theological rationale for the adoption of the language of field theory.[30] This in our view explains Wicken's false allegation that the application of the field concept "physicalizes" God.[31]

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[27] See W. Pannenberg "Theological Appropriation of Scientific Understandings: Response to Hefner, Wicken, Eaves, and Tipler," *Zygon* 24.2, June 1989, 255-71. See also *ST* 2.101 and C. Albright (ed.) *Beginning with the End: God, Science and Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), pp.425ff.

[28] J. S. Wicken "Theology and Science in the Evolving Cosmos: A Need for Dialogue," *Zygon* 23.1, March 1988.

[29] Albright (ed.), p.428. Emphasis added.

[30] In a recent colloquium in Oxford Pannenberg stated to a group of experts in the field of science and religion that such tight identifications of the meaning of terms used in contemporary scientific discourse and their application within his own theology are inappropriate since he is – in his own words – a "scientific dilettante". Moreover, at the same event Pannenberg said that he had originally been unconvinced of this use of field theory to understand divine action in creation, but changed his mind on reading Max Jammer, presumably his *Das Problem des Raumes: Die Entwicklung der Raumtheorien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1953) and *Concepts of Force* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), although when writing on the topic he also cites Jammer's articles "Feld/Feldtheorie" and "Kraft" in Gruender and Eisler (eds.) *Historisches Woerterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe, 1971-) as well as some other authors.

[31] Wicken (1988), p.52.

And for the same reason it is also wrong to assume that the use of field theory necessarily depersonalises the Spirit's work in creation. Aung, for instance,[32] states, 'When [Pannenberg] speaks about field he is viewing God in an impersonal sense.'[33] On 2.83 Pannenberg emphasises clearly: 'the *person* of the Holy Spirit is one of the personal concretions of the essence of God as Spirit in distinction from the Father and the Son;' and, 'The *person* of the Holy Spirit is not himself to be understood as the field but as a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality.'[34] Grenz's summation rightly understands the relative modesty of Pannenberg's use of the concept, when he writes,

> his use of field theory to describe the work of the Spirit in creation does not require that he carry the impersonal nature of the cosmic field to his understanding of the Spirit, because Pannenberg uses the concept of the cosmic field as a clarifying model that has acknowledged shortcomings.[35]

Pannenberg's highly developed treatment of the Spirit's work in creation, much more developed than most other treatments, cannot be dismissed so easily.

5. Creation, understood in trinitarian terms, cannot concern merely the world's beginning, but refers to all world time.

Pannenberg is aware that 'the traditional path' of theology 'speak[s] of creation more narrowly in distinction from reconciliation and consummation' (2.8). That he departs from this has significant bearing on how he understands the work of the Trinity, the effects of which we shall examine partly here and partly in later chapters.[36] Pannenberg includes within his doctrine of creation detailed discussion of God's ongoing work in maintaining the universe He has created and in bringing it to the goal He has appointed it. In particular he develops the doctrines of preservation, concursus and world government

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[32] See also Gunton (1998), p.161.
[33] Aung, p.219, with reference not to the divine essence in *ST* chapter 6 but in particular to chapter 7's treatment of creation. Aung seems to say this on the basis of a less than clearly argued correspondence with Whitehead's metaphysics.
[34] Emphasis retained from the German.
[35] Grenz, p. 166.
[36] In particular it effects the treatment of the newness of the work of Son and Spirit, which we shall consider in more detail when we look at Pannenberg's treatment of the Spirit's activity in kingdom and church.

along with their indispensable precondition, i.e., God's original creation which has occurred not in, but with, time. And we shall look at each of these three in turn before going on to see how they are given trinitarian shape in Pannenberg's scheme, and how they necessarily follow from explicating creation as a genuinely triune action of God.

Creation, Pannenberg believes, inevitably involves *preservation*, and even then such preservation should not be understood as the mere maintenance of an original order set once for all. Rather, 'it is a living occurrence, continued creation, a constantly new creative fashioning that goes beyond what was given existence originally' (2.34). And it is this creative action of God which continues to break into the world He has first created, that leads Pannenberg to advocate seeing His preserving work as *creatio continuata* or *creatio continua*. *Concursus*, on the other hand, goes one step further, having to do with God's 'participation in the independence of [the] lives [of his creatures], even though the intentions of creaturely conduct may deviate from the norm of the relation of the Son to the Father' (2.58). The creatures that God has created and preserved are not left to themselves in their activities, but only in such a way that there is a divine omnicausality that does not exclude creaturely independence. And *world government* has to do with the future fulfillment to which all this is leading – it is 'providence in its orientation to a goal' (2.57). God, the Creator and Ruler of what He has made will bring the creation into perfect communion with Himself. This is the goal of the world government, and its power is the fact that this divine intention is superior and sovereign over any and every abuse of our created independence.

Now why and in what way do these notions of preservation, concursus and world government arise from a trinitarian understanding of creation? We have had cause to touch on some of them already especially regarding the work of Son and Spirit. For Pannenberg, their dynamic action involves not the mere preservation of an originally existing order, but the continuing production of new forms of being. The work of God in creating, as our survey of Pannenberg has already indicated, involves not just the mere positing of original form and matter, but includes both the taking shape of the Word and the moving of the Spirit in space and time.

Of course there are other factors too, which influence Pannenberg's discussion here, yet of those others which are distinctively trinitarian we shall note four. First, one must go on to consider God's continuing rule of the world because its creation is a single act of

the triune God. That there is such a single divine act needs to be argued for, not just stated, as Pannenberg notes scripture's talk of a plurality of divine acts that should not be reduced merely to how it appears to finite creatures. 'It is proper to God's action as well' (2.8), he affirms, emphasising that divine actions such as the incarnation and reconciliation are really something new. Against certain reductive understandings of divine simplicity, then, Pannenberg understands God's action as a complex and differentiated unity, revealing anew in finite temporality the surprising richness of the life of eternal Trinity.[37]

The Trinity is, for Pannenberg, both the problem and the resolution of the unity of God's action. On the one hand he writes, 'With the trinitarian mediation of God's outward action a...question arises concerning the unity and inner cohesion of the different phases of the saving economy of the divine action.' Thus, that God acts as three centres of action not just in the initial creation by the Father, but also in the preservation and reconciliation that are the work of the Son and the Spirit's work of consummation and world government, provides an irreducible plurality to the divine activity. On the other hand, he continues, 'The unity of action, which finally rests on the unity of the acting subject, links a variety of elements into a unity of process in the course of events' (2.6). That this threefold God is in fact one is the ultimate basis for seeing the extension of divine activity as itself a unitary and unified action. Just as to speak of God, then, one cannot simply say the Father and not go on to speak of the Son and Spirit, so to speak of God's action, one likewise cannot simply say creation and not go on to speak of preservation and world government or reconciliation and consummation. So, Pannenberg concludes,

> The trinitarian exposition of the concept of creation makes it possible, then, to relate what is said about creation to the totality of the world from the standpoint of its duration in time. It does not concern merely the world's beginning...Creation, preservation and overruling thus form a unity whose structural relation has yet to be defined more closely.

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[37] Hence Pannenberg summarises: '[W]e might say very generally that what is new is that the sequence of the divine action, and therefore its multiplicity, is grounded in the trinitarian plurality of the divine life. Therefore the unity of this divine action in the economy of God's history with his creation is not lost by reason of the plurality of events' (2.8-9).

But since one cannot consider God properly unless one pays sufficient attention to Father, Son and Spirit, and since these three are the one God, their particular works are also their common work. And so, Pannenberg continues, it is by the doctrine of the Trinity that

> 'all three are set in relation to the saving economy of the divine action in the world. God's action, then, is seen to be a single act that embraces the whole cosmic process, that includes at the same time many individual acts and phases' (2.34-35).

For, 'the sequence of the divine action, and therefore its multiplicity, is grounded in the trinitarian plurality of the divine life' (2.8-9).

Second, God's ongoing creative activity is not determined by the nature of the world, but is a continuing act of free love because it flows from God's trinitarian fullness. This is closely connected to the previous point, but it has something distinct to say. There we saw that as a component element of the one God's external action in the economy creation, if conceived on its own, gives only a partial and distorted account of the triune God's action and self-revelation. Here, however, we note that since all this economic action is an overflow of what God already has in His trinitarian life, it remains gratuitous.[38]

We shall examine two important consequences. The one is Pannenberg's correction of earlier theology, the other later commentators' attempted correction of Pannenberg.

First come some critical remarks from Pannenberg about statements of older Protestant dogmaticians. Their 'idea of a direct self-reference of the divine action whereby God is its final goal was adopted in the form of the statement that the glory of God and its recognition and praising by creatures is the goal of creation' (2.56).[39] Pannenberg cannot accept such an interpretation of the goal of God's world government. To attribute to God's creating and providential acting a goal that God does not already have in his eternal immanent life not only makes God dependent on the world, but it also makes the creation a means to achieving an end God does not already have. The eternal Trinity as Pannenberg has explicated is the bulwark against such instrumental

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[38] There is, then, some overlap with what thesis 1 had to say about God's freedom in the original act of creation, but here we need to make clear that for Pannenberg, albeit in a different way and under different conditions, God's triune nature means that He remains free in His ongoing dealings with the world,

[39] As typical examples on the Lutheran side Pannenberg notes D. Hollaz, *Examen*, q 14, Calov, *Systema*, pp. 900, 1141 and J. Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, II, 15, n.85.

understandings of creation that seek some higher *telos* for creation than the overflow of divine love. As he writes,

> [T]he creature was not created in order that God should receive glory from it. God does not need this, for he is already God in himself from all eternity. He does not need to become God through his action or much less become sure of his deity in the mirror of creaturely praise...As the activation and expression of his free love, God's creative action is oriented wholly to creatures. They are both the object and goal of creation. Herein is his glory as Creator, the glory of the Father, who is glorified by the Son and by the Spirit in creatures (2.56-57).

Second is some recent criticism, which differs from the interpretation offered here, that Pannenberg undermines the freedom of God's outward action as soon as He has created the world. A typical sentence that is taken to be problematic can be found in *ST* chapter 7:

> 'though God is independent in himself, yet with the act of creation and in the course of the history of his creatures he makes himself dependent on creaturely conditions for the manifestation of his Son in the relation of Jesus to the Father' (2.7).

Nor is this affirmation of God's dependence on the world, once created, an exception, but is part of a recurring theme in his Pannenberg's theology. A number of similar sounding statements can be found, in particular in his discussion of the incarnation as God's self-actualisation in 2.389-391.

This has led a number of recent scholars to criticise Pannenberg at this point. Detecting a tension in Pannenberg's thought exemplified in phrases like the above cited 'though God is independent...yet he makes himself dependent', Martinez-Camino, for instance, finds, if not a contradiction, then at least an insufficient explanation. He writes:

> the relationship between the debatability of God in the world and his omnipotence...is given no real explanation. God is the subject of his actualisation, which, the creation of a world once given, cannot happen without this world, but only with and in it precisely for the sake of God's true infinity and power. But if God is in fact actually infinite and omnipotent, can he at the same time be thought of as "at stake"?

He therefore detects in Pannenberg's position 'a wavering between a positivity in the immanent life of God and a potentialising in the economy of his relationship with the world.'[40]

Stated thus, the critique does have a fair degree of plausibility, yet it needs to be stated with greater precision. It is possible, if not to offer a defence of Pannenberg here, then at least to provide clarifications which blunt much of Martinez-Camino's criticism. It is true that such quotations from Pannenberg do appear deterministic, and one may wonder whether the dependence on Hegel might not be significant after all. Yet an apologia for Pannenberg need not rely solely on the counter-intuitive nature of a claim that a theologian as careful as Pannenberg should fail to see the incompatibility of statements of God's dependence on creaturely conditions with a robust account of creation from nothing. Two clarifications go some way to exonerating Pannenberg.

The first is that those of Pannenberg's statements which sound deterministic have to be understood in the context of his revised concept of divine personality. We find that those statements of God's historical becoming or His dependence on the world that sound most Hegelian are made in the context of some radical correction of the terminology usually employed. We noted, for instance, that Pannenberg is often at pains to differentiate himself from Hegel, whom in many ways he sees as the apotheosis of the Western tradition of seeing God along the lines of subjectivity or mind, with its anthropomorphic talk of God's will or intention. And so Pannenberg often juxtaposes Hegelian sounding statements of divine dependence alongside very un-Hegelian notions of personality, which he strips of those supposedly anthropomorphising elements. Deterministic readings of Pannenberg can arise, therefore, by focussing on certain remarks he makes to the exclusion of, rather than alongside, other emphases.

Particularly instructive is a passage early on in *ST* chapter 7. There Pannenberg does indeed say that God 'makes himself dependent on creaturely conditions.' Nevertheless, this statement is prefaced by a revised understanding of the ends and means of God's action. So, having affirmed both the unity of God's action and the unity of the acting subject, on which it rests, Pannenberg distinguishes two types of action that take place in time. On the one hand there are actions, in which '*the one who acts* has a place in time and with the goals of the action aims at a future distinct from the present.' And on the

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[40] Martinez-Camino, pp. 146-147.

other, there are actions, in which 'only the *object* of the action has its existence in time and takes shape under the conditions of temporal processes.' He continues, 'We may properly speak of God's purposeful action only in the second sense, otherwise we would 'make God a needy and dependent being' (2.6). That is, God, the infinite and eternal subject, acts in time in a way utterly different from all finite subjects. When He acts externally, the first type of action does not apply since 'the one who acts' is not bound by His place in time and does not aim at a future that He lacks in the present. Rather, it is only the *object*, namely the economy of salvation, which has a temporal form. For finite creatures, on the other hand, any act necessarily entails that they must use as means to the achievement of their goals conditions and posited for them. But for God to act entails no lack on His part or any need for external means. God's means are self-posited and self-conditioned, and so free, because they are the overflow of the free relations of the inner-trinitarian divine life.

The second is that one should note that Pannenberg's discussion operates with two standpoints, the one of God's eternal immanence, the other of our finite temporality, which is the theatre of His economic action. As we saw in the first chapter, one misreads Pannenberg if one takes him to be baldly stating that God becomes Himself only as a result of history or that he depends on the world. Such readings overlook the fact 'that from the point of view of God's eternity history is always seen as a whole, in the light of its ultimate completion.'[41] Hence when Pannenberg says that with the creation of the world God makes himself dependent on creaturely processes it is for the reason that God Himself links the realisation of His will to the sweep of His economy. Yet this does not mean His freedom is compromised. On this he is adamant, saying,

> It is...wrong to say that with the transition from God's eternity to the act of creation and the economy of salvation no immanent trinity remains or that the immanent trinity is completely dissolved into the historical process, into the economic trinity. Quite to the contrary: in the face of the ambiguities of history the contrast to God's eternity, to the life of the immanent trinity, is intensified, a contrast that will be resolved only in the end, when in the kingdom of God the creation will be so transformed as to participate in the eternal life of the trinity. In the light of the eschatological future, the process of the divine economy in the history of salvation is not a process of divine *kenosis*, but a process of God's

> spontaneous and gracious offering himself for communion with his creatures so that they may participate in his eternal life.[42]

That is, ambiguities remain from our standpoint, on the side of the realisation of the economy, where God, in order to reveal Himself and execute His will, acts and communicates in the form of human history. Yet, from the point of view of God's eternity this is always a free and fulfilled reality, which contrasts with how it appears to us, whose standpoint is an as yet uncompleted drama. Before and after creation, without and with the world, God's action is ever 'spontaneous and gracious'.

Pannenberg's trinitarian account of divine action, then, emphasises God's triune reality and fullness, because what He is for us in the economy He already is and has in His trinitarian immanence. It is only in the context of such remarks, then, that Pannenberg utters the phrase that otherwise might seem problematic that God 'makes himself dependent on creaturely conditions'. As he expresses the matter later on in chapter 7,

> The idea of distance between the goal and the subject of action is not in keeping with God's eternal self-identity as though his identity were the result of his participation in the life of his creatures. The object of the divine will has to be thought of as already realized, even though God ties the realization to the creaturely conditions of creaturely life and conduct. It is only on the condition of the trinitarian God's participation in the life of his creatures, and therefore in the distinction of beginning and end that characterized creaturely life, that we can speak of a differentiation of subject, goal and object in the divine action (2.57).

What Martinez-Camino has termed a 'wavering', therefore, is for Pannenberg the viewing of the same thing, i.e. divine action, on the one hand from the standpoint of creaturely temporality, and on the other from that of divine eternity.

Third, God's ongoing sustaining and directing of the universe is an expression of his inner-triune faithfulness. In the subsection on the divine world government, Pannenberg says that God's governing is an expression not of God's rigid immutability but of His free and constant faithfulness. And this faithfulness of God to His creation has its ultimate origin in His trinitarian life. 'God's faithfulness,' he writes, 'which proceeds from the mutual faithfulness of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son, is the basis of the

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[41] "DEET" p.5.
[42] ibid.p.5.

identity and continuation of his creatures' (2.53). Creatures, as Pannenberg says, are not the direct object of the Father's love and action. Rather, 'only indirectly do they proceed from the self-distinction of the Son from the Father...The Father wills and accepts them as an expression of the overflowing of the divine love with which the Father loves the Son' (2.87).

Rejected herewith are understandings of the creation of the world, such as Hans Blumenberg's, who sees it as an act of pure caprice with no relation to what precedes and follows.[43] The trinitarian refutation of such views is a natural corollary of the point made earlier that the Father's love for us is the same love with which He loves the Son and so shares in its eternal constancy. And our preservation is not self-grounded, but is grounded on the Logos in whom creation is kept in a relation of constant otherness to God.

Fourth and finally, the goal of creation is to be understood in trinitarian terms. Of course, this will be dealt with in much greater detail in a following chapter, but it is nevertheless a constituent part not just of reconciliation and consummation, but of creation as well. In the introduction to volume 2 Pannenberg has already alerted the reader to this indispensable aspect of creation. And this eschatological aspect is not just a brooding and ever-present theme in the first two sections of chapter 7, but it comes to dominate the third section, "Creation and Eschatology." Much of the detail of this section need not concern us here, since trinitarian concerns are not so explicitly to the fore there as elsewhere, and we shall devote greater attention to this topic in chapter 10. Yet here Pannenberg is clear that not only is the goal of creation participation in the Trinity, but the way that goal is reached is also trinitarian. The trinitarian God is not just the One we were created by, He is the One we are created for. Or, as Pannenberg puts it,

> If the destiny of all creaturely occurrence and existence is oriented to fellowship with God himself, then this idea takes the conceptual form of a plan of salvation. At this point the relation of the outward divine action to a goal acquires the form of trinitarian mediation inasmuch as the fellowship of creatures with their Creator is be thought of as a participation in the fellowship of the Son with the Father through the Spirit (2.7)

How Pannenberg understands as specifically trinitarian God's work in accomplishing that goal we shall discover as we investigate his theology in further chapters.

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[43]See Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp.125-226.

Pannenberg's treatment of the doctrine of creation gives perhaps more substance than anywhere else in *ST* to his claim to have written the most trinitarian theology he knows of. As a constructive attempt to arrange scientific and theological material relating to the origin and structure of the created order in terms of the eternal life of the triune God it has few if any rivals in thoroughgoing trinitarian rigour. Not only the positive dogmatic description of creation, but also the dialogue with the conclusions of science are examined in the light of the trinitarian God. Pannenberg's description of God's nature as triune explains how His creative action *ad intra* is genuinely free, since as the triune God He is already active *in se*. Creaturely existence is understood as the work of the Father who is prime originator within and outside the triune life. Creaturely independence and pluriformity are understood as the work of second divine person who is creation's Logos and Mediator as well as its noetic and ontic basis. Creaturely life, its ec-static participation in God and in the rest of creation, is understood as the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal medium of fellowship that makes possible both God's presence with His creatures and the creatures' participation in God. And creation's ongoing development is understood as the process of the Word's taking shape and the Spirit's moving in space and time. In scope – and perhaps in depth too – Pannenberg's trinitarian account of creation may well be the most impressive part of *ST*.

Using a trinitarian framework for the explanation of the natural world and its processes may well arouse the suspicions of some commentators, who fear Pannenberg may be projecting trinitarian categories onto the scientific material. In Pannenberg's defence it should be noted both that he is wary of the 'bad apologetics' we noted before and that his goal is more to offer a plausible account of how the trinitarian God can be the source and sustainer of the universe we live in than to identify natural phenomena with theological terms.

From a dogmatic standpoint, too, questions could be raised. Some have criticised Pannenberg for having too much discontinuity between creation and eschatology.[44] Commenting on such criticisms, Svein Rise not only says that they are misplaced, since

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[44] See Christoph von Schoenborn '"Aporie der Zweinaturenlehre": Ueberlegungen zur Christologie von Wolfhart Pannenberg,' *FZPhTH* (1977), pp.428-445, and Per Lonning *Der begreiflich Unergreifbare. "Sein Gottes" und moderntheologische Denkstrukturen* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986)

'When he affirms that the revelation in Christ is the key to the eschatologically-based ontology, it is Jesus Christ *the mediator of creation* who is involved here,'[45] but he also treats Pannenberg's account as fundamentally correct. We agree with Rise that these misgivings are misplaced, but unlike Rise find Pannenberg's relating of the two still problematic. Our criticisms point in the opposite direction.

If, as Pannenberg seems to suggest, creation means Christmas and the incarnation the completed creation of humanity, there could result the danger that all of God's action in the economy is part of the doctrine of creation. This is the danger that Barth earlier highlighted in when the doctrine of providence is not included as part of the doctrine of creation and becomes confused with God's election to salvation in Christ.[46] Perhaps the greatest difficulty arises when Pannenberg handles the theme of new life in the Spirit, where he cannot easily account for scripture's talk of *new* creation. It is one thing to state that our understanding of God's creation must include the ongoing production of new forms of created life and God's sustaining power, but it is quite another to say that the new thing He does in Jesus Christ is just another chapter of the unfolding of the old thing. It will become evident as we come to Pannenberg's treatment of the new thing, especially the gift of the Spirit, that this is a question he finds difficulty answering.

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[45] S. Rise *The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Lewisten, NY: Mellen, 1997), p.114, emphasis added.
[46] *CD* III/3, pp.3ff.

Chapter Four

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

Any attempt to précis the thought of a significant theologian inevitably involves omissions. Yet, given the very great importance to Pannenberg of the topic of anthropology, we need to offer a special word of explanation for the specific focus on his trinitarian doctrine of humanity in this chapter. The two most important reasons are, firstly, that already much anthropological detail has been outlined in the trinitarian account of creation and, second, that there will be much more to say as Pannenberg delineates the work of the Trinity in reconciliation and glorification. 'A full anthropology,' he explains,

> 'would have to include as well [as a description of our destiny and the situation of our alienation from it] the actualizing of this destiny, which is the theme of God's redeeming work, its appropriation to and by us, and its goal in the eschatological consummation' (2.180).

Our focus here will be the doctrine of humanity Pannenberg develops with particular reference to chapter 8 of *ST*. There is other material, mainly within *ST* which counts as part of an explicitly trinitarian anthropology, such as we have seen in the previous chapter already. And there is a wealth of other material that makes no appeal to trinitarian categories or reasoning (at least not directly), which is specifically devoted to anthropology.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of anthropology in Pannenberg's work. Some remarks from *TuP* are especially instructive:

> 'Today Christian theology too is referred first of all to the basis of anthropology for the proof of the universal human validity of the Christian faith, although this basis is not sufficient for assurance of the truth of the Christian idea of God and His revelation. For the confirmation of the truth of the Christian God it is imperative that world and history can at least be conceived of as His creation and work. But, in turn, to the world and its history belongs humanity, and for this

> reason anthropology remains the first and most pressing topic in relation to which the universal validity of faith in God will have to be demonstrated.'[1]

And the centrality of anthropology to his theological project in general, up to and including the above quotation, is borne out by a survey of Pannenberg's publications. Even before *RaH*, which brought Pannenberg fame early on in his career, he had given a series of radio broadcasts which were subsequently published in English as *What Is Man?*[2] In the meantime he has published several extended treatments of anthropological themes, including *Human Nature, Election and History*[3] and *Sind wir von Natur aus religioes?*[4] as well as some shorter pieces, and most substantially of all, *ATP*, which is the most detailed of all his writings on the topic. The focus of this study on the role the Trinity plays within his mature theology means that this central element within his theological project is necessarily given short shrift. We shall draw on some of the earlier writings too, especially *ATP*, where there is an explicit and complex theology at work, but the more explicit trinitarian focus of his theology is not so evident. Again we rightly rely most of all on *ST*.

In this chapter we shall describe with the help of three theses how Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity affects his theological anthropology. The first is a general and rather negative one that shows what approaches Pannenberg declines to adopt, and why Pannenberg prefers a different tack to a properly trinitarian doctrine of humanity. That is, a trinitarian anthropology cannot mean, for Pannenberg, psychological or social models, but viewing humanity within the general framework of the triune God. The second and third are both more specific and more positive, and outline how the action of Son and Spirit form the indispensable framework for Pannenberg's theological anthropology. In the former we look at the role of the Spirit, whose free life-giving to humanity is the basis of its "spirit." In the latter the image of God is reworked, not in terms of a human faculty, but as human destiny to be conformed to the Son of God.

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[1] *TuP*, pp.359-360, and chapter 12. For a very helpful treatment of the place of anthropology in Pannenberg's theological project as a whole, and the key place it has in the sublation which lies at the heart of the structure of Pannenberg's thought, see Shults.

[2] W. Pannenberg *What Is Man?* (trans. D. Priebe) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). German, *Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart in Lichte der Theologie* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962).

[3] W. Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), subsequently published in German as *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978).

1. **A truly trinitarian doctrine of humanity does not see the Trinity primarily as providing a model for understanding the human mind or human society. Rather the Trinity is the essential framework within which to understand humanity.**

Broadly speaking we can outline three general ways in which theologians have articulated a theological anthropology that is trinitarian. They are firstly the view that the Trinity provides a model for understanding the human mind, secondly the view that the Trinity provides a model for understanding the structure of human society, and third the view that the Trinity provides the general framework within which to understand humanity.[5] One should see Pannenberg as following the third of these approaches.

The first, which we call the psychological view, finds human likeness to the trinitarian God in the differentiation within the human soul. The *locus classicus* for this approach is to be found in Augustine, especially the latter books of his *De Trinitate*, or at least this is how many, including Pannenberg, interpret him.[6] There the psychological approach is developed on the premise – one which Pannenberg would not share[7] – that the highest point of our nature, and that by which humanity excels other animals, 'is in his reason or understanding and in whatever else can be said about the rational or intellectual soul that may belong to what is called mind or consciousness.'[8] And, so this approach argues, Augustine investigates how the faculties of the human mind can have a threefold structure, as befits the part of our nature that is the divine likeness.

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[4] W. Pannenberg *Sind wir von Natur aus religioes?* Schriften der Katholischen Akademie in Bayern 120 (Duesseldorf: Patmos, 1986)

[5] These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Both Augustine (the classic representative of the psychological view, at least as commonly understood) and Moltmann (the classic representative of the social view) also view the Trinity as a general framework within which to construct their doctrines of humanity. For Augustine, see his remarks on the immortality of the body in *De Trinitate* 14.24, and for Moltmann see his discussion of how believers are conformed to the image of the Son in *God in Creation*, pp.242-243. Yet in *ST* at least Pannenberg – in our view rightly – adheres exclusively to the third option.

[6] We are aware of other interpretations of Augustine's intentions here. Nevertheless we represent here the most common interpretation and the one which spawned much of Western dogmatic treatment of the Trinity, regardless of its actual faithfulness to the argument of *De Trinitate*.

[7] Before and since Augustine this view has had an august pedigree. Perhaps without the explicit reference to the Trinity other church fathers had identified the divine image with human reason. We find this both in Clement *Stromateis* 5.94.5 and Origen *De principiis* 1.1.7.24.

[8] *De Trinitate* 15.1.1.

The second, which we call the social view, finds human likeness to the trinitarian God in the relations between persons in human social life. Though there are many advocates of social trinitarianism,[9] probably the name most associated with this approach is Juergen Moltmann. Moltmann's social trinitarianism is well known and can be found throughout his writings, but the most important treatment for how this affects his anthropology is to be found in *God in Creation*. There he writes, 'Human beings are *imago trinitatis* and only correspond to the triune God when they are united with one another.'[10]

At least as Moltmann presents the argument here, there has to be a likeness or analogue to the triune God in humanity, and the Augustinian psychological model is inappropriate. Not only does Moltmann think it 'shows a tendency towards monotheism in the concept of God, and a trend towards individualism in anthropology,'[11] it is, he says, 'a pure analogy of domination,'[12] that is, it accompanies ideologies that practise domination of the soul over the body and of man over woman.

Rather than follow this approach which dominated Western thinking, Moltmann takes up a suggestion from the East, in particular the analogy of Gregory Nazianzen's *Orationes*.[13]

> 'It is not the human individual, all by him- or herself, that corresponds to the triune God – it is not even the first couple, Adam and Eve; it is the family, as the nuclear cell of every human society. Just as the three divine hypostases form a unity by virtue of their common Being, so these three human persons also share the same flesh and blood, and form a single family. In the primal human community of husband, wife and child, the Trinity sees itself reflected and appears on earth.'[14]

Pannenberg adopts neither strategy in his trinitarian anthropology, at least in *ST*. It differs from the psychological approach. We have noted already that Pannenberg

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[9] E.g., the liberation version of Leonardo Boff *Trinity and Society* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1988), esp. p.149, and the more conservative version of John Zizioulas' *Being as Communion* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985).
[10] p.216.
[11] *Ibid.*, p.234.
[12] *Ibid.*, p.240.
[13] This analogy is to be found in *Orationes* 31.11. To what extent these words of Gregory Nazianzen, or indeed any others of the Cappadocian Fathers, accord with Moltmann's interpretation of them is not so straightforward as a reading of Moltmann might suppose. For a helpful discussion see Coakley (2002), pp.109-129.
[14] (1985), p. 235.

criticises the tendency, especially of Western theology, to pattern God after the individual rational subject. He also takes issue with the assumption of the psychological approach that the mind is the highest part of human nature and is somehow more divine than the rest of us. Not only does he say that 'when it is a matter of the advantage of humans over all other creatures, the emphasis is not on intellectual ability' (2.190), but he also maintains:

> 'human reason is not of itself filled with the Spirit. In its creatureliness it needs, like every other vital function, to be quickened by the living power of the Spirit if it is to be active, and it also needs the inspiration that lifts it above its own finitude and that in all its limitation makes it aware of the presence of truth and totality in the individual' (2.197).

It also differs from the approach of social trinitarianism. Although Pannenberg shares with many social trinitarians a concern for drawing theology away from tendencies to speak of the divine unity at the expense of the trinity, whether those tendencies do or do not actually exist, he stops short of advocating trinitarian relations as a blueprint for human society. The Trinity is not, to quote someone else, his "social programme."[15]

It must be admitted that in the past Pannenberg has been attracted to this interpretation of a trinitarian anthropology, and there is some – but only some and that far from sufficient – warrant for ascribing to him the social view.[16] For instance, in *ATP* there are remarks that do seem to point in a social trinitarian direction. The last two pages of the work are the most obvious indication.[17] He writes, 'the image of God in human beings, when viewed from the standpoint of its realization in Jesus Christ, has in fact a "societal structure".'[18] Then he goes on to write a remark that is probably the most social trinitarian of all:

> The correspondence between the image of God in human beings and the Trinitarian life of God is in fact fulfilled in the human community and specifically in the community of God's kingdom, whose King-Messiah is Christ

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[15] The slogan 'The dogma of the Trinity is our social programme' comes originally from Nicholas Fedorov. For a contemporary attempt to restate Fedorov's claim, albeit with qualification, see M. Volf '"The Trinity is Our Social Program": The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement' in *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), pp.403-423.
[16] Anselm Kim, for instance, sees Pannenberg as a social trinitarian.
[17] See in particular *ATP*, pp.530ff.
[18] *ATP*, p.531.

> the Servant and in which all dominion of human beings over one another will be eliminated.[19]

Unsurprisingly, there seems to be dependence on Moltmann here. Not only is the language and content of what Pannenberg says highly reminiscent of Moltmann, but there are also two explicit references to his works.[20]

Yet, by the time of the writing of *ST* there seems to have been some cooling in Pannenberg's enthusiasm for this approach. Pannenberg still holds to the view stated in *ATP* that our eschatological destiny is one 'in which all dominion of human beings over one another will be eliminated.' Yet he will not go as far as Moltmann and advocate an end to relationships of super- and subordination. So in *ST* Pannenberg takes issue with Moltmann's idea of a partnership of mutual influencing between body and soul. Not only does this, in Pannenberg's view, entail far too ideal a notion of harmony and agreement, but it is founded on a faulty conception of the Trinity. 'As regards intra-trinitarian relations,' he writes,

> We cannot reject out of hand the thought of the Father's rule, to which the Son obediently subjects himself, without also ignoring basic NT statements, and especially the fundamental concept of a kingdom of God. The important point is that the monarchy of the Father is mediated through the free obedience of the Son (2.201).

Nor will Pannenberg countenance an obvious mirroring of triune relationships in human ones. One no longer reads, for instance, of 'the correspondence between the image of God in human beings and the Trinitarian life of God.'

Two other points show Pannenberg's distance from the social view. The first is the distinction he makes between divine and human personhood. 1.430-1 is where Pannenberg sounds at his most social trinitarian in *ST*, noting that 'the argument that the trinitarian concept of person has no relation to the modern view is mistaken.' Yet he notes two important differences that distance his view from social trinitarianism. The one is that 'being a human person is not so exclusively constituted by the relation to one or two other persons as it is in the trinitarian life of God.' The other follows, namely that 'in

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[19] *ATP*, p.532.

[20] The works of Moltmann that Pannenberg refers to are, firstly, a then as yet unpublished lecture which explained the destiny of human beings to a community based on the image of God as originating in the trinitarian community in God, and, second, his *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (tr. M. Kohl), (London: SCM, 1977).

human self-awareness the human I and the human self are different,' whereas in the divine life the self is realised already.

The second, and even more explicit point, is his rejection of the attempt to see relations between human persons as mirroring trinitarian relations. We shall note two instances of this rejection. The one is Pannenberg's taking issue with the attempts of Bonhoeffer and Barth,[21] who from the 'Let *us*' of Gen. 1:26 deduced that ' humankind is the image of God in the plurality of co-human encounter in its basic form as the distinction and relation of male and female.' This is a faulty approach, Pannenberg believes, since,

> 'If we want to agree... that the sexual relation corresponds to the trinitarian relation of the Father and the Son, then we must subordinate woman to man as Barth subordinates the Son to the Father. The story, however, implies an equality of man and woman in principle inasmuch as the divine likeness applies to both, irrespective of sexual distinction' (2.205-206).[22]

The other has to do with relations within the church. Commenting on the *communio* structure of the church, Pannenberg criticises those who use the trinity as a model that the church has to reflect in an order of hierarchy. 'This danger,' he writes, 'becomes particularly acute when the hierarchical *communio* is viewed as a reflection of the trinitarian persons in the unity of the divine life, so that we must then think of the head of the hierarchy as analogous to the Father to whom the Son subjects himself in eternity.' There is, he goes on,

> no need to see a close link between the *communio* structure of the church expressed in eucharistic communion and the trinitarian fellowship...The analogy between the minister and the Father cannot be based on the eucharistic liturgy. Instead, the liturgist, and with him the whole congregation, is drawn into the filial relation of Jesus Christ to the Father (3.106).[23]

In recent years two different assessments of the social view have been adopted by theologians who are very sympathetic with Pannenberg's overall project, including his

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[21] This social trinitarian approach, which in the light of 1 Cor. 11 arguably has the strongest biblical warrant on the relationship between the sexes, is discussed in D. Bonhoeffer *Creation and Fall* (New York: Macmillan, 1959) and *CD* III/1 and III/4.

[22] Though Pannenberg does distance his own remarks in *ATP* from this headship of man over woman, he still appears to be sympathetic with the general notion of trinitarian analogy of which this is a variety.

trinitarian aspirations. One such theologian is Stanley Grenz, who in his recent book *The Social God and the Relational Self*[24] relies heavily on Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity and uses it to develop his own social trinitarian approach. '[T]he three members of the Trinity,' Grenz writes,

> are "person" precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations. The attendant ontology of personhood suggests that the Creator's intent that humans be the representation of the divine reality means that the goal of human existence is to be persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic divine life disclosed in Jesus Christ.[25]

The other is Ted Peters who again depends very much on Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity, but exercises caution regarding any social analogies. So, the fifth of his trinitarian theses states:

> 'The image of the immanent Trinity ought not to be used as a model for human society; rather, we should seek to transform human society on the basis of our vision of the coming kingdom of God in which God alone is the absolute."[26]

It is the procedure of Peters which seems more in line with Pannenberg than does Grenz's.

The third approach is to see the trinitarian God as the general framework within which to construct a doctrine of humanity. There is a qualitative difference between this and the first two approaches. The first two approaches regard the *imago Dei* as a *similitudo trinitatis*, where either the human soul or mind on the one hand, or human society on the other is a mirror of trinitarian relations. For Pannenberg the *imago Dei* is not like this. Christology and pneumatology are more important for him than the relations within the immanent Trinity for understanding what it means to be human. The *imago Dei* is not *similitudo trinitatis* but *creatura operis trinitatis*, that is, the human being is to be understood in trinitarian terms, not as an analogy of the threefold God, but as the one made by the triune God and destined for eschatological participation within

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[23] In particular Pannenberg sees this danger in the works of Joseph Ratzinger and J. Zizioulas. Zizioulas has been influential in the development of aspects of Pannenberg's trinitarian thinking, but here at least the two part intellectual company.
[24] S. Grenz *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
[25] *Ibid.* p.332.
[26] Peters, (1993), p.184.

the trinitarian life. Exactly how the Trinity shapes Pannenberg's understanding of humanity we shall investigate under the following two theses.

2. **Human beings are spiritual, not because they have the divine Spirit as a constituent part, nor because they are rational, but because in every part, including their reason, they rely on and are animated by the life-giving Spirit.**

We saw in the previous chapter that Pannenberg moves from traditional notions of the Spirit as *nous* or mind to seeing Him as a vital creative force in ways analogous to modern field theory. This broader understanding of the Spirit's work has inevitable consequences for how one understands a properly Christian anthropology. Since the Spirit is the one who freely gives life to all things, both corporeal and psychic, Pannenberg believes that one has to refashion our understanding of body and soul to take account of this. Broadly speaking, human "spirit" is neither synonymous with, nor reducible to, the faculty of intellect, whether it be considered the soul or the mind. Rather, human spirit is our reception of the freely given spirit of the freely giving Spirit.

Again Pannenberg consciously differentiates himself from Aquinas. Though noting Aquinas' genuine insight that the soul is the essential form of the body[27] which was an advance on earlier Christian theology's revision of Platonic concepts (2.184), Pannenberg detects a problem. There is a difference, he says, between Aquinas' account and that of the Bible, a difference that

> 'lies in the understanding of the soul, and especially its spiritual or intellectual character (*anima intellectiva*). The biblical account certainly relates the soul to the spirit, but in a very different sense' (2.185).

The 'different sense' is that Thomas' formulation implies autonomy for the soul. Pannenberg, however, understands the Genesis account as affirming the soul as the whole living being (and so different from patristic exegesis), and one which is dependent rather than autonomous (and so different from Aquinas). He writes,

> The description of Adam as *nephesh hayya* represents him as needy and therefore desirous; his life has the form of need and desire...A human being as

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[27] *STh* 1.76.1 and 4.

> *nephesh* is a being of desires oriented to things that meet the desires, and one that is searching for them. Hence an ensouled body does not live of itself but by the Spirit of God who breathes life into it (2.185).

Here we see the importance for Pannenberg of understanding spirit not as intellect, but as vital creative force. It enables him to avoid the move of much earlier theology, i.e., to see the mind as somehow more "spiritual" than the rest of us, since Pannenberg thinks,

> '[t]he interpreting of Gen. 2:7 as an imparting of reason by the Creator was the basis of equating the human spirit and reason, which led Christian theology to see in the spirit-soul a higher part of our human constitution' (2.188).

If spirit is seen as having some special affinity with intellect, then the impression can be given that our minds are somehow less dependent on the Spirit, the Giver of Life, than the rest of us. This Pannenberg avoids. As with all created things, he remarks, so with the human being too 'only the Creator's breathing makes him...a living being, a living person, a living individual' (2.185).[28]

This has two implications. The first is that this breath of life cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit. Our "spirit", then, is not something other than the Spirit. Its being given or taken away is His giving or withdrawing. 'As "flesh,"' Pannenberg writes,

> 'we are perishable like all other living creatures. Conversely as long as human life lasts, it is due to the continued activity of the breath of life that comes from the Spirit of God' (2.186)

The second is that 'the working of the Spirit in living creatures does not mean that he is a constituent part of the creature' (2.186). Pannenberg believes this to be the teaching of both Old and New Testaments, as he has shown in his remarks on Gen. 2. And even when the OT assigns a relative independence to the *ruahim*, as for instance in the good and evil spirits sent on various OT figures[29] or when the Spirit's continued but limited work in us is called "our" spirit,[30] 'nowhere,' Pannenberg says, 'does the OT make any basic distinction between the divine *ruah* and the independent creaturely *ruah* as an essential constituent of living things' (2.186-187), any such idea being a Hellenistic

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[28] Pannenberg here cites H. W. Wolff's *Anthropology of the OT* (London: SCM, 1974).
[29] Pannenberg notes in particular the evil *ruah* God sends on King Saul and others in 1 Sam. 16:14; 1 Kgs. 22.20ff.; Isa. 19:14
[30] Here Pannenberg is referring to passages such as Ps. 104.

embellishment. And in the NT too, Pannenberg says, divine and human spirits are sharply distinguished.[31]

Hence, if one is to speak of the human being as body, soul and spirit, the third term is not to be understood as a constituent part of the creature as the first two are. That is, '[t]he working of the Spirit in living creatures does not mean that he is a constituent part of the creature.' Instead, we humans are spirit only insofar as we depend on the Spirit of life freely to quicken us into vitality. '[I]t means,' he goes on,

> 'that creaturely life has an eccentric character, that it is referred to the divine power of the Spirit that works upon it. Living creatures have the breath of life in them, but it is not at their disposal. God is always the Lord of creaturely life (2.186).

Pannenberg is on guard here against the conflation of divine and human spirit[32] and is adamant that the two are distinct. As he has written on an earlier occasion,

> 'The spirit never belongs in a strict sense to the creature in his immanent nature, but the creature participates in the spirit – and I venture to say: in the divine spirit – by transcending itself, i.e., by being elevated beyond itself in the ecstatic experience that illustrates the working of the spirit.'[33]

Whereas his trinitarian anthropology differs from intellectual notions of divine and human spirit, Pannenberg nevertheless does offer a trinitarian psychology. Naturally this differs from the trinitarian psychology Pannenberg criticises in the use of mental analogies for the Trinity we noted earlier, nor does it rely on assuming either that our reason is somehow more divine and less in need of the Spirit's life-giving work than the rest of us, or that it is what differentiates us from other earthly creatures, but it is nevertheless a genuine attempt to understand human intellectual activity in the light of trinitarian doctrine.

There are three ways in particular in which Pannenberg sees human cognition in trinitarian terms. The first and most straightforward we have noted already, namely its

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[31] On 2.187 he writes, 'Paul could describe human beings comprehensively as spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23) and contrast the divine Spirit with the human spirit (Rom. 8:16ff.), even setting the two in opposition (1 Cor. 2:10f.),' and points to more in R. Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* in an accompanying footnote.

[32] Hence we cannot follow the criticism of Roger Olson in "Pannenberg's Theological Anthropology: A Review Article' in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13 (1986), pp.161-171.

[33] "The Working of the Spirit in the Creation and in the People of God," in *Spirit, Faith and Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p.21.

utter creatureliness and therefore its equal dependence on and difference from the divine Spirit. '[H]uman reason,' he writes,

> 'is not of itself filled with the Spirit. In its creatureliness it needs, like every other vital function, to be quickened by the living power of the Spirit if it is to be active, and it also needs the inspiration that lifts it above its own finitude and that in all its limitation makes it aware of the presence of truth and totality in the individual' (2.197).

As well as, on the one hand, entailing that reason cannot be the infusion of some divine faculty, this point contradicts, on the other hand, the concomitant idea that the human ego stands at the centre of cognition. Not only is the ground taken away from the idea that our reason is distinctively human and is the reason for our species' inalienable superiority over all others.[34] Also, the more the mind is aware of its dependence on the Creator Spirit, the more it is open to the rest of the creation that is animated by Him. Thus we are referred not to some independent, internal faculty but to ecstatic participation, which,

> 'expands the soul by experience of the world, which the Spirit creatively permeates, and especially by the experience of human fellowship in face of the infinite ground of the world' (2.197-198).[35]

The second is that the Son is the basis both for the individuality that we perceive and for the distinguishing of each particularity. The Son, as we have learnt, is for Pannenberg the principle of otherness within God and His creative activity and the basis of the order within the universe. Hence, the distinguishing of the other that is operative in human cognition is, Pannenberg believes, rightly to be understood as a participation in the work of the Logos. He writes,

> In a rational distinction of each finite thing from every other, and of all finite things, including ourselves, from the infinite, the divine Logos is at work, who creates and rules all creaturely existence in its individuality...[H]uman intelligence in its perception of the otherness of the other participates in the self-distinction of the eternal Son from the Father by which he is not merely united to the Father but is also the principle of all creaturely existence in its individuality (2.196).

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[34] See 2.189-190.
[35] This also explains the importance for Pannenberg of human imagination.

For what lies behind 'the human consciousness that differentiates things and that also links what it differentiates' is 'the self-distinction from the Father that constitutes the sonship of Jesus' (2.292).

The third is that the Spirit is the 'ultimate basis for the interrelatedness of that which is distinct in the consciousness, of the interrelatedness also of the I and the things of the world, especially similar living creatures' (2.196). As the one who in the immanent trinitarian life is the bond of fellowship between Father and Son, and in the work of creation is the one who lifts beings outside themselves to participate in the life of God, so in human cognition too the Spirit is the fellowship of what is distinct. The unity and wholeness which is the work of the Spirit in all things, then, also has its mark in human psychology, enabling genuine human personhood and a true, varied and united perception of the world outside us. Pannenberg expresses the matter thus in rich trinitarian prose:

> 'As the Son, in his self-distinction from the Father, is united with him by the Spirit in the unity of the divine life, and as, in his creative activity, he unites what is distinct by the power of the Spirit, so the differentiating activity of human reason needs the Spirit who enables it, by mediating the imagination, to name each thing in its particularity, and in all the distinction to be aware of the unity that holds together what is different' (2.197).

3. Humanity is created in the image of God, since its destiny is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, who is Himself the true image of God. The realisation of this destiny is the work of the Trinity in time, and we attain to it as by the Spirit we accept our finitude just as Christ, the Son, distinguished Himself from God the Father.

The issue of the *imago Dei* has a long, varied and august theological heritage, of which Pannenberg shows himself keenly aware. Yet Pannenberg finds himself dissatisfied with previous answers and seeks instead a more rigorously trinitarian solution. Whether the *imago Dei* be understood as relationship or encounter that can entail patriarchy,[36] as

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[36] Pannenberg is here referring to the view of Barth and Bonhoeffer we spoke of earlier.

wisdom or the soul that can ignore the reference to the whole person,[37] or as the exegetically unjustifiable upright stance,[38] Pannenberg will not adopt such approaches.

What about Pannenberg's trinitarian alternative? After surveying traditional accounts he writes:

> 'Christian theology must read the OT saying about our divine likeness in the light of the Pauline statements that call Jesus Christ the image of God...and that speak of the transforming of believers into this image' (2.208).[39]

Put very simply, many other accounts have tended to see human beings as themselves the image of God, whereas Pannenberg emphasises that they are properly only "in" or "according to" the image of God, which is Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate (2.215). And even where this distinction was noted, as, Pannenberg believes, in Reformation understandings of the *imago Dei* in opposition to those of Latin Scholasticism, it was tied to notions of an original state which pay inadequate attention to NT talk of transformation into the new man.[40] On the contrary, Pannenberg asserts,

> 'In the story of the human race...the image of God was not achieved fully at the outset. It was still in process. This is true not only of the likeness but of the image itself. But since likeness is essential to an image, our creation in the image of God stands implicitly related to full similarity. This full actualization is our destiny, one that was historically achieved with Jesus Christ and in which others may participate by transformation into the image of Christ' (2.217).

Pannenberg emphasises that to understand the divine image not as a general faculty but as a destiny that one achieves in union with God the Son, does not necessarily undermine its universality by limiting it to believers. Creation and redemption, that is, while related differently, are not sundered. Whereas this destiny has been actualised in

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[37] This is what Pannenberg calls the 'classical' understanding of the divine likeness in Christian theology, which through the Alexandrian theologians, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, became the mainstream understanding of Western theology.

[38] This is the suggestion of E. Juengel in his "Der Gott entsprechende Mensch" in *Neue Anthropologie* 6, ed. H. G. Gadamer and P. Vogler (Stuttgart: G. Thieme, 1974). Pannenberg notes that Juengel can cite many other authors in support including Lactantius, Baumgarten, Ammon and Herder, but not, he believes, any scriptural ones.

[39] The Pauline statements that Pannenberg has in mind are, firstly, 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15 on Jesus as the divine image, and, secondly, Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 15:49 and 2 Cor. 3:18 on believers' transformation. See 2.208.

[40] Pannenberg's dispenses with traditional dogma of perfect first estate, not least because he finds no evidence either for immortality before the Fall or for an Edenic perfect knowledge and holiness. And since Pannenberg identifies the image of God not with human origins but with human destiny, this is another reason for him to claim that it is incorrect to say that the image is lost or marred. On this see 2.210-217.

believers and in Paul's letters is presented as an injunction to Christian believers, it nevertheless does so as a fact that has universal, ontological validity. As Pannenberg puts it,

> 'In Paul's sayings about Christ as the image of God into which all others must be transformed, the Christian doctrine of the divine likeness must see an elucidation of our general destiny of divine likeness. But in so doing it may not expunge the differences between the fulfilling of our divine likeness in and by Jesus Christ on the one hand, and the OT statements about Adam's divine likeness on the other. To do this is to miss the point that our destiny as creatures is brought to fulfillment by Jesus Christ' (2.210).

All of humanity has been created according to this image; and all of humanity is related to the true image, the eschatological new man, the second Adam who came from heaven to bring all of humanity to its destiny of fellowship with God. The image of God is our destiny for fellowship with God (2.224), a destiny that marks all of humanity, but is actualised not by ourselves but by the triune God. So, it is a trinitarian possibility and not one infused into us at our creation. 'The hope of participation in this life,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'is guaranteed to believers by the fact that even now they put on the new man in the power of the Spirit..., namely, by righteousness and true holiness, by mercy, kindness, gentleness, and generosity, as Christ has taught and shown them' (2.220).

Humanity itself, then, is not the image, but it is created "in" the image; it is a copy to be fashioned after the original.[41] And the image itself is the Son of God, and He incarnate. In Pannenberg's view, after Irenaeus theology took a wrong turn and lost sight of the fact that *Jesus* is God's image firstly in referring statements about the divine image to the *logos asarkos*,[42] and then again to the whole Trinity and the divine essence as such.[43] This had the consequence that theological anthropology became increasingly devoid of christological and trinitarian specificity. As the action of the Trinity in time, then, the image is not to be understood solely protologically, but in terms of eschatological becoming. 'It is,' Pannenberg writes,

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[41] Pannenberg takes up the language of original and copy especially in 2.215ff. See also the remarks on Irenaeus in 2.208f.
[42] E.g., Origen *De Principiis* 1.2.6; Athanasius *De Incarnatione Verbi* 13.7.
[43] E.g., Augustine *De Genesi ad litteram* 3.22.

> 'reinterpreted as our final destiny, which is manifested already in Jesus Christ and in which believers share already through the power of the Spirit, who is already effecting the eschatological reality of the new man in them' (2.220).

Pannenberg also suggests that such moves obscure the eschatological thrust of our being made in the divine image. He claims,

> 'If the understanding of human reason is further detached from the idea of the divine Logos, then our divine likeness can be viewed as a theme essentially different from the that of the Logos in relation to the Father' (2.209).

Here the discussion differs from traditional Christian anthropologies, where the image tends to be seen rather like an independent faculty that was originally infused into humanity intact, which now needs to be restored.[44] For it is not enough, he thinks, to equate the renewal in the image in Eph. 4 and Col. 3 with the creation account in Gen. 1. Paul's statements, he says,

> 'that believers are changed by the Spirit into the likeness of Christ, who is God's image, must have in view, not merely restoration of the image, but a closeness to God that goes beyond the divine likeness grounded in creation' (2.215).

And, for similar reasons Pannenberg's trinitarian account differs from modern views also. It is the de-coupling of notions of the *imago Dei* from the activity of the Son and Spirit that has led, at least from the 18th century, to much talk on the subject that Pannenberg considers moralistic. He writes:

> 'if we detach the ethical statements of Col. 3 and Eph. 4 from the basic christological and eschatological relation, then, reversing the Pauline intention in what is said about the new man, we can use them only to describe the original divine likeness of Adam. Furthermore, we promote a purely moral understanding of human destiny such as had developed in much of modern Protestant theology' (2.220)

In particular Pannenberg has in mind the thesis, championed by Kant and Fichte,[45] of seeing our destiny solely in earthly or moral terms, rather than as an eschatological future blessedness. 'To do this,' as with the other points just mentioned, is, Pannenberg believes,

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[44] E.g., *STh* 1.93.1 ad 2, and the older Protestant dogmatics.

[45] Pannenberg refers here to Kant's giving 'material primacy to our moral destiny as against a destiny of future happiness, even though regarding the latter as a consequence of the former' (2.220) in a number of works. And as regards Fichte, see his *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (new ed.) (Berlin, 1838).

'to miss the point that our destiny as creatures is brought to fulfillment by Jesus Christ' (2.210).

So far we have seen in some detail what Pannenberg thinks the *imago Dei* does not mean, yet not enough of his positive exposition of its being our destiny of transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ. For Pannenberg has more to say on this, both in terms of the content of the image and in terms of its trinitarian formulation.

The fellowship with God we are destined for is neither absorption into the divine life (as we shall see later) nor the separation from and self-assertion against God that Pannenberg goes on to delineate as sin in the second half of *ST* chapter 8,[46] which is a self-centred hijacking of humanity's created destiny. Rather, the *imago Dei* means a fellowship that entails our independence and distinction as finite creatures of an infinite Creator, for

> '[o]nly by accepting our finitude as God-given do we attain to the fellowship with God that is implied in our destiny of divine likeness. In other words, [and here is the trinitarian move] we must be fashioned into the image of the Son, of his self-distinction from the Father. We participate thus in the fellowship of the Son with the Father' (2.230).

Human fellowship with God, and so human destiny too, reached its apex, then in Jesus Christ, as the Son distinguished Himself, in a way unparalleled, from the Father. Thus He is the image. And in Him and His self-distinction from God our lives find their meaning and human destiny is fulfilled.[47]

How, in trinitarian terms, is this so? The Son, as the one who eternally distinguishes Himself from the Father and did so definitively in the incarnation, is, as we saw above, the divine Other who is the basis for the existence of created others. And it is as such that He is the image "in" whom we were created and "according to" whom we are to be transformed, so that we, like He, may participate in free, genuine and unhindered fellowship with the Father. Hence Pannenberg can continue on the subject of the divine image using this trinitarian construal. 'In the Son,' he says,

> 'the image is achieved in the sense of full likeness, not because God made himself the same or similar, but because the Son distinguished himself from the Father and the Father from himself in order to reveal that father as the one God. In this

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[46] See 2.231-275.
[47] As well as *ST* chapter 8, see also 2.385-386.

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> way the Son is so in accord with the being of God as Father that only in relation to him is the Father eternally Father and God. Only to the degree that the self-distinction of the Son from the Father takes human form in the human distinction from God do we find a person who corresponds to God, who as the image of God is destined for fellowship with him' (2.230-231).

Humanity's destiny, therefore, is to share in the self-distinction of the Son from the Father. And its ethical duty – one laid explicitly on believers in the NT – is by the Spirit to live out and to grow into this independence we have in union with Christ and in our relationship with, i.e. our self-distinction from, God the Father. For 'by thus distinguishing God from everything finite,' Pannenberg says, 'we pay him the honour of his deity' (2.230).

According to Pannenberg, then, understanding humanity in trinitarian terms is to see it in terms of ecstatic participation in the life-giving Holy Spirit and its destiny to be conformed to Christ, the Son of God. Yet if Pannenberg takes it that humanity is ordered to and completed by the incarnation, we have to see in the following chapter whether his treatment of christology itself meets the highest trinitarian credentials.

Chapter Five

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST

So far in our treatment of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology, what we have had to say about the figure Jesus of Nazareth has tended to be explained in terms of the second divine person. The life and ministry of Jesus, that is, are to be understood as the humility and mission of the Son, which spring from His eternal self-distinction from the Father. This is not the whole story, to be sure, as shown, for instance, in Pannenberg's insistence that the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity is the historical revelation in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, in the doctrines surveyed so far the focus has been on the trinitarian person at least as much as the historical figure.

Yet according to some readings of Pannenberg common especially before the publication of *ST*, this may appear surprising. This explains some of the critique of Burhenn we discussed above that Pannenberg lacks a necessary understanding of God as Trinity, since so much of his work on Jesus Christ – especially his 1964 *Grundzuege der Christologie*, which was published in English four years later as *JGM* – has been taken up with defending the importance of the historical Jesus. Burhenn writes,

> 'A major emphasis in his christology is that one must proceed from below – that is, one must begin logically from the man Jesus...Consequently, descriptions of the unity of essence come at the end rather than at the beginning of the task of systematic theology.'[1]

Since our treatment of Pannenberg's theology has been structured according to his own systematic ordering rather than chronologically, the surprise for those who have followed Pannenberg's career of seeing Pannenberg write at such length on the eternal Logos might escape us.

In part this is explained by the limited focus of the earlier work. The English title might give the misleading impression that *JGM* offers a complete presentation of Pannenberg's christology. The purpose was, however, merely a detailed discussion of

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[1] Burhenn (1975), p.536.

"Grundzuege" or foundations for the task of christology, which among other things emphasised the need for an approach "from below" that sought the distinctive identity of Jesus not apart from history but in and through it.

But there is also the undeniable fact that Pannenberg's thinking on christology has changed. Since the first edition of *JGM* Pannenberg has clarified certain aspects of his doctrine of God and has developed a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity, as we noted earlier. Although it is possible to overestimate the importance of this change, it is real nonetheless. There are genuine differences in *ST* from *JGM* in overall structure and tone as well as in detail. What is this change and how does it relate to Pannenberg's increased focus on the doctrine of the Trinity? The following discussion will outline an answer in greater depth, but in general terms we may say here that after the publication of *JGM* which argued for the necessity of christology "from below" Pannenberg began to show worries about some of its implications if not qualified by an approach "from above" and that from the mid-1970's onwards there was a marked change of emphasis – although not, we believe, a substantial change in content – in his handling of christology.

In the christological discussion in chapters 9 and 10 of *ST* the Trinity is put to work in Pannenberg's christology and forms a large part of what he has to say. Nevertheless, much of Pannenberg's concern is to provide an alternative trinitarian account to that of classical orthodoxy, which, as Pannenberg understands it, presupposes a doctrine that acts as a procrustean bed for the historical Jesus, rather than being its most compelling explanation. This will be the subject matter of the first thesis. The next two points outline Pannenberg's alternative account, the one expounding how Jesus Christ is properly understood in terms of the self-distinction from the Father of the eternal Son of God, the other stating that this is not something that is alien to the life of the immanent Trinity, nor even its copy or fulfilment, but the self-actualisation of the triune God.

1. Christology, in its defence and explication of the deity of Jesus, should not seek refuge in a speculative doctrine of the Trinity that is the abstract presupposition of the incarnation. Rather, for it to be rational and theological, such a claim must arise as the reasonable and necessary explanation of the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth.

Christology, Pannenberg thinks, faces a methodological problem. It is this:

> Should we begin with the basis in God and his initiative in sending the Son, or should we move on the plane of human reality, on which we must show that the event took place, if it really took place at all? (2.277).

Whether or not the terms are original to him, it is from Pannenberg, especially his *JGM*, that these two approaches have been known by their common terms, "christology from above" and "christology from below." The issue is, which approach to adopt to begin theological reflection on the person of Jesus Christ.

So far as Pannenberg explains the terms in *ST*, [2] by "christology from above" is understood 'interpreting the whole NT witness to Christ from the standpoint of this sending of the preexistent Son into the world' (2.278). That is, as Pannenberg put it in the earlier work, 'the doctrine of the Trinity is presupposed and the question posed is: How has the Second Person of the Trinity (the Logos) assumed a human nature?'[3] And by "christology from below" is meant an approach where 'the historical Jesus Christ is the starting point and measure of all christological statements about his person,' and 'christological statements are viewed as an interpretation of his historical reality' (2.280). That is, without the presupposition of later Christian christological dogma the evidence of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth is taken independently and on its own merits as a piece of historical investigation – there has, then, to be a quest of the historical Jesus.

Our main subject is not Pannenberg's christology, so we shall not give the two approaches the extended treatment that might be appropriate elsewhere. But one point at least should be noted that is relevant here, which sometimes has been misunderstood. Pannenberg is not adopting one approach to the exclusion of the other. This is especially clear in *ST*, for instance 2.290, which states,

> 'regard for the reciprocal conditioning of concepts of God and concepts of human nature and destiny is a methodological premise if we are to achieve a systematically comprehensive christology.'

And, though not so clearly, it is present also in *JGM*. In the 1970's Pannenberg was aware that in that work there might have been an over-emphasis on the approach "from below"

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[2] Although perhaps the later treatment has added nuance and sophistication, the original statement of the two christologies in *JGM* p.33 is fundamentally identical.
[3] *JGM*, p.34.

that gave a misleading interpretation of his general intent in framing a christology. So, responding to some of Tupper's critical remarks, he writes:

> Because of my approach from the anthropological-historical perspective ("from below"), I concentrated my attention on the inherent meaning of the events rather than on a divine intention attributed to them, although I did relate the historical events to the activity of God. Only after the Christology was published was I able to clarify certain aspects in the doctrine of God to my own satisfaction so that I could dare now to speak of a divine intention in historical events.[4]

And even before the publication of *ST*, one can see Pannenberg correcting impressions of such one-sidedness, in particular in the article "Christologie und Theologie."[5] In that article Pannenberg argues a point continued in *ST*, that without appeal to a concept of God, i.e. without theology, the significance of Jesus and his ministry gets lost. 'The man Jesus is not accessible without his God.'[6] Pannenberg writes that both classical incarnation christology (of which he had been critical in *JGM*) and the modern christology "from below" (which he had attempted to reinstate) suffer from a 'common deficiency.' For 'they both agree that one already has to presuppose an idea of the reality of God gained otherwise than by Christology before one can begin Christology in the proper sense.'[7] Then, dealing with misgivings he has with some contemporary approaches to christology he poses two questions:

> 'Does not such a christology "from below" rest on a problematic presupposition, namely that the man Jesus in himself becomes the object of the investigation and his relation to God must first be put to one side? Is such a procedure fair to the situation that Jesus' existence has to be thought of as determined by the God he proclaimed, if the failure of his claim and his message should not be already presupposed?'

Then he continues, 'Such questions have to be asked too of my own *Jesus – God and Man*, so far as it begins "from below" from the man Jesus of Nazareth.'[8]

The conclusion Pannenberg reaches is that christology should not focus one-sidedly on the man Jesus. Rather there needs to be a different sort of "christology from below," which 'can present itself as the implementation of the true christology "from above."'

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[4] Tupper, p.305.
[5] *GST2*, pp. 129-145.
[6] Ibid. p.130.
[7] Ibid. p.134.
[8] Ibid. p.131.

That is, it should be – in words that presage the presentation of *ST* – 'the implementation of a christology of God's self-actualisation,' which rests on '[n]ot the difference of Jesus from God, but His self-differentiation from him."[9] What is called for, then, is a more explicitly trinitarian christology.

Yet, even after writing "Christologie und Theologie" in the postscript to the 5th German edition of *JGM,* Pannenberg wrote, 'The alterations that appear to be necessary still do not mean any departure from the path engaged by this book, but rather a continuation of it.'[10] What we see in the development, then, is not so drastic a change as the "shift" detected by Philip Clayton,[11] but a change in emphasis in later works that draws out themes already present in Pannenberg's earlier writings.

For this reason, one has to judge as insufficient the accounts of Pannenberg's christology – at whatever period – that see him advocating only the approach "from below," even in *JGM.* Gunton, for instance, misses this twofold basis in Pannenberg's christology. For he writes,

> 'In place of the double movement, with anthropological considerations being, so to speak, answered by a theological movement from above, Pannenberg's process of thought is continuous, a movement from the finite to the infinite.'[12]

It is in fact the other way round than in Gunton's description. For '[o]nly methodologically,' Pannenberg says, does he 'give precedence to arguing from below... In truth, material primacy belongs to the eternal Son, who has become man by his incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth' (2.289).[13]

The point for Pannenberg, therefore, is not that an unabashedly trinitarian interpretation of the christological task is illegitimate, nor even that beginning from the counsels of the immanent trinitarian life of God and only then moving to their actualisation in the historical Jesus of Nazareth is completely excluded. Rather, there are two approaches that Pannenberg wants to avoid in employing such a procedure, both of

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[9] Ibid, p.145.
[10] *JGM*, p.399. *IST*, p.67 also states, 'the emerging synthesis is no more what I earlier called a "christology from below." But it presupposes and integrates that methodological approach.' The element of "from above" in Pannenberg's works pre-dating *ST* is admirably highlighted in Rise, pp. 127-187, especially 183-186 on "Christologie and Theologie". See also Shults, pp.166ff.
[11] See his "The God of History and the Presence of the Future" *Journal of Religion* 65, (1985), pp.98-108, where he uses the term 'shift' on pp.98 and 101, and 'new methodology' to describe the emphases he finds in the articles within *GST2*.
[12] C. E. Gunton *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology* (2nd ed.) (London: SPCK, 1997), p.20.
[13] The very same point is made in *JGM*, p.337.

which bear on the use of the Trinity in shaping his theology. The one is when the Trinity is presupposed in discussion of the person of Christ, the other when Christ's uniqueness and significance is solely understood in virtue of the Trinity.

It is then, firstly, the *presupposition* – understood literally as a judgement supposed before historical investigation or corroboration – of an *abstract* doctrine of the Trinity that Pannenberg is seeking to exclude. The approach "from above" even of classical christology whose leading question is, 'How has the Second Person of the Trinity (the Logos) assumed a human nature?'[14] just like the approaches of those such as Schleiermacher and Bultmann who interpret the Christ as the temporal instantiation of some presupposed eternal principle – be it the religious God-consciousness[15] or existential crisis,[16] – remains abstract and insufficient without the justification of proper historical investigation into the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. So, for Pannenberg, theology may not begin with a concept of God that is not shaped for its part by the revelation of God in the human history of Jesus. Only through Jesus is it manifest who or what God is.[17]

Theology had to learn this lesson in particular in the post-Reformation reaction to the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ's identity. With the advent of anti-trinitarian Socinianism that 'threw doubt on the trinitarian understanding of the confession of Christ's deity and to a large extent the whole idea of his pre-existence,' Pannenberg argues that 'another way of grounding christological statements was needed' (2.278). Indeed Pannenberg makes the point that the need for an approach to christology "from below" was occasioned precisely because in the post-Reformation period the traditional trinitarian approach to viewing the person of Jesus – namely as God the Son, eternally begotten from and consubstantial with the Father – was being faced with serious questioning. Pannenberg writes:

> 'Another way of grounding christological statements was needed only with the Reformation, when antitrinitarians and Socinians threw doubt on the trinitarian

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[14] *JGM*, p.34.
[15] Pannenberg believes Schleiermacher's approach insufficient for a proper christology from below and is actually the wrong type of christology from above. See 2.310 and *JGM*, p 25.
[16] Pannenberg, along with many of Bultmann's pupils in the post-war years called for a recovery of the quest of the historical Jesus, lest the Christ figure become the tool of ideologies. Hence he cites with approval Ebeling's critique: 'If the person to whom the kerygma refers is in no way concretely definable in his historicity, if the reference of the kerygma to Jesus consists exclusively in assertions for whose understanding Jesus himself is irrelevant, as merely a cipher that is accidental and in itself says nothing, then the kerygma – if it then could be kerygma at all – would be pure myth' (G. Ebeling *Theology and Proclamation*, (Tuebingen: Mohr, 1962), p.64, cited in *JGM*, p. 27)

> understanding of the confession of Christ's deity and to a large extent the whole idea of his preexistence. Since the criticism was made on the basis of a strict scripture principle, debate with it had to be in terms of biblical exposition. Hence the messiahship of Jesus as the core of the NT witness and the basis of dogmatic statements about his person came increasingly to the fore' (2.278-279).

Those approaches of christology "from above" that Pannenberg considers illegitimate, then, are those that do not allow an irreducible epistemological basis in Christ's human history *per se*, i.e., those that cannot be justified in terms of that history and do not necessarily rest on it.

There is, however, another approach that Pannenberg's method excludes, although this is not so obvious as the matter of abstract presupposition of trinitarian doctrine. That is, that Jesus' uniqueness and significance is to be understood in virtue of the Trinity. This point is not so obvious as the rejection of an abstractly presupposed doctrine of the Trinity, since Pannenberg does not treat this matter directly. Yet it is important, and will be taken up in more detail later in our concluding critical evaluation of the thorough trinitarianism of Pannenberg's theology.

A clear statement of what is meant by understanding Jesus' uniqueness and significance in virtue of the Trinity is the pithy phrase of Paul Molnar: 'Christ's humanity draws its meaning from the immanent Trinity and not from history.'[18] It is *in virtue of* the Trinity, since it is the strength of the trinitarian action alone and not of a corresponding human strength that is the key to Jesus' identity and how we come to know Him.

Such a position does not dispute the need to avoid the abstract presupposition Pannenberg also denies. Rather, it introduces the distinction that although Christ's identity is revealed *in* His human nature, for we should not look anywhere other than Jesus to know the triune God, it is not *in virtue of* His human nature that this knowledge comes, but only by the power of the second person of the Trinity incarnate in that one human being. Yet, in the very places where one might look for Pannenberg offering such a distinction, it is not there. So, for instance, while acknowledging that 'only God himself could be behind this event,' he goes on to state that 'we can know that it actually happened only as it took place on the plane of our human, creaturely reality' (2.277). Again, he writes,

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[17] See the remarks in *GST2*, pp.129ff.

> 'We must discover the contours of the divine sonship of Jesus in his human reality, which as eternal sonship precedes his historical existence on earth and must be regarded as the creative basis of his human existence' (2.325),

once more omitting any such distinction as we have noted. Furthermore, a large section of chapter 9, "Anthropology and Christology" is devoted to the attempt to decipher something unique in Christ's humanity *per se* that would justify Christian claims to His uniqueness and divinity.[19] Svein Rise, commenting on *JGM*, nicely puts his finger on this emphasis:

> 'A fundamental idea in the book on christology is that the eternal God becomes visible in Jesus' factual, historical activity. This is why Pannenberg emphasizes that the revelation of God takes place, not only through individual events in Jesus' life, but in Jesus' history as a whole. It seems therefore to be quite natural that christology therefore must take its starting-point in the *human being* Jesus, and that it must build in all circumstances on the historical accounts of Jesus' life.'"[20]

Of course, if Pannenberg wishes to make room for the possibility of a quest of the historical Jesus, i.e., the investigation of Jesus' identity on the basis of a general historical method, it follows that to state that Jesus' identity is comprehensible only in virtue of the triune God removes the possibility of a neutral "from below" discovery of Christ's significance that he is after. We recognise the consistency here. Nevertheless, we must also note that the question remains whether it is possible to square such a claim that Christ's self-revelation is not solely empowered by His being the second person of the Trinity but requires arguments for the historicity of his resurrection, with Pannenberg's other claim to write the most trinitarian of known theologies. For now we shall have to leave this question hanging until later, and move onto further elements of Pannenberg's trinitarian christology.

There is more to be said on this particular matter. And what we have to say will not be without criticism, since Pannenberg's remarks here fit into a matrix of themes where we do not believe the high trinitarian credentials he has set himself have been met. In

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[18] Molnar, p.280 on Barth's understanding of the *anhypostasis* of Christ's human nature.
[19] See 2.297-323, where Christ's significance is traced to His founding a new humanity as the new Adam.
[20] Rise, p.149.

this respect his theology is not a step forward from the emphases of thinkers that have preceded him.

2. **The historical Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. The epistemological basis of Jesus' divine sonship is His resurrection, which is the Father's vindication of, and identification with, Jesus Christ. The ontological basis of Jesus' divine sonship is His self-distinction from the Father, which finds its ultimate realisation and perfect expression in Christ's suffering obedience.**

For Pannenberg there has to be a way from below to above for christology to have a proper foundation. Yet there also has to be a way from above to below to account for the substance of the claim that the man Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

Yet that this individual has not just human, but also divine status needs grounding. And this grounding may not be the mere claim to, or sense of authority, on the part of Jesus. It has to be something about Jesus' observable human historical existence, rather than His divine eternal sonship, which gives epistemological legitimacy to claims for His deity, although of course Pannenberg believes the ontological primacy for the claim attaches to His triune identity.

The Christian claim that the historical individual Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel and the pre-existent Son of God, the second person of the triune Godhead must have a basis. In line with his advocacy of the necessity and mutual compatibility of doing christology both "from below" and "from above," Pannenberg posits a dual basis for Christ's eternal divine sonship: epistemologically, it is based in Christ's resurrection; ontologically, it is based in the Son's eternal self-distinction from the Father.

Epistemological basis

That a proper understanding of Jesus Christ requires us to see in Him the person of the Son of God who is eternally pre-existent, finds its epistemological basis, for Pannenberg, in the resurrection. For, it is 'the Easter event,' he says, which

> 'became the starting point of apostolic proclamation and the church's christology. Both rest on the distinctive significance of this event in its reference back to the pre-Easter history of Jesus' (2.363).

How is this so? Working from below to above, the resurrection of Jesus by God is a twofold validation. Firstly and directly it demonstrates that Jesus was executed innocently and is God's approved messenger, and secondly and more importantly that God is eternally one with this man of Nazareth.

Firstly, then, the resurrection of Jesus, which for Pannenberg is His divine confirmation and vindication, clears Him of all charges laid against Him. In particular He is justified in face of his Jewish and Roman accuser. So Jesus' raising overturns the Jewish charge of blasphemy. For, 'precisely by not making himself equal to God, he is righteous before God as the "Son" of the Father, as the resurrection discloses this' (2.364). And against the condemnation by the Romans, by God's resurrection it is shown that Jesus 'is not the Messiah in the sense of a political ruler and therefore in the sense of the charge of revolt against Roman domination,' but 'was confirmed as a fully authorized representative of the royal rule of God that he proclaimed' (2.364).

And, second, this divine validation of God's raising Jesus from the dead also has what Pannenberg calls retroactive force. That is, it is a divine stamp of approval that reaches back to Jesus' ministry, His personal identity and even into the furthest reaches of eternity, demonstrating that Jesus of Nazareth is not just an innocent divine messenger. It shows, rather, that He is the very presence of the divine rule, the Messiah in person, and – ultimately – God the Son from all eternity.

The resurrection, then, is first of all, the validation of the reality of Jesus' implied claim, namely, that the future of God is present in and by him. For, Pannenberg states,

> 'The resurrection of Jesus now gives confirmation that already in his earthly ministry he acted on the Father's authority, so that the kingly rule of the Father was indeed present in him' (2.365).

Next, it shows that not just Jesus' ministry, but His whole person and identity were at one with the Father. 'The resurrection of Jesus,' Pannenberg continues,

> 'confirmed not merely his message and work, as though the content of these were detachable from his person, but Jesus himself, the person upon whom his message had cast a half-light. Jesus' filial relation to the Father thus could rightly

> be dated back to the actual beginning of his earthly existence, to his conception and birth' (2.365-366).

And the resurrection's revelation of the Son has a retroactive force that goes back beyond this, stretching into the furthest eternity. '[T]he confirmation of his message by the God who raised him to life,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'says...that God is from all eternity the One whom Jesus proclaimed him to be...if the Father is from all eternity the One he is shown historically to be in relation to Jesus his Son, and through him, then we cannot think of the Father apart from the Son...The relation reaches back also to the time before his earthly birth' (2.367).

So, in the light of the resurrection, 'we must speak of a preexistence of the Son' (2.368), and not some mere ideal or functional pre-existence, but such that 'the Father cannot be the Father without the Son and hence is never without the Son' (2.371). And on this basis, Pannenberg believes, one can rightly affirm the orthodox doctrine worked out in the 4th century.

So, the resurrection is Pannenberg's epistemological basis of Jesus being God the Son. We now consider the ontological basis, or what Pannenberg terms the "inner basis," which is the intra-trinitarian rationale for the incarnation of the Son whose deity we have reason to affirm on the basis of His resurrection.

Ontological basis

This "inner basis" is, he writes, not some abstract divine nature, but the specific being as the Son. In particular it is – as predicted in "Christologie und Theologie" – the Son's self-distinction from God the Father. To understand this better, let us see how Pannenberg differentiates his understanding from what he considers the import of the two natures theory, namely that the person of Christ should be understood as constituted of a divine and a human nature. Two differences are especially instructive for our purposes.

The first is that the incarnation has to be understood as more than protological union. There was, Pannenberg thinks, 'a fateful change...or at least a fateful change of emphasis' in the early church[21] when 'the schema of twofold evaluation "after the flesh" and "after the spirit"' was reinterpreted so that 'succession gave way to simultaneity.' The

incarnation, i.e. the union of deity and humanity in Christ, then, was considered solely in terms of the beginning of Jesus' existence. For Pannenberg, such an approach will not do, even if Easter shows that Jesus' conception was the becoming human of the eternal Son. As he goes on to elucidate,

> 'Only in his life as a whole is he the Son. Hence we must not restrict what we say about the incarnation to his conception and birth at the beginning. If he had followed a different path in his human development, if he had not been baptized by John, if he had not been the herald of the rule of God, if he had not accepted the consequences of his mission by taking the path of suffering, he would not be the Son of God. And he is this only in the light of Easter morning because only in this light is his path defined unequivocally as a path of obedience and not of human arrogance' (2.384).

Christ's sonship, the actualisation of the divine sonship of eternity, had to be "made perfect" in the course of His life, so for Pannenberg more than a protological union is at stake in the formation of Jesus' identity. We have to think of the sonship as mediated by *Jesus'* relation with the Father.

The second difference in Pannenberg's account from the two-natures doctrine, is that Jesus is God incarnate not in the sense of the linking of deity *per se* with the humanity, but of the divine person who eternally distinguishes Himself from the Father in loving obedience. An undifferentiated idea of God, such as Pannenberg detects in the concept of a "divine nature," makes sense of biblical texts that subordinate the Son to the Father by ascribing them to Christ's humanity alone.[22] Yet Pannenberg's explanation arises not from the concept of human nature, but the triune reality, i.e., the Son's relationship to the Father.

A key instance of this is Pannenberg's explaining why 'Jesus did not make himself equal to God, not even in the sense of declaring himself to be the Son of God.' Pannenberg explains it thus:

> He differentiated himself from God by subordinating himself to the Father so that he might serve the Father's lordship by all that he did...Only in this self-distinction from the Father by subordination to his royal rule, and in service to it, is he the Son (2.363).

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[21] In particular Pannenberg cites Ignatius *Ephesians* 18.2.
[22] Pannenberg notes among others Mark 10.17-18; John 10:33; 14:28. See 1.263, 309-310 and 2.372-373.

Both in His incarnation and His eternity, Pannenberg thinks, '"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19)' (2.372). And so for the Son, this renunciation of the honour due to the Father befits both His eternal deity and His assumed humanity. As Pannenberg puts it,

> 'The relation of the Son to the Father is characterized in eternity by the subordination to the Father, by the self-distinction from the majesty of the Father, which took historical form in the human relation of Jesus to God...As the incarnation of the Logos was the result of the self-emptying of the eternal Son in his self-distinction from the Father, so the self-humbling of Jesus in obedience to his sending by the Father is the medium of the manifestation of the Son on the path of his earthly life' (2.377).[23]

It is the natural outflow of His eternal submission to the Father in the triune life. Indeed we are to understand the resurrection in these terms. 'The divine vindication vis-à-vis the judgment of human judges says...that precisely by not making himself equal to God, he is righteous before God as the "Son" of the Father' (2.364).

There is in *ST* a repeated emphasis on the fact that this assuming flesh by God the Son is not alien or accidental. For example, Pannenberg states, 'The deity is not an addition to this reality [the human history of Jesus]' (2.325), nor may the eternal Son be 'detached' or 'treated in isolation' (2.368) from the incarnation, and 'The self-emptying of the Preexistent is not a surrender or negation of his deity as the Son. It is its activation' (2.327). Again,

> '[T]he assuming of human existence by the eternal Son is not to be seen as the adding of a nature that is alien to his deity. It is the self-created medium of his extreme self-actualization in consequence of his free self-distinction from the Father, i.e., a way of fulfilling his eternal sonship' (2.325).

The Son who became incarnate as the human Jesus did indeed empty Himself, but this is wholly appropriate to His eternity.

Two consequences follow. The first is that Pannenberg joins the ranks of the critics of kenotic christology, i.e., the doctrine outlined in such works as G. Thomasius's *Christi Person und Werk*[24] and C. Gore's *The Incarnation of the Son of God*,[25] that the self-

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[23] The same point is made on *JGM*, p.336.
[24] *Christi Person und Werk: Darstellung der evangelischen-lutheranischen Dogmatik vom Mittelpunkt der Christologie aus* (3rd ed.) (ed. F. J. Winter) (Erlangen: 1886,1888).
[25] 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1892).

emptying of the Logos involved the putting aside of at least some of the attributes of deity. Critics of *kenosis*, including Dorner, says Pannenberg,

> 'rightly saw here a renouncing of deity itself. This would then destroy the whole concept of incarnation. If God is not truly and totally in Christ, what sense does it make to talk of the reconciliation of the world with God in him?' (2.378).

Rather such *kenosis* as there is in the incarnation is for Pannenberg not the setting aside of deity, but the true expression and actualisation of the God, who in the person of the Son eternally offers Himself in submission to the Father. The incarnation, then, is not the putting off of the divine reality, but deity put into action. 'The self-emptying of the Preexistent,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'is to be understood as a renunciation not of his divine essence but simply of any equating of himself with the Father. By distinguishing the Father from himself as the one God, the Son certainly moved out of the unity of the deity and became man. But in so doing he actively expressed his divine essence as the Son. The self-emptying of the Preexistent is not a surrender or negation of his deity as the Son. It is its activation. Hence the end of his earthly path in obedience to the Father is the revelation of his deity' (2.377).

The christological hymn of Philippians 2, then, Pannenberg understands as referring neither to the human Jesus or the divine Son exclusively, but to both, the temporal obedience of the one being the eternal self-differentiation of the other.[26]

The second is that, for Pannenberg, the ultimate explanation for the nature of the incarnation is not so much determined by human misery, as if the Son's mission were an accommodation to humanity's plight that otherwise ill befits the Son's divine majesty. Rather its highest and most basic ground is the inner-triune relations themselves, most notably that of the Son to the Father which came to expression in the incarnation. Jesus' obedience, Pannenberg says,

> 'should not be understood first as an unselfish turning to us, though it is that also. Rather, it is primarily an expression of the self-giving of the Son to the Father in an obedience that desires nothing for self but serves totally the glorifying of God and the coming of his kingdom' (2.379).

For these reasons, then, Jesus can only be properly understood, so far as Pannenberg is concerned, in trinitarian terms. The identification of Jesus with the divine Son is, he

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[26] See 2.375-377.

admits, an indirect one, in that as the One in whose submission His Father's kingdom is realised, He alone must eternally and essentially belong to Israel's God. But Christ, as the herald of the kingdom, is the One the Father completely identifies with and as the one in complete and perfect submission to the Father, corresponds perfectly to the second person of the divine life. The humiliation and suffering of the Son of God are not, then, a drastic emergency measure that fits ill with the divine Christ, but are His perfect self-expression.

On the particular points discussed here there are different avenues of criticism. One has been voiced already by Klaus Vechtel. In *Trinitaet und Zukunft* he argues that it is better to say that the Son corresponds to the Father rather than distinguishes Himself from Him. Vechtel writes:

> God has revealed Himself in the life and death of Jesus not just provisionally, but definitively, in unique events and in a way that can never be surpassed. This does not mean...the distinction, but the mutual *correspondence and unity* of the trinitarian persons...the Son corresponds to the Father perfectly in His obedience, and the Father corresponds to the Son in remaining faithful to Him beyond death and raising Him from the dead.[27]

Against Vechtel, however, we must state that it does not follow that Pannenberg's emphasis on the Son's self-distinction contradicts His correspondence to the Father. They are not alternatives, since it is precisely as self-distinction that Christ's correspondence takes its form. As Pannenberg writes:

> There is no "correspondence", however, with the Father without obedient submission to his will, which is to say without self-distinction that does not put one's own person in the place of God, but rather submits to the authority of the Father. Furthermore, it could be argued that the description of Jesus' relationship to the Father in terms of "correspondence" needs to be interpreted as self-distinction, because otherwise the personal distinctiveness would not be expressed.[28]

And as he notes in the same place, correspondence is a term he himself uses. We do not, then, believe Vechtel's criticism holds.

We offer another criticism. It is this: why is the basis of Pannenberg's Christology trinitarian ontologically and not epistemologically? This too belongs to that matrix of concerns about Pannenberg's reticence concerning the Trinity on matters methodological

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[27] Vechtel, p.272, emphasis retained.

and epistemological, and can be formulated as follows. If, as Pannenberg says, Christ's person and being have their basis in the free, gracious self-presentation of the triune God and can only be rightly understood as such, why is this not also the case for how we *come to know* Him?

The human being, Jesus of Nazareth, has no independent existence apart from the sustaining power of the second triune person. On this Pannenberg is clear, and he argues the point saying that the assumed humanity 'is the [Son's] self-created medium of his extreme self-actualization' (2.325). But is it equally clear that our perceiving the identity of Jesus of Nazareth has no independent existence apart from the enabling and sustaining power of the triune God? This is stated both in scripture[29] and within the theological tradition.[30] In Pannenberg, however, it is the resurrection – and that conceived in terms of our positive judgement of its conformity to valid historical investigation and method – that performs this function, rather than spiritual discernment. Indeed one traditional way of safeguarding this truth, i.e. the doctrine of the *anhypostasia* or *impersonalitas* of Christ's human nature that states that the active subject during the incarnation was the person of the Son of God rather than the assumed humanity, Pannenberg misinterprets to mean that Jesus lacks what we commonly call a "personality" (2.389). In our conclusion we shall see that this bifurcation of who Jesus is and how we come to know Him is a pervading problem within *ST*, with important consequences for its high trinitarian aspirations.

Just as we saw in the previous chapter that the incarnation was not alien to the assumed humanity,[31] so it is not alien to God the Son who assumed it. Neither is it alien to the other trinitarian persons, as we shall see under the following point.

3. The incarnation reveals and involves not just the Son of God, but the Father and Holy Spirit also: it is the self-actualisation of the triune God.

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[28] "DEET," p.4.
[29] As examples we cite Matt. 16:17, John 6:44-46 and the narrative of Luke 24 where v45 states that knowledge of the risen Christ came not from the evidence of the resurrection presented to him but to His own opening of their minds.
[30] Calvin, for instance, writes that there is no effect unless 'Christ himself, inner Schoolmaster, did not by his Spirit draw to himself those given to him by the Father' (*Institutes* 3.1.4).
[31] See *ST* chapter 8 and 2.385-386.

The incarnation, we have seen, is not alien to the deity of the Son. Yet for Pannenberg there is more: it 'is not irrelevant to the deity of the *trinitarian God*,' and 'was also significant for the eternal fellowship of the *Father with the Son by the Holy Spirit*' (2.389).[32] That this is so, of course, gives substance to two others of Pannenberg's claims. On the one hand, that God involves Himself in time in this way is a fitting realisation of the fullness of the divine life, thus demonstrating the unity of economic and immanent trinities. And on the other, it is in this that we gain sufficient knowledge of the divine being, and so the history of Jesus is able to serve as the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet the point of emphasis for Pannenberg here is that in Jesus Christ the triune God is Himself.

The incarnation, to use Pannenberg's own expression, is God's "self-actualisation." Pannenberg does not offer any exact definition of what he means in positive terms, although we might provide a rough summary thus: in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ we have God's very self made real and effective with respect to His creation. His approach rather is to make clear how not to understand what he means by offering three clarifications or qualifications.

The first clarification he offers is that divine self-actualisation 'cannot mean that the trinitarian God has no prior reality in himself' (2.393). This is not just the most natural meaning in semantic terms, since there has, for Pannenberg, to be a self already to be the subject of its actualisation. It is also theological reality. For,

> 'The monarchy of the Father had been actualized already in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity. It did not need the existence of a world. In all eternity the Son gives the Father the honor of his kingly rule. The rule is thus eternal...But it now applies to creation as well' (2.390).

Here, again as in *ST* chapter 7, we have clear evidence of distance between Pannenberg's own position and that of Hegel, whose understanding of God is that He only actualises Himself for the first time in the course of the self-development of spirit.

We have noted before that there might be misgivings about how successfully Pannenberg safeguards the divine freedom, yet we have to regard as correct Grenz's attempt to distance Pannenberg's christology from the charges of Hegelianism laid by

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[32] Emphasis added.

Roger Olson.[33] In Olson's view Pannenberg's Christology undermines the 'graciousness of God's redemptive activity in the history of Jesus Christ,' since 'God must save the world by unifying it with himself in order to realize his own deity.'[34] Olson's reading conflates Hegel's view of God being necessarily Creator and Pannenberg's according to which He is only contingently so. As Grenz demonstrates, 'the process of God's self-realization in the world is but the revelation in the history of the world of the eternal self-realization of God found in the intertrinitarian life.'[35]

The second is when the subject and result of divine action are different. As actualisation of God's *self*, Pannenberg argues, subject and result have to be the same. In other words, economic and immanent trinities are the same. Hence, he states:

> The term "self-actualization" is better for what is at issue than Barth's "repetition of God" because it avoids the idea of copying and instead pregnantly expresses the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity. The reality that is achieved in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity and by the economy of its action in the world is one and the same (2.393).

So, it is not a correlate of God that appears in the life and ministry of Christ. It is not that in the incarnation God is like Himself or perfectly corresponds to Himself, but really is Himself.

The third is that 'we do not have a simple subject but the threefold subjectivity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as both the origin and the result of the event.' Here, as in many other places, the idealist doctrine of the Trinity is in Pannenberg's sights. We do not have to deal with a God who is a single subject comprising three moments of action or expression. '[T]he action of the trinitarian persons,' Pannenberg continues,

> 'is...oriented...to the other persons. In the economy of salvation the same is true of the sending of the Son by the Father, of the Son's obedience to the Father, and of the glorifying of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. Hence the self-actualization of the one God is one of reciprocity in the relations of the persons and the result of their mutual self-giving to each other' (2.394).

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[33] See his "The Human Self-realization of God: Hegelian Elements in Pannenberg's Christology," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13 (1986), pp.207-223.
[34] *Ibid.* p.222.
[35] (1990), pp.138-139.

And so it is that the presence of God and His kingdom, for Pannenberg, are mediated in an inner-triune distinction and reciprocity. For there is a sending, ruling Father as well as an obedient Son on whom the Father depends (2.391).

The incarnation, then, is the presence and enactment of the kingdom of God, i.e. self-realisation of the God who is both our Creator and Lord and relationship with whom is our destiny. 'Since,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'we cannot separate the deity of God from his royal lordship, it follows that the irruption of this lordship in the work of the Son has as its content the absolute reality of God in and for the world' (2.392).

Thus it is in the very act of reconciliation that expresses the self-distinction of the Son that godself is revealed and enacted in creation.

This explains Pannenberg's remarks on the divine absence and impotence, which are themselves to be understood in expressly trinitarian terms. For, Pannenberg writes, the world that has emancipated itself from God experiences Him only as a limit, and God the Father is absent for such creatures, this absence expressing creation's inescapable judgement. But since Pannenberg holds that 'without lordship over his creation, God would not be God' (2.390), to actualise Himself God must make himself present and exert His power, so inaction is not an option. Yet judgement too, while exerting divine authority to some extent over against creation, is also insufficient. While an assertion of might, it is nevertheless a thwarting of His purpose. For as Pannenberg puts it,

> 'By judgment God remains the Lord of creatures that turn aside from him. But the judgment that sinners cannot escape also expresses the impotence of the Creator. God as Creator does not will the death of sinners...He wills the existence and life of his creatures' (2.391-392).

God, to be Himself, therefore, cannot be idle or merely Judge. He has to become incarnate. So, Pannenberg continues:

> In this sense his deity is tied to the sending of the Son, who with the Spirit is already present to all creatures from creation, but who himself also took creaturely form in order that by his message the future of God might be present to the world, to its salvation and not its judgment. In this way the Son glorifies the Father in the world and completes the work of creation (2.392).

For the Son in His crucifixion both shows and takes the place of our two-fold plight of on the one hand our independent self-assertion against God, and on the other the Father's

absence from us. But for God's self and rule this cannot be the end, since we also share in the new life by the Spirit that the Father grants the Son. For it is in this self-distinction and mutual dependence that constitute the divine life that we receive salvation.

How this salvation is conceived in terms of the Trinity we explore in subsequent chapters. Yet in ending this section on the christology in *ST*, let us offer a brief critical review. We have seen that, for Pannenberg, the Trinity is operative, but not as an abstract presupposition from which to derive the incarnation. Christ's identity and significance are to be discovered, rather, in the contours of His earthly historical existence, in which we come to realise that the ontological basis for Jesus' divine sonship is His eternal self-distinction from the Father. Pannenberg also emphasises that the incarnation is the self-actualisation of the whole Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so in Jesus Christ we are dealing with the divine reality in its triune fullness.

By definition at the heart of any Christian theology is the treatment of christology, and the moves made here will be of significant moment for the rest of systematic theology. To this Pannenberg is no exception, and more extensive studies than the one here would be able to show the importance of the conclusions reached in this locus for shaping the whole of his theology. The account Pannenberg offers has roused several misgivings in his readers. Some of these have been misunderstandings as we have shown. There nevertheless remain for us misgivings about the argument in *ST* chapters 9 and 10, misgivings bearing on our trinitarian theme, which as yet appear unresolved. We shall return to them again.

Chapter 6

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

There is a development in Pannenberg's thinking on reconciliation that mirrors the development we noted in his christology. Already in 1974 Pannenberg alerted his readers that one day he would produce an account of the atonement that would give due weight to the action of God in the cross of Christ. He felt that he needed to revise the interpretation of the crucifixion he offered in *JGM*, where his approach "from below" – as we noted in the previous chapter – was an anthropological-historical perspective that focussed on the inherent meaning of the events rather than on a divine intention attributed to them. A supplementing was called for, so that in the postscript to Tupper's book he writes:

> Only after the Christology was published was I able to clarify certain aspects in the doctrine of God to my own satisfaction so that I could dare now to speak of a divine intention in historical events. As a consequence, in relation to the crucifixion, as in other respects, the self-explication of God in the history of Jesus will get closer attention when I am able someday to revise the text of that book.'[1]

Not that talk of divine agency was absent from *JGM*, even talk of trinitarian divine agency, as we have already seen, but in the later presentation of Christ's reconciling work in *ST* the themes to which Pannenberg believes he paid insufficient attention in the earlier work are given greater treatment. In chapter 11 of *ST*, 'The Reconciliation of the World', this is especially clear. The discussion is structured around a series of issues – in particular the idea that reconciliation embraces not just the past history of Jesus but also the present and ongoing ministry of reconciliation –, which appear easier to resolve once trinitarian thinking is put to work. The divine agency, which Pannenberg has said he wanted to clarify, has to do primarily with a proper understanding of the human reception of reconciliation. As he puts the matter,

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[1] Tupper, pp.304-305.

> 'Is the divine action in Christ's death no more than the object of human interpretation and reception? Or is God himself at work in the proclaiming of Christ's death as the reconciliation of the world to him? If he is, is there still room for the free entry into his reconciliation of those who are to be reconciled?' (2.437).

So, a keynote of Pannenberg's presentation here is the *scope* of reconciliation. For one thing, the concept covers not merely the past history of Jesus, but also the present apostolic ministry of reconciliation. For another, the concept involves not just the work of the Son during His earthly ministry but also human reception by the Spirit, raising the issue of how the history of reception relates to God's own reconciling action in the death of Christ.

The subjectivity of the triune God in the reconciliation of the world is at the forefront of Pannenberg's trinitarian understanding in his discussion, and it will therefore be our focus too. Yet other less dominant themes are of note. In particular we should note the treatment of salvation, which for Pannenberg is primarily an eschatological event, and reconciliation, which is a present reality. This ties in with earlier discussions, which show that God's triune action mirrors the breaking in of the future into time that is structurally identical with the concept of the true Infinite. 'Since future salvation is mediated in the present by Jesus,' Pannenberg writes, 'we may extend the term *soteria* to his work' (2.402). The Trinity, therefore, is operative not just in the fourth subsection ("The Triune God as Reconciler of the World"), but in the earlier ones also. Nevertheless, we shall guide our discussion according to where Pannenberg is most explicitly trinitarian, and investigate in turn the subjectivity of each of the triune persons in reconciliation.

1. The Father is the reconciling God in giving His Son for us and sending Him to die for our salvation, but not so as to exclude the free co-operation of the other trinitarian persons.

> 'It is only a correct doctrine of God that makes it possible to integrate Jesus' death into the concept of God in such a way that the death too can be understood as a mediation of the Father's divine reality."[2]

The cross was the act of God the Father to reconcile the world. It is not just an event to be understood in terms of the actions and motivations of the human agents involved, but also has its basis in the divine initiative of the Father who sent His Son into the world to fulfil His mission which necessarily culminated in His salvific crucifixion. As Pannenberg argues,

> In the crucifixion of Jesus the law of action did not rest finally with the human executioners. Through all the baseness, cowardice and brutality, God the Father was at work in this event according to his providential directing of the course of history. He "gave up" his Son (2.438).

In this context he notes the NT evidence, not merely where the Father is said to "give up" His Son (e.g., Rom. 8:32), but also where He "sent" (Rom. 8:3) and "gave" Him (John 3:16). Christ's reconciling was, therefore, the action of the sending and giving Father.

This follows from the exegetical evidence that the crucifixion follows as a consequence of Jesus' proclamation of the imminence of God's kingdom. The Son so completely subjects Himself to the rule of the Father as to follow His will and initiative. And it is also, for Pannenberg, the proper inference from the resurrection. In the resurrection the Father raised and exalted His Son, and so is God the Reconciler. 'God is the acting subject in this expiatory action, for...the crucifixion of Jesus has atoning force only in the light of his resurrection by God.' For it is in this way, Pannenberg continues, that 'God showed himself to be the Victor over sin and death in reconciliation of the world' (2.412).

To view the Father as the subject of reconciliation is to distinguish it from two approaches Pannenberg rejects, on the one hand to see the Father either as the object of reconciliation, not its subject, or on the other to consider Him the sole subject of reconciliation to the exclusion of Son and Spirit. Pannenberg detects the former procedure in many classical doctrines of the atonement. Key for Pannenberg is 2 Cor. 5:19, whence he concludes, '*God* did not have to be reconciled; the *world* is reconciled by

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[2] Rise, p.197.

God in Christ' (2.407). That is, what has to be changed is not the nature or disposition of an otherwise unreconciled or unreconcileable deity, whether this be by the obedience of the Son or by the sacrificing of His life on the cross, but a world which is at enmity with the God who loves it.

This insight was progressively lost in Christian theology, Pannenberg believes, from the time of Irenaeus. For Irenaeus, our reconciliation with God accomplished by the second Adam is Jesus' reconciling, by His perfect obedience, the Father, against whom we had sinned. As he puts it, 'in the last times the Lord has restored us into friendship through His incarnation, having become "the Mediator between God and men", propitiating indeed for us the Father against whom we had sinned.'[3] The Father, on this model, is made propitious to sinful men on the basis of the sacrificial self-offering of the Son. So, for Pannenberg one should not, with Irenaeus and much subsequent tradition, wrongly interpret Romans 5:19 ('For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous), which, he says, 'does not speak of any softening of an angry Father by the sacrificial death of Christ' (2.404),[4] but should start from 2 Corinthians 5:19 ('in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them') and view the Father as reconciliation's active subject.

In emphasising the work of the triune God of reconciliation, therefore, Pannenberg departs from the satisfaction theory of the atonement, which has dominated much Western theology up to the post-Reformation period. According to this theory, a hostile God who is outraged by human sin and disobedience is the object of reconciliation, satisfied and appeased by Christ's procuring merit or righteousness for us by His dying on the cross in our stead.[5] In such construals Pannenberg thinks that the Father is portrayed wrongly as the recipient of Christ's offering, rather than as the agent. So, he concludes,

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[3] Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.17.1

[4] Pannenberg here seems in our opinion to treat the issue with a little over-simplification. Notwithstanding his reliance on the arguments of Ritschl, acknowledged in *Problemgeschichte*, there is the other problem that his reference to Rom. 5:19 does not pay attention to the context of the letter, especially chapters 1-3. By chapter 3 there has built up a large amount of divine wrath, yet there results 'peace with God' in 5:1. One need not by any means intend to say that the atonement is something done to the Father, rather than by him. Yet one can say that what also needs to be dealt with is the problem of the divine displeasure, which must be put right by Christ's death in order for peace to be proclaimed.

[5] A typical articulation of this is the shared statement of the Augsburg Confession (art.3) and the 39 Articles (art.2), which reads, 'Christ...was crucified, dead and buried, that he might reconcile the

> 'It must be regarded as a merit of modern Protestant theology that after critical destruction of the satisfaction theory it reinstated the Pauline orientation of reconciliation statements to the world, to us who are to be reconciled. It now came to view the reconciliation of the world by Christ as an outworking of the love of God in the face of the opposition of humans who are hostile to God, a love of God that we see operative through Jesus Christ' (2.407).

Even when, as was often (perhaps invariably) the case in those pre-modern accounts, note was taken of the Father or the whole Trinity at work in reconciliation, the insight was undone. For according to Pannenberg,

> 'the idea of appeasing divine wrath, along with the concept of the Mediator, which Lombard, under Augustine's influence, related to the human nature of Christ, resulted in the statement that in regard to power it is the whole Trinity that is involved in reconciliation but that the Son alone is mediator according to his human nature according to his obedience. The equation of reconciling with Christ's mediatorship also caused the leading 13th century theologians to relate both concepts to his human nature' (2. 405-406).

The reconciliation of the world that was achieved in the Easter story is, then, the work not on, but of the Father. Yet – and this is the second point of clarification – for all the emphasis Pannenberg puts on reconciliation as the active work of the loving Father, reconciliation is brought about not by Him alone, but also with the agency of Son and Spirit. This is in keeping with his desire both to free theology from the tendency, common at least in the Western tradition, to view the deity (even the triune deity) as ultimately synonymous with the sole subjectivity of the Father, or, as Pannenberg puts it elsewhere, to make the other persons a mere object without any active, conscious co-operation; and to make adequate sense of the biblical references to the other persons' agency. Indeed, as we have noted before, in this central element of the establishment of the monarchy of the Father, the establishment of His kingdom both takes the form of a trinitarian action and is dependent on the work of the other two persons. So it is the object of *both* Father *and* Son. 'This is possible,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'only if the action of the Father in giving up the Son does not make the Son a mere object but implies his active cooperation, and again if the action of the Son does not rule out the fact that initiative in the event lies with the Father' (2.439).

Father unto us.' See P. Schaff (ed.) *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*

And it is also true of the Spirit. Just how this is so we shall investigate in the following two points.

2. **The Son is the reconciling God in that He actively obeys the Father in giving Himself for our sins as our Representative. As the eternal Son His work of reconciliation is not to be restricted either to His earthly history or to His human nature.**

The reconciling death of Christ is to be understood 'not merely in the sense that *God* acted in Christ's death for the reconciliation of the world...but also in the sense that the *Son* offered himself up in this event' (2.443). Pannenberg cites the witness of scripture that corresponding to the giving up of the Father there is an active obedience of the Son, as shown in such passages as Mark 14:32ff par.; Rom. 5:19; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 5:8; 7:27. So, Pannenberg states,

> 'The Father does not act alone in the offering up of Jesus to death. Jesus himself is not simply passive in this action, for the Son is also acting subject in the event. As such, he is the Saviour of the world' (2.441).

As Christoph Schwoebel summarises, 'The obedience of Jesus to the Father must, if we follow the logic of Pannenberg's Christology, be interpreted as an expression of the action of the eternal Son. In this sense the Son is an agent in the process of salvation.'[6]

Such a trinitarian reading of the Easter story that understands it as the work of the second divine person, precludes, Pannenberg believes, two interpretations. The first is that Christ's reconciliation is to be understood only in terms of His earthly history, the second that Christ's reconciliation is achieved only by His human nature.

As for the first, to see in the death of Christ not merely an event on the human plane, but also the activity of the eternal Son of God requires knowledge of Christ's resurrection. It may be, Pannenberg says, that statements of Christ's active agency 'correspond to the Gospel accounts of the passion as foreknown to Jesus...and even planned by him. Yet,' he goes on,

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vol.3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1931), pp.9, 488.

[6] (1996), p.514.

> 'they are in tension with the historical judgment that although Jesus certainly reckoned with the possibility of a violent death and ultimately faced its inevitability, he can hardly have sought it as the goal of his message and ministry' (2.438-439)

And even were it granted that Jesus came to expect his own death as likely, to get to an idea of the Son's self-offering is a 'big leap' (2.439). The biblical witness as well as subsequent trinitarian and christological reflection on the life and mind of Christ does then, according to Pannenberg, presuppose knowledge of His resurrection and exaltation, if one is to see the Son as the subject of reconciliation. Pannenberg writes,

> 'He who was exalted as Son of God came to be seen as the true subject of the history that led him to the cross. He was detected in the course of events. Exalted, Jesus is also the subject of the history of proclamation in which his death is explained and proclaimed as the reconciliation of the world' (2.440).

And as in his christology the resurrection alters drastically what we are obliged to say about Christ's person, so in Pannenberg's doctrine of reconciliation it affects our understanding of His work. Pannenberg therefore distinguishes three levels or aspects of the reconciling work of the Son. 'We first have,' he writes,

> 'the human historical level of the work and fate of Jesus. Then we have the same history as the medium of the eternal Son of God, who is at work in it as he became man in the person of Jesus. Finally we have the same history again as the medium of the active presence of the exalted Lord through the apostolic proclamation that explains to the world at large the saving significance of this history' (2.441).

All the reconciling acts of the man Jesus, therefore, are the deeds of the active subject, the Son of God, even the crucifixion which is not just an action inflicted on a human being, but is the mighty act of God.

It is for this reason that Pannenberg can go on to affirm positions that he had earlier criticised, especially the doctrine of Christ's threefold office which he wrote against in *JGM*. There Pannenberg argued that in historical terms the justification of Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest and king is untenable. Whether in terms of the inherent meaning of anointing[7] or of the term "Christ,"[8] or in terms of the functions

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[7] See *JGM*, pp.213f.

[8] See *JGM*, pp.213ff.

apprehended by or devolved upon Jesus, Pannenberg concludes, 'the concept of the three offices in the dogmatics of Protestant orthodoxy is subject to considerable objection.'[9]

In *ST* the earlier position is not so much rejected as supplemented. 'The historical Jesus,' he still maintains, '...was neither priest nor king nor, in the strict sense, prophet' (2.445). Yet, Pannenberg continues, such a judgement is insufficient if one is to view the second triune person as subject in the work of reconciliation, an insight highlighted and safeguarded by the doctrine of the threefold office. Hence a retraction:

> Deliberations on the fact that looking back from Easter we see that the thought of divine sonship means not only incarnation but also an activity of the Son in the history of Jesus have now forced me to correct the position that I took up in 1964. The only point remaining is that between the human action of Jesus in the context of his earthly history and the action of the Son of God in that history must be made, and that the relation between the two stands in need of clarification. Naturally the Son of God incarnate in Jesus acts through his human activity, but his action embraces the distinction between the human activity and the fate of Jesus. The earthly activities thus have contexts other than those that appear on a purely historical approach (2.446).

And Pannenberg outlines in what sense Jesus Christ, the risen and exalted eternal Son of God can properly be ascribed the offices of prophet (2.449), priest and king.[10]

The second interpretation that Pannenberg's trinitarian approach precludes, is that the Son's reconciling activity is the work of His assumed human nature. That is, the cross and resurrection must be understood as being achieved not so much by the humanity that was assumed, as by the One who assumed it. It is therefore, the person of the Son incarnate, the God-man, and not His human nature as such that is the mediator.

Pannenberg's notion of the Son's mediation is in explicit contrast to what he considers the classic Western understanding of the Son's work, that He became incarnate to appease the divine wrath. That is, that 'in regard to power it is the whole Trinity that is involved in reconciliation but that the Son alone is mediator *according to His human nature* according to his obedience' (2.405-406).[11] The result of such formulations is that although the trinitarian agency is affirmed, inevitably the main focus of the work of

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[9] *JGM* p.215.

[10] See 3.449.

[11] Emphasis added.

reconciliation is lain on the Son's assumed humanity. Such a view has roots in Augustine and is operative, Pannenberg believes, throughout medieval theology, for instance in Lombard, Anselm, Bonaventure and Aquinas. For, as the last of these writes, 'as the one and only Mediator, Christ reconciles us to God by His sacrifice, doing so according to his human nature.'[12]

In reconciliation there is not just the giving up of the Father, but also the active co-operation of the Son, and as such a *divine* active co-operation. This, then, is a second trinitarian reason (to follow the discussion of the subjectivity of the Father) for Pannenberg's rejection of satisfaction theories of the atonement.

3. The Holy Spirit is the reconciling God who completes God's work of reconciliation, in that He lifts us up into ecstatic union with Jesus Christ, and as the one who is distinct from both Son and Father allows us to live in joyful differentiation from God.

> 'As the self-offering of the Son for the reconciliation of the world and his being offered up by the Father are one and the same event and form a single process, so we are to see the work of the exalted Christ and that of the Spirit in us as different aspects of one and the same divine action for the reconciliation of the world' (2.450)

The Spirit is not the Son. This in itself elementary piece of trinitarian theology, that the second and third divine persons are genuinely distinct and not to be confused, requires, Pannenberg believes, further penetration into the doctrine of reconciliation than is sometimes recognised. It is of a piece with one of the points we (like he) shall deal with in the chapter on ecclesiology, namely the rejection of the Barthian understanding of the reconciling work of the Spirit, that 'the Spirit is the power in which Jesus Christ bears witness to himself,' which in Pannenberg's view pays insufficient attention to the distinct subjectivity of the Spirit.[13] And it is a further development of Pannenberg's rejection of at root inevitably modalising conceptions of the being and action of the trinitarian God.

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[12] *STh* 3.26.2. Pannenberg notes similar statements in Lombard *Sentences* 2.3-4, and Bonaventura *Sentences* 3.19.2.3.

[13] Barth makes this remark in *CD* IV/1, 645, and Pannenberg his reservations in 3.5.

The reconciling action of the Spirit is not, or rather is not to be confused with, the reconciling action of the Son. As in being so also in action, there are three distinct centres of action within God, and, in particular, the third person cannot be subsumed as an extension of the second. In support Pannenberg notes the exegetical evidence, particularly in Paul and John, that for all the unity there is a clear distinction between the reconciling work of Son and Spirit. So, Pannenberg emphasises, 'At issue' in the reconciling action of the Spirit

> 'is not just a later appropriating of the *fruit*[14] of the once-for-all event in the death of Jesus. By baptism believers are inserted into the death of Jesus (Rom. 6:3). This takes place through the Spirit...By the power of the Spirit, then, Christians are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:17), which itself by the resurrection is a pneumatic reality (1 Cor. 15:4f.)' (2.451).

By this distinct action of the Spirit, then, which is more than the mere fruit or application of Christ's benefits, we are made 'recipients of the reconciliation that was made in his death' (2.451).

Theologies that in Pannenberg's view are reticent on the work of the Spirit, go wrong at precisely this point. In *ST* Barth again serves as a conspicuous example, for whom the event of reconciliation in Christ's crucifixion 'was "self-contained." It was not an ongoing process towards some distant goal' (2.413). Yet such accounts leave hanging an important question, namely, 'Do we not have to regard not merely God's reconciling act but also its human acceptance as constitutive for the event' of reconciliation? What is needed, Pannenberg believes, is 'an answer that does justice to the situation of the recipients as human beings, as sinners in need of reconciliation' (2.415), and one that sinners can appropriate in a way that leaves room for their human creaturely independence. In sum, there needs to be an account both of reconciliation and of the God of reconciliation that does justice to human reception.

Pannenberg's view of the scope of reconciliation relies on his interpretation of 2 Cor. 5.18-6:2, according to which God's reconciling the world to Himself is not limited to the death of Christ. Reconciliation also occurs "now" in the ministry of the apostles and the repentance of the Corinthians, whence the appeal in v.20 to be reconciled to God.[15] As

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[14] Emphasis retained.

[15] Hence Pannenberg considers Barth's exposition inadequate, which sharply distinguishes the apostolic ministry of reconciliation v.18 from reconciliation itself (2.413).

Pannenberg writes in another place, 'In and by [the church] there is now being fulfilled already the reconciliation of humanity to God that is the work of the crucified and risen Lord' (3.432).

How are we to account for this extension of reconciliation beyond the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Pannenberg says at one point that this is Jesus' ongoing work:

> 'It is Jesus Christ himself, the exalted Kyrios, who "now" gives us reconciliation through the ministry of the apostles and the preaching of the church' (2.440).

But such an understanding of this ongoing reconciliation in terms of the work of the Son is one that Pannenberg deems insufficient. Reconciliation means, for Pannenberg, our renewal in independent existence. But for us to be truly independent, 'this cannot come solely from the Father, nor can it be achieved solely by the sending of the Son into the world. It must,' he says, 'happen on our side as well.' Now, this does, for Pannenberg, involve the Son, but only 'in exemplary fashion.' But it is properly understood to be the work of the Spirit, he maintains. Humans need, Pannenberg says, to be taken up into the room the Son has made for us alongside Himself. And,

> 'this taking up is not merely in the sense of something that happens to them from outside but as a liberation to their own identity. This takes place through the Spirit. Through the Spirit reconciliation with God no longer comes upon us from outside. We ourselves enter into it' (2.450).

The event of reconciliation, then, has to be understood in broad terms, because it 'includes the whole process of the renewing of our fellowship with God that sin had broken - the process that begins at the cross of Christ and continues by means of the ministry of the apostles' (2.413).[16] And this broader understanding of reconciliation requires a broader understanding of the reconciling God, who is not just Father and Son but also – and distinctively – Holy Spirit.

So, what is this distinct work of the Spirit corresponding to His distinct identity? The Spirit completes reconciliation, Pannenberg says, 'by enabling us through faith in Jesus Christ to accept our own finite existence before God' (2.454). This acceptance of our finitude, the very thing that sinful humanity failed to do, and that Jesus' consistent self-distinction from the Father reverses can only come not in ourselves, but 'in Jesus Christ',

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[16] This broader scope of reconciliation is one of the themes Pannenberg develops (see 2.412-437, where he argues that not merely God's reconciling act but also its human acceptance as constitutive for the event of reconciliation), which, he maintains, can only be resolved properly when understood in the trinitarian terms we outline here.

and not through our unaided effort but 'through faith.' This, then, is the reconciling act of the Holy Spirit.

'The Spirit,' Pannenberg says

> 'lifts us above our own finitude, so that in faith we share in him who is outside us, Jesus Christ, and in the event of reconciliation that God accomplished in his death. Believers are "ecstatic," i.e., outside themselves, as they are in Christ' (2.451).

This is not, Pannenberg believes, either dehumanising or depersonalising. In "ecstatic" being with Christ believers are not taken up into an autocratic God or an alien deity. Though 'outside themselves' they are not, Pannenberg believes, 'in bondage to another.' This is because, he continues,

> 'Jesus as the Son of the Father is for his part fully God and therefore the man who gives himself up for others...Those who believe in Jesus are thus not estranged from themselves, for with Jesus they are with God, who is the origin of the finite existence of all creatures and their specific destiny' (2.452).

We achieve our true identity, then, by the action of the trinitarian God. By the Spirit we become ourselves in Christ as we are brought into true relationship with the Father. And by accepting our true identity not in ourselves but outside us in Christ, the Spirit completes the divine act of reconciliation by causing us to seek and recognise our real selves in the reconciling work of the Father and the Son.

We can further flesh out the detail of this third element of God's trinitarian act of reconciliation by noting three explanatory points in Pannenberg's exposition. The first two are relatively straightforward and concern two possible misunderstandings regarding reconciliation that Pannenberg thinks his proposal avoids. Firstly, it excludes totalitarian understandings of reconciliation, namely 'the replacement of those who are represented'. That our reception is not overwhelmed and colonised by the work of the Son, but is referred to the enabling Spirit, does justice to what Pannenberg considers the true meaning of representation. A true representative, he thinks, 'only temporarily takes the place of others and thus leaves open the place that is only representatively occupied. With permanent occupation the representative becomes a replacement' (2.432). And second, it avoids any idea that our reception of salvation is an unaided human work. The divine action in Christ's death is indeed more than the object of human interpretation and reception 'Awareness of being reconciled to God,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'is something that Christians do not find on their own but through faith in Jesus Christ. They achieve it as the Spirit teaches them to know the heavenly Father in Jesus the Son' (2.454).

The third is rather more complex and interesting. It is that as the one who is distinct from both Son and Father, the Spirit allows us to live in joyful differentiation from God. With this clarification Pannenberg differentiates his approach from understandings of salvation as a divinisation that merges humanity and divinity. The Spirit unites us, not with divinity as such, but with Christ who distinguishes Himself from God the Father. So, 'believers who in Christ share in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father differentiate themselves therein from the Father as Jesus did' (2.452-453).

Not only this, but by the Spirit we are also distinct from God the Son, for our ecstatic union with Him is not our being merged into Him, but our being linked to Him outside ourselves. '[B]elievers,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'know very well that their own existence is different from Jesus Christ in whom they believe, even though they are united to him by faith. An irrevocable part of their union with Christ in faith is awareness of the difference between their own existence and him their Head (2.452).

And this is fitting for the third trinitarian person since as the one who eternally maintains the distinct unity of Father and Son, the Spirit likewise maintains us in a distinct unity with Jesus Christ. As Pannenberg puts the matter,

> 'By the Spirit, believers are capable of this self-distinction from Jesus, who is in person the eternal Son of the Father, for the Spirit himself differentiates himself from the Son by not openly glorifying himself but glorifying Jesus as the Son of the Father and the Father in the Son. The Spirit, who is himself God, brings with him fellowship with God, but only as he distinguishes himself from the Father and the Son, and with himself all those whose hearts he fills and lifts up to God. Even the ecstatic working of the Spirit does not mean that self-distinction from God is no longer a condition of fellowship with him. It makes it possible for us to rejoice in this distinction in peace with God' (2.453).

It is the same point being made here as Pannenberg will make again in his distinction between our "Gotteskindschaft", i.e., the adoption as God's children that believers enjoy, and "Gottessohnschaft", i.e., the eternal sonship which only the Son has.[17] Our sharing in the Son's filial relation to the Father, then, neither supplants nor disregards His original and unique sonship.

It is in this context that we should note a sub-theme of Pannenberg's exposition that has a bearing on this point, namely Christ's making room for others in reconciliation. '[T]he acceptance of death,' he writes, 'was the extreme consequence of the self-distinction of the Son from the Father, and by it he made room not only for the glory of God but also for the existence of others alongside Jesus' (2.450).

This point is closely related to the rejection of both totalitarian understandings of reconciliation and Barthian understandings of the application of reconciliation. Yet it is not quite the same. The divine work of reconciliation means not the setting aside, but the renewal of human independence, but in Jesus of Nazareth this took place only 'in exemplary fashion.' This means that our renewed independence can be really our own, for

> '[t]hrough the death of the Son...God gives room alongside himself even after death. Because the Son dies in the particularity of his human existence, all others in their otherness are not crowded out by him as though his human particularity were the measure of all things and excluded all others' (2.434).

Our integrity and particularity are therefore both assured. And this explains both the absence of Christ now ascended and why it is good that He leave for the Spirit to come. For,

> 'Although Jesus himself was filled with the Spirit of God, it was only after he left the disciples that they received the Spirit as an abiding gift. His absence put them in a position in which they could *independently* recognize the glory of Jesus in his humility and lowliness and thus be reconciled to God in their own lives...Hence the Johannine Christ could say that it was good for them that he should leave them..., for they could then attain to the independence of their own relation to the Father by perceiving the glory of the Son in his death and passion' (2.454).

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[17] See 3.211, especially footnote 350.

The room, then, that Christ makes in reconciliation is both for the Spirit and for us, namely for reconciliation to be completed as the Spirit enables us to participate in our own personal way in reconciliation by sharing the Son's relationship with the Father.

In sum, then, we may say that Christians are enabled by the Spirit to be in real and direct relation with God the Father by virtue of their union with Christ. Hence they enjoy both freedom, since by the Spirit they have been liberated from the bondage of the world, sin and devil for a life of righteousness, and immediacy to God, since they share Christ's filial relationship to the Father. They do not have to become God or even Jesus Christ, since in their union with them they remain distinct from both. For this reason, '[t]his immediacy to God is to be lived out in the particularity of their own life-fulfillment' (2.453).

Pannenberg's account of God's reconciliation of the world is not as full as many other dogmatic accounts of the atoning work of Christ, being shorter than the sections on creation, christology, the church and eschatology. The emphasis on the Trinity within the discussion, then, is proportionally very strong, as Pannenberg seeks to apportion to all three persons in turn their proper role in the drama of salvation. Nevertheless Herbert Neie in his book on Pannenberg's doctrine of the atonement suggests he might go further and proposes how a more explicitly trinitarian account of the passion might be worked out:

> The fact that the Son and the Father realize themselves in their unity precisely by their reciprocal self-dedication and common dedication to the creatures, which includes participation in the others' suffering, would enable Pannenberg to teach that God in his love for humanity and all creatures suffers on the cross the passion of love – *without compromising his principle, historically established, of the distinction of Father, Son and Spirit in the essence of God itself.* To say, then, that God suffers on the cross means that the Persons of the trinity participate in Jesus' passion on the cross – as in *all* suffering of *all* creatures on *all* crosses.[18]

The Trinity is operative is Pannenberg's presentation in *ST*, as we have seen, but not in the way that Neie has proposed. Rather than a revised patripassianism, Pannenberg's

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[18] Neie, p.223.

trinitarian doctrine of reconciliation focuses on how God's triune action in saving the world has the character of a process. God's act of reconciliation is not limited in Pannenberg's presentation to the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, but encompasses the Spirit's reconciling work in the establishing of the kingdom and the ministry of the church. To this we now turn.

Chapter Seven

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Pannenberg's deep interest in ecclesiological and ecclesiastical matters may have escaped some of his readers, especially those readers of his works in English translation. Alongside the more familiar interests in anthropology, theological method, christology and theology's relationship to philosophy and the natural sciences, there is also a significant body of literature penned by him on the nature and vocation of the church.[1] Nor is his interest in church matters restricted to the purely academic in view of his activities in contemporary ecumenism. For example, since 1956 he has been a member of the ecumenical working group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany, being the theological leader on the Protestant side from 1975 to 1990; and from 1975 to 1990 he was a member of the World Council of Churches' Commission for Faith and Church Order.[2]

The importance and scope of Pannenberg's discussion of the church in *ST* results in a survey that includes much material that would often be organised under a different theological locus. Not only does chapter 13, "The Messianic Community and Individuals," contain material on the nature of the church (section I) as well as lengthy treatments of the sacraments (section III) and ministry (section IV), but there is also substantial discussion of the virtues of the Christian life, namely, faith, hope, love, along with adoption as God's children and justification.[3] Hence Pannenberg can write in the foreword:

> Not just externally the theme of the church lies at the heart of the third volume of the present exposition of Christian doctrine. It occupies by far the largest chapter, though also embracing the doctrine of the Spirit as an eschatological gift that aims at the eschatological consummation of salvation (3.xiii).

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[1] For details see the bibliography in Braaten and Clayton (ed.).
[2] Such information comes from *Beitraege zur systematischen Theologie: Band 3* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2003), p. 9 (Hereafter *BST3).*
[3] These are all discussed in section II, "The Basic Saving Works of the Spirit in Individual Christians" (3.135-236).

Nevertheless, Pannenberg provides dogmatic checks on the inflation of ecclesiology, two in particular: the stress on individual participation, and the context of pneumatology and the kingdom. As for the former, 'what is the church,' Pannenberg asks, 'except a fellowship of individuals who believe in Jesus Christ?' (3.97). Hence,

> 'the focus of the discussion is on individual participation in salvation, with the church and sacraments simply as signs of its future consummation...It is only in the immediacy of the personal relation to God that future salvation is already at work, changing present-day life into a life of faith, hope and love' (3.xiii).[4]

So, for instance, discussion of sacrament and ministry follows that of the works of the Spirit in individual believers.

As for the latter, 'as a sign and tool of the coming kingdom of God the church has its end not in itself' (3.45), but in the kingdom brought in by the work of Son and Spirit. We can see this primarily in Pannenberg's placing discussion of ecclesiology within the realm of pneumatology. Chapter 13 on the church follows chapter 12, "The Outpouring of the Spirit, the Kingdom of God, and the Church."[5] It is, then, this 'relation to the kingdom of God,' which is 'the context of the church's existence' (3.97). It is the work of the Spirit in bringing creation to its perfection that is to set the agenda for the church, not vice versa. And the ultimate end of the Spirit's activity is not the church, but to bring to consummation the kingdom of God, with which the church should never identify herself, but to which she can only point. For,

> '[t]he church can only try to fulfill its function as a sign pointing to God's kingdom but in distinction from it, in this way mediating to believers assurance of their participation in eschatological salvation, and thus itself being able, in its liturgical life, to be the place of the Spirit's presence already on this side of the eschatological consummation' (3.xv).

With the spiritual poverty and humility that the Son himself showed, the church too must not seek for itself the glory that is the prerogative of God alone. For,

> '[a]s Jesus in his earthly proclamation humbly distinguished himself from the Father and the future of his kingdom, so the church must distinguish its own existence from the future of the kingdom of God' (3.32).

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[4] Pannenberg's emphasis on the need for individual participation is stated very clearly in *IST* chapter 1.
[5] Pannenberg could also defend himself from advocating too high an ecclesiology by means of the his trinitarian categories is in his statements of the church distinguishing itself not just from the Father, but also from the Son and the kingdom which breaks in with His coming. See e.g., 3.32.

The church, Pannenberg believes, must never confuse itself either with Christ or with its own future glorification in God's universal kingdom.

A central emphasis of Pannenberg's discussion is to correct predominant understandings of the personality and work of the Spirit within standard Western treatments of the Trinity. In his view, the description of the Spirit in Western theology from the time of Augustine as gift or love within the divine life has led to accounts of the Spirit's work, which tend to restrict His operation either to the institution of the church or to the individual Christians within it. By offering an alternative trinitarian theology along the lines of *ST* chapter 5, Pannenberg gives an account that describes the Spirit's essence less as gift but more as Life-Giver; that sees Him less as the emanation of the Son but more as an equal partner in a relationship of mutual dependence; and that understands His work in reconciliation less as the isolated activity of generating faith and grace in Christians, but more as enabling ec-static existence in Christ as part of His general work within creation.

There are four specific points to be addressed in this chapter on Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine of the church. The first two, i.e., that the Spirit is gift only as life-giver and that the church is the creature of both Son and Spirit, make similar revisions to traditional Western treatments to the scope and nature of the Spirit's work in general and towards the church in particular, and so form a natural pair. The third deals with the immediacy to God achieved by the Spirit's work in reconciliation, and the fourth treats the various ways in which the Spirit's ecstatic work takes shape in individuals and the church fellowship.

1. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father and Son who imparts salvation, but is so only because He is first of all the Giver of life who consummates the creation.

The triune God of reconciliation is the same triune God of creation. The existence, appearance and activity of all three persons, then, are neither novel nor confined to the later work, but they co-exist and co-operate in all stages of salvation history. This point was made earlier, when Pannenberg argued with Athanasius and against Origen that the work of the Spirit was not to be restricted to spiritual beings, but was to share in the

entire breadth of divine activity of Father and Son (1.271). Here a more specific and related point is being made, i.e., that the work of the Spirit in reconciliation is in continuity with His creative work as God's mighty breath and the origin of all life and movement, and must be understood only against this background. 'The work of the Spirit of God in his church and in believers,' Pannenberg states,

> 'serves the consummating of his work in the world of creation. For the special mode of the presence of the divine Spirit in the gospel and by its proclamation...is a pledge of the promise that the life which derives everywhere from the creative work of the Spirit will finally triumph over death' (3.2).

The soteriological work of the Spirit, then, has to be understood in the context, and fits into the grander narrative, of the eschatological renewal of creation. It is a 'pledge' of this greater scheme, which it 'serves.'

In Pannenberg's view this has been a blindspot of other theology, especially that of the Christian West.[6] 'Perhaps' from Augustine's doctrine of the Spirit as gift[7] later theology tended to identify the Spirit with the application of salvation, whether as with the medieval scholastics He was linked with grace,[8] or with the Reformers He was primarily associated with faith.[9] In modern theology too this tendency is evident in Barth, who describes the Holy Spirit as the '"awakening power" by which the risen Lord created the church,' and, according to Pannenberg, 'almost dualistically set the Spirit as eschatological gift in contrast to existing world reality' (3.3). Yet, Pannenberg notes, the Spirit is active in both creation and the eschaton, in the former as 'the source of the movement and life of all creatures,' in the latter as 'the enabling and transforming power that gives creatures a share in the glory of God' (3.4). We should beware, therefore, of making the Spirit's activity in only the soteriological phase of His work (i.e., His being as sent by the Son as gift) the sole determination of His activity. As Pannenberg summarises,

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[6] The two references he gives to a proper relating of the Spirit's work to creation and eschatology are the Orthodox liturgy for the Feast of the Epiphany and Basil's *De Spiritu Sancto* 16.38 (3.4).
[7] The 'perhaps' is to be found on 3.2 and is – again *perhaps* – evidence of greater nuance in Pannenberg's critique of Western trinitarian thinking than many other contemporary theologians. Here and at other points we are yet to be fully convinced of the accuracy and validity of such readings of the Western theological tradition.
[8] Pannenberg here relies on W.-D. Hauschild, "Heiliger Geist/Geistes Gaben IV. Dogmengeschichtlich," *TRE*, XII/1 (1984), 196-217, esp. pp.202-203.
[9] Pannenberg cites Luther's *Small Catechism.*

'The sending of the Spirit by the Son relates...to the *special* nature of his work in connection with the revelation of salvation' (3.5)[10]

But what is this "special nature" of the Spirit's soteriological work? Pannenberg states, 'the special nature of his function relative to the salvation event is that the Spirit's work on believers ceases to be merely 'an external, invisible, and incomprehensible field of force' – as in creation – but 'is given to them as a gift' (3.7).

Three aspects of this nature as gift are mentioned. Firstly, the Spirit is given 'as a lasting possession of believers.' Unlike the self-imparting of the Spirit in creation in general, there is no taking back of the vitality and movement of the divine Life-Giver. We see this archetypically in the gift of the Spirit to the incarnate Son. As the one who in eternity is the recipient of the Spirit, Jesus Christ is given the Spirit without measure, in such a permanent way that it is operative in and beyond the grave. And by the Spirit's uniting us with Christ, this permanent gift becomes one that believers share. For,

> 'the Spirit who proceeded from the Father, and who was thus conferred on Jesus for his earthly work, is the power of God...by which God raised him from the dead. Just as those who are linked to Jesus in faith will also be raised up by the Spirit, who is granted to them...[F]or this reason...the gift of the Spirit [is] for believers a pledge of their own future resurrection' (3.11).

Second, 'participation in the eternal life of God is made possible' (3.12). The Spirit's work of lifting creatures beyond their finitude has, in its soteriological function, a definite and comprehensible object that is not so much the case as in His activity in creation. The specific thing is that we are irreversibly related to Jesus Christ, who by His life, death and resurrection has secured an eternal destiny for the children of Adam. Since believers receive as a gift the eschatological power of Jesus Christ, who bears the Spirit, they share both in His destiny and in the new life of the future that broke in with His resurrection (3.4-5).

Third, and consequently, the gift of the Spirit means for believers also that 'their resurrection to a new life in fellowship with God is guaranteed' (3.12). This Spirit is by nature the Life-Giver, whose work is fulfilled not just in individual illuminations, but in the consummation of life in all its fullness. And when He is given so that He dwells in believers, He becomes 'a pledge of the promise that the life which derives everywhere

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[10] Emphasis added.

from the creative work of the Spirit will finally triumph over death' (3.2). Thus it is an anticipation of our divine destiny. It is an eschatological gift.

Yet for all the importance of the Spirit's soteriological activity as gift, Pannenberg believes there is a danger of over-emphasis on this particular aspect. To do so is to privilege one stage of the divine economy at the expense of the others where the Spirit's nature as gift is not so essential.

It is not the case in creation. There '[t]he Logos and Spirit work together...in such a way that the Word is the fashioning principle, while the Spirit is the source of the movement and life of creatures.' Truly the Spirit as gift is not separate from His creative work (as outlined in *ST* chapter 7), as Pannenberg believes Western trinitarian theology[11] has traditionally understood the matter, isolating the Spirit's illumining from His creative work. For His salvific work, Pannenberg writes,

> 'takes place in full and continuous connection with his work in the world of nature as the origin of all life, and especially in humans as the source of the spontaneity of their "spiritual" activities that lift them ecstatically above their own particularity and thus enable them to grasp that which is beyond themselves and distinct from their own existence. In just the same way the Spirit effects in us the spontaneous recognition of Jesus as the Son of God that leads to faith in him as the Messiah of God's people' (3.17).

Hence, Pannenberg thinks that 'in an extended sense' the breath of life we are all given, 'may be seen as endowment with God's Spirit' (3.9). And special manifestations of the Spirit, as well as the endowments of the Spirit that certain characters in the OT had, may also be described as gifts.[12] 'The Spirit's work,' then, 'is always in some measure linked to an imparting of his dynamic even though he is not in the full sense always imparted and received as gift' (3.9). Yet, for all its continuity, it is also something new. Something new and definitive happens when the Spirit is *given*. 'The gift of the Spirit to humanity at creation and the charisms of the old covenant as well,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'are simply anticipatory signs of this eschatological gift. By this gift alone the Spirit binds himself to the lives of the recipients in such a way that even death can no longer separate these lives from his creative power' (3.12).

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[11] Pannenberg comments on 3.17, 'Western theology has often failed to see this because it has isolated illumination by the Spirit in faith's recognition of Jesus Christ from the Spirit's work in creation and especially in our own creaturely life.'

Nor is it the case in consummation, in which,

> 'the Spirit is active as the enabling and transfiguring power that gives creatures a share in the glory of God, while the Son, as the agent of the last judgment, is the criterion of belonging to God and his kingdom or for incompatibility with them' (3.4).

Hence, Pannenberg believes, one should not make too much of the fact that in reconciliation the incarnation of the Son precedes the imparting of the Spirit to believers. It is '*only in this connection*'[13] that we can 'speak of the Son "sending" the Spirit who in eternity proceeds from the Father' (3.4).

Augustine's, again, is for Pannenberg a prime example of a theology that falls prey to this danger. Augustine's view, at least as Pannenberg presents it, is that the Spirit is essentially gift, because 'only here,' i.e., in the term "gift" rather than "Spirit,"

> 'do we find in the Spirit the element of relation that characterizes the trinitarian persons, which in the case of the Father or the Son lies already in these personal terms, and which must also be constitutive for the Spirit as a trinitarian person' (3.8).

That is, to understand the essential particularity of the Spirit as related to the other persons, His name is not enough in contrast to the Father and Son (the begetter and begotten), so His role as gift must fulfil this function instead.

Such formulations, Pannenberg thinks, fail to note that,

> 'the imparting of the Spirit as gift is only a transitional stage in his work in salvation history...[It] characterizes the distinctiveness of the soteriological phase of his work in the event of reconciliation' (3.12).

Indeed, 'the first thing to call for notice when he is said to proceed from the Father' (3.7) is His nature as wind, not gift. Pannenberg therefore contests what he calls the Augustinian tradition's 'equating of *donum* and *processio*' (3.8). Augustine believes that the Spirit proceeds eternally from both Father and Son, being from all eternity their mutual gift in the sense that He proceeds from both as origin. This is to fail to give due emphasis, Pannenberg believes, to the fact that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father, but only in the ongoing work of reconciliation proceeds from the Son (i.e., after Christ's resurrection). 'We have,' he says, 'to distinguish from [the Spirit's eternal

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[12] 3.9 notes 'special capacities for insight, artistic gifts, prophetic inspiration, and leadership charisma,' in particular King David and the promised Messiah.
[13] Emphasis added.

procession from the Father] the Son's participation in the imparting or sending, especially because the Son himself is a recipient of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father' (3.8). And Pannenberg backs up his contention with Jesus' baptism and conception, in which the Son is both the recipient of and constituted by the Spirit (3.9).

Yet Pannenberg does not conclude from this that since the Spirit is not the mutual gift of Father and Son in terms of relations of origin, He is not their mutual gift in just any sense. He is not to be seen as proceeding from both as source, but as given from one to the other and then returned. For, just as Jesus' receiving the Spirit at His baptism is followed by His yielding it up at death, so 'the Father gives the Spirit who proceeds from him,' and 'the Son gives him back and in this way proves his self-distinction from the Father as the Son who in eternity receives from the Father the Spirit who raises him to life.' And in this reciprocal giving believers are involved as they are caught up in this dynamic in union with the Christ. For, as Pannenberg continues:

> 'The gift of the Spirit to believers in which the Father and the Son work together follows only from its mediation by the fact that believers, linked by faith and baptism to the Son revealed in Jesus Christ, become members of his body, so that sonship in relation to the Father finds manifestation in them, too, as participation in the sonship of Jesus and therefore in the intratrinitarian life of God, in the reception of the Spirit by the Son and in the giving back of the Spirit to the Father' (3.11).

Christians, then, receive the Spirit as a gift, since the Spirit is first of all gift in the triune reality of God. For, unlike the general giving of the Spirit they share in the gift of the life-giving Spirit to the ultimate and definitive recipient, Jesus Christ, the risen spiritual second Adam, who received Him without measure or restriction.

This reconfiguration of the role of the specifically soteriological role of the Spirit and its implications for trinitarian theology in general are continued under the next point.

2. **Both the Son and the Spirit are active in producing the kingdom as their work and the church as their creature, their activity being irreducible the one to the other. The Son is the one into whose body believers are gathered, and the Spirit the one by whom they can thus belong to church and kingdom.**

Pannenberg notes passages such as 1 Cor. 3:11 which name Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church, and certain others (particularly Luke-Acts) that trace the church's existence back to the power of the Spirit. So, as persons of the Trinity who, as we have seen, have each their own integrity and mutually indwell and depend upon each other, the work of the Son and Spirit are not competitive but together constitute the future kingdom and the church which points towards it. As Pannenberg puts it,

> 'Each by faith is related to the one Lord and hence to all other believers. By the Spirit each is lifted above individual particularity in order, "in Christ," to form with all other believers the fellowship of the church' (3.13).

Again, this is continuous with the divine work of creation and eschatology where both Son and Spirit are at work. They are active together in creation 'in such a way that the Word of creation is the fashioning principle, while the Spirit is the source of movement and life of creatures,' and in consummation with the Spirit as 'the enabling and transfiguring power that gives creatures a share in the glory of God' and the Son 'the criterion for belonging to God and his kingdom' (3.4). In the work of establishing the kingdom and the church which is its sign, the work of Son and Spirit Pannenberg apportions thus. On the one hand Christ is the one into whose body believers are gathered together in the fellowship of the church, and He is thus its one foundation. On the other hand the Spirit, as the one who gives glory to Christ, is the one by whom we participate outside ourselves in Christ, and so it can be said, 'only by the work of the Spirit, then, is Jesus Christ the church's foundation' (3.16). And as the Spirit is also the Life-Giver, Pannenberg writes, it is always against the wider background of the kingdom that we should view the church. For,

> '[t]he function of the pneumatological grounding of the church is to enable us to perceive in the eschatological consummation of creation, which was already the goal of the earthly mission of Jesus, the glory of Jesus Christ in virtue of which he is the new Adam and therefore also the Head of the church as his body' (3.20).

The church, then, is the work of *both* Son and Spirit. This Pannenberg finds in the biblical witness, especially in John and Paul. In John, the two persons are linked, not just because the Spirit is sent by the Son, but also because the Spirit leads people to knowledge of the Son and by the Spirit the Son is "in" His disciples. Both Paul and John refer to this mutual indwelling of the triune persons. Pannenberg comments on John 14:23,

> 'As the Spirit bears witness in believers to Jesus as the truth of God, they themselves are ecstatically raptured and are outside themselves in Jesus, while conversely Jesus is in them to bind them in fellowship with one another, and along with Jesus the Father also takes up his dwelling in believers' (3.16).

As the Spirit in creation lifts beings above their own particularity, so in building the church He 'effects in us the spontaneous recognition of Jesus as the Son of God that leads to faith in him as the Messiah of God's people' (3.17).

Two main points follow from this. Firstly, as the One who binds us to the one Lord, the Spirit both in the church and in believers is a common gift. It is, he says, 'not just for individual believers but aims at the building up of the fellowship of believers, at the founding and the constant giving of new life to the church' (3.12). This is the message, so Pannenberg says, of the account of Pentecost in Acts 2, '[f]or this story does at all events demonstrate that the Spirit was given to all the disciples in common and that therewith the church had its beginning' (3.13). Here, he says the Spirit not only provides assurance of salvation to the individual believer, but also founds the fellowship.

Secondly, since the church is the creature of *both* Son and Spirit, the work of the one should not be reduced to that of the other. For Pannenberg this entails that no one model of the church is to have hegemony over the others. 'Each theological concept of the church', Pannenberg writes,

> 'must integrate into itself the material aspects articulated in these different conceptions to form an intrinsically unified view of the constituting of the church by Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit, and consequently an interpretation of the relation between church and Spirit that cannot be treated as identical with any one NT concept because of a compulsion to erase the differences' (3.15).

And there is an inevitable fall-out when the work of one person is emphasised to the exclusion of the other. If the christological grounding starts to obscure the pneumatological, then, Pannenberg states drawing on the work of recent ecumenical theology, there arises the danger of theocracy, either of official church structures[14] or of proclamation.[15] For without the work of the Spirit,

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[14] A perceived weakness of much Western Christianity (3.18-19).

[15] This is a weakness of Reformation theology with its notion of the church as a creation of the Word. Pannenberg is here drawing on the critique in W. Kasper and G. Sauter (eds.) *Kirche – Ort des Geistes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), as well as R. Gruetzmacher's critical remarks on the theology of Lutheran

> 'the history of Jesus and the gospel Word concerning him [would have] remained external to hearers of the message, even as a purely external authority, and [would] not [have] led to personal knowledge and the resultant spontaneous involvement' (3.18).

And a one-sided stress on pneumatology can, as some of Schleiermacher's remarks might suggest,[16] lead to a view of the church's Spirit after the manner of the esprit de corps that characterises and unites other human communities. The christological foundation, then, can operate 'as a brake on the unregulated enthusiasm that with an appeal to the dynamic of the Spirit breaks free from the church's tradition and institutional order as though it alone counted as a sign of spiritual vitality.' For, Pannenberg says,

> 'The church and its members do not control the gift of the Spirit as though it were their possession. The gift remains linked to the foundation that they have *outside* themselves in Jesus Christ' (3.19).[17]

Hence the church as the community of the Spirit must be engaged in recollection and glorification of the Son, since the Spirit's life-giving work always relates to Jesus and the eschatological consummation realised in Him.

It should be noted that here as elsewhere, Pannenberg's thinking is closely bound up with his understanding of the internal triune relations, the economic action of the persons being at one with their immanent constitution. Of particular importance here is the relationship between the second and third persons of the Trinity, with Pannenberg seeking to avoid some of the perceived abuses that some have traced to the Western adoption of the *filioque*. For, Pannenberg writes, '[w]e do not exhaustively describe the Spirit of God by saying that through him the risen Christ still works on earth, even if invisibly' (3.5),[18] and His significance consists in more than just the application of redemption. This follows, since the Son does not merely give the Spirit. He also receives it. The Spirit, therefore, does not merely take from what is the Son's and make it known to us. He does this because He is firstly the one who constitutes the identity and work of the incarnate Son.

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orthodoxy in his *Wort und Geist: Eine historische und dogmatische Untersuchung aum Gnadenmittel des Worts* (Leipzig, 1902).

[16] *Christian Faith* pp.560ff.

[17] Emphasis added, but properly represents the specific point Pannenberg is making, as can be seen in the attached footnote.

[18] 3.5 argues primarily against Barth.

Some critical comment is called for here on the points Pannenberg makes in our first two theses, particularly on two matters. We shall need to say some more below in the critical sections of the conclusion, where we shall raise questions about some of the moves being made in the midst of all this trinitarian language. Yet for now we can note positively that Pannenberg has shown clearly and succinctly the need to understand pneumatology in terms of the whole economy of salvation. There is indeed something incomplete about identifying the Spirit's work with faith since scripture testifies that one day our faith will give way to sight.[19]

Yet we raise two criticisms. Firstly, Pannenberg's depiction of Western theology is more of a caricature than an accurate portrait. The idea that the Spirit is 'much more than just cognitive divine help' (3.2) by no means requires an overhaul of Western trinitarianism. The dominant view of Western theology is that the Spirit links us to Christ, and it is thus that we receive the richness of divine blessing, not just cognitive help. Whereas earlier he could uncover a parody of Western trinitarian theology on the matter of intra-trinitarian 'actions' (2.4), his reading is less sympathetic when he writes

> 'The Reformation concentration on the relation of Word, Spirit and faith could easily lead to a restriction of the Spirit's function to an imparting of the knowledge of faith that is not accessible...to human reason (3.3).

Calvin, for instance, with his knowledge of and reliance on Augustine's writings as well as his abiding influence on subsequent Western Christian thought, represents a theology four-square within the Western and Reformation traditions. His pneumatology will not fit in Pannenberg's scheme, however. 'The Holy Spirit,' Calvin says, 'is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself,'[20] whence comes not just knowledge, but all blessings.[21]

There may be something more significant than faulty history that is awry in Pannenberg's argument, however. In defence of his stress on the Spirit's work in more than the application of redemption, Pannenberg cites the Augustinian rule that all the external works of the Trinity are undivided. Chapter 12 begins: 'In all its forms the activity of the trinitarian God in creation is an activity of the Father by the Son and Spirit,

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[19] E.g., Rom. 8:24; Heb. 2:8; 11:1. For a helpful elucidation of this point see H. Berkhof *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (revised) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp.108-111.
[20] *Institutes* 3.1.1.
[21] *Ibid.* 2.16.19

an activity of the Son in obedience to the Father, and the glorifying of both in the consummation of their work by the Spirit' (3.1). We wholly concur, as would all orthodox theology, both eastern and western. Pannenberg's deployment of the rule makes the justified point that the Spirit is involved not just in divine acts of reconciliation, but in creation too. Yet this rule cuts both ways. It is equally justified to conclude from this rule that every work of the Spirit is a giving of what is Christ's to us. And if "what is Christ's" is – in the work of reconciliation, unlike that of creation – an utter reconstitution of our being that involves death and resurrection that is only accessible by faith, then the regenerating work of the Spirit appears rather more drastic than does His providential ordering of the universe. The significance of this point becomes clearer in the light of the one that follows.

The second question we have to raise here concerns a theme present throughout *ST*, but whose trinitarian outworking is particularly evident here. This is Pannenberg's insistence that redemption represents the completion of creation, the act of which is only complete with the eschatological consummation of the world. There are a number of points in *ST* where this is emphasised. In chapter 7, for instance, Pannenberg emphasises that God's creative work 'embraces the whole cosmic process and permeates all phases of the divine action in history' (2.41), and the christology presents Christ as the one in whom creation first comes to completion. Yet the issue is perhaps most pressing here in the discussion of pneumatology.

A perhaps rather simplistic way to introduce the issue which causes us concern is to ask this question: When Christ says 'Behold! I have made all things new,' how new is new? The reconciling work of the Holy Spirit is the application of Christ's death and resurrection, and thus means the annihilation and reconstitution of our existence, because of which we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6.11). This explains why His work is described in terms of new creation, new birth and regeneration, i.e., an utter reconstitution of our identity and a completely new life. Indeed to appeal to the Augustinian rule to justify seeing reconciliation more as the completion of creation than as re-creation is rather misleading, since the undivided nature of the external works of the Trinity signifies not so much that there is only one action, but that there is only one agent. And since the work of reconciliation means for the Son our complete re-creation, so should it also for the work of the Spirit.

We noted already that Pannenberg is writing in a polemical context against the idea of the Spirit as 'divine cognitive help' that he thinks bedevils Western theology. We do not take particular exception to this, since against tendencies often termed Gnostic or Manichaean, one has to state that salvation is not from creation, nor is its goal a creation other than this one; rather it is the salvation *of* creation, and of *this* creation. But in addition, one also has to state, against tendencies commonly referred to in an early age as Sadduceean, that the saving work of Son and Spirit in redemption is not just the completion of creation, but is its complete and genuine renewal. The way in which Pannenberg structures his account of the Spirit's work in reconciliation, we believe, pushes some of his remarks in a Sadducean direction. We conclude by noting two points where Pannenberg's account of the Spirit puts his treatment of kingdom and church under particular strain.

Firstly, Pannenberg's stress on the continuity of the Spirit's work leads to some questionable theological judgements. For instance, he accuses Otto Weber and Karl Barth of 'almost dualistically set[ting] the Spirit as an eschatological gift in contrast to the existing world reality' (3.3). Yet for all that it is *this* world reality that will then be changed, is it not the point of the consummation that it *is* in contrast to *existing* world reality – 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'?[22] Both Barth and Weber are careful to differentiate their accounts from gnostic soteriologies of salvation from creation, which would be dualistic, but at this point their grasp of the genuine and total newness of the new creation is the more convincing in our opinion.

Second, there is inevitable tension between the emphasis on the continuous work of the Spirit throughout the economy and Pannenberg's account of what the Spirit does which often focuses on the discontinuity. For Pannenberg, no less than other theologians who place more stress on the newness of the Spirit's work, wishes to emphasise that it is not a possession we have of ourselves and that it is the coming of the future reality rather than the mere maintenance of the present. Our fellowship, he says, is something 'that by the Spirit [we] have beyond [our]selves in Christ,' just as by faith we are 'lifted up ...beyond the self in Christ' (3.134). So, for instance, on Christian baptism he writes, 'It is the actual reconstitution of the person in the form of the sacramental sign...the gaining of

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[22] 1Cor 15:50.

true human self-identity' (3.275). Moreover, Pannenberg's account of conversion maintains that

> 'faith is not effected in us by God's Spirit in the same way as all life's phenomena go back to the Spirit's work in creation. It is with the eschatological reality of the new life manifested in Jesus Christ that believers also receive the Holy Spirit as a gift' (3.200).

Often it is either the ecstatic nature of our being in Christ *extra nos* or eschatology that allow for these references to the unique and salvific character of the life-giving acts of the Spirit, and it is only thus rather than by some immanent process that Christ can be said to be in us.

Yet this uniqueness seems not always to be so clearly stated with reference to the Spirit. At one point Pannenberg writes:

> 'This work of the Spirit takes place in full and continuous connection with his work in the world of nature as the origin of all life, and especially in humans as the source of their "spiritual" activities that lift them ecstatically above their own particularity...*In just the same way* the Spirit effects in us the spontaneous recognition of Jesus as the Son of God that leads to faith in him as the Messiah of God's people' (3.17).[23]

There are at least two problems with these comments, especially in saying that the Spirit works in just the same way when He produces faith in Christ as when He enables other instances of human ecstasy. For one thing, faith in Christ means being united in Christ's death and resurrection, which means both death to the world and the utter recreation of worldly reality. So, faith in Christ involves not a continuity with the rest of the Spirit's work in creation, but the discontinuity of something totally and radically new. For another, faith in Christ means being united with a supernatural object, i.e., the Son of God who became incarnate.

Pannenberg goes on to say, 'The special distinction of faith's recognition rests simply on its object, not on the nature of its perception' (3.17). But can this really be maintained? If it is the case, as Pannenberg believes, that Christ is really the unique Son of God incarnate, and so radically different from all creaturely reality, then surely the mode of perceiving it must be unique too. If it is merely a case of something being outside of us then there is no problem with the nature of perception remaining the same no matter what the object is, but the incarnate Son of God cannot be put into a species of things that

are outside of us. *Deus non est in genere*, even if the *deus* is God the Son and even if the *genus* is that of things external to us. Christ is the invisible God veiled in flesh, and so can be known only in that unique mode of perception, which is faith that the Spirit gives. Certainly it is the same Spirit who is operative both in the preserving of creation and in faith in the crucified Saviour, but in a wholly new way.

3. **The Spirit grants Christians immediacy to God and thus gives them true freedom, that is, He unites them to Jesus' filial relation to the Father both as individuals and as the fellowship of believers.**

The content and ordering of Pannenberg 's ecclesiology is guided by the concern not to fall prey to an individualistic subjectivity or spirituality. One can see this both in his placing the section on the immediacy of individuals to Jesus Christ (3.122-135) after the one entitled 'The Mediating of the Fellowship of Believers by the Common Confession' (3.110-122), and by stressing the trinitarian context of the individual Christian life. The discussion of believers' immediacy God is in many ways Pannenberg's interpretation of Luther's notion of the priesthood of all believers and his *On the Freedom of the Christian*.[24] By placing this discussion in an ecclesial and kingdom context, and by giving it trinitarian content – the full title of the section is "The Immediacy of Individuals to Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and the Communicating of the Gospel by the Church," – Pannenberg takes up Luther's insights shorn of individualistic and subjectivist interpretation.

Two questions arise. What is this immediacy? And how is it a work of the specifically trinitarian God?

Firstly, what Pannenberg means by this immediacy is when the recipients of the gospel message 'achieve their own independent relation to the matter, and hence a relation of immediacy that can cause them to forget the communication process.' This 'work of the Spirit' is 'the immediacy of a personal relationship' with Jesus, and in Him the Father (3.124). It is not the individualism of lone ranger Christians who conduct

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[23] Emphasis added.
[24] *LW* vol.31, pp.327ff (*WA* 7.20ff).

themselves outside the visible church, which is, Pannenberg believes, a peculiarly modern phenomenon, and not the intent of the Reformers' notion of the priesthood of all believers (3.125-6).

The individual believer's commitment is mediated by the church's praise and confession of her Lord, just as the church is the gathering of individuals with an immediate relationship with Jesus. It is freedom, freedom from sin, from law, from corruption and death; it is a freedom founded on the basic freedom of direct access to God. For Pannenberg, it means being God's children, rather than servants, since 'by participation in the filial relation of Jesus Christ to the Father, Christians have free access to the Father and may address him as Father...as Jesus did' (2.128-129).

Pannenberg notes two elements of this liberating immediacy that the Spirit brings. The first is knowledge of Jesus. It includes 'the freedom of individual judgement regarding the content of the tradition' (3.123), and even the right sort of critical reflection. Hence the responsibility of church leaders to instruct believers in the substance of scripture so that they too can share in the joy and freedom of this immediacy to Christ, and the need to beware of the wrong sort of priestly mediation (3.127). The second is 'the immediacy of a personal relationship.' For believers, Pannenberg writes, 'have immediacy to Jesus because all have individual fellowship with Jesus in faith' (3.124). In this way believers achieve their own independent relationship with God.

As for the second question, it is a triune action thus: this evangelical freedom is possible only because it is first the work of the Spirit, who is permanently given to believers, in order that they may share in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father, with its free access to God. Let us look at the various components of this in turn.

That our immediacy to God is *the work of the Spirit* is to be expected given what we have already mentioned on His creative activity and His work in the human reception of reconciliation. Yet there is something more to notice. '[T]his is not just one work of the Spirit among others,' Pannenberg avers. 'The freedom of believers expresses the fact that the Spirit of God not only works in them but is permanently given to them' (3.129). For as the pledge of eternal life He is our unending link to the Son, by which we share in *His* unrestricted gift of the Spirit.[25]

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[25] John 3:34.

It is for this reason, i.e., the permanent gift of the Spirit, that the second part of our definition holds true, namely, *in order that they may share in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father, with its free access to God.* The permanent gift of union with the Son, for Pannenberg, explains Christ's words, '"If, then, the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36)' (3.129).

And since this "freedom indeed" is achieved only in union with Christ, Pannenberg distinguishes it from what he considers false freedom. In particular it is not just formal freedom, a freedom *from*, by which one distances oneself from a spectrum of possibilities, but a freedom *for*, by which we are firmly linked to the good and so choose it. It is a freedom not of detachment or isolation, but the freedom of humanity's new and true identity in Christ. For, as Pannenberg states,

> In fellowship with the eternal God believers are freed from anxiety about their finite existence, from fear of others, and from the powers of this world. The Spirit grants this freedom not only by liberating us from fixation on our own ego and lifting us above our own finitude, but by becoming lastingly ours as he gives us a share in the sonship of Jesus Christ (3.130).

The final part of the above thesis that we have to exegete concerns how the Spirit's work of granting immediacy is for *both believers and the church.* As Pannenberg notes, in modern times especially there has been an interpretation of Christian immediacy to God that sees it as a key insight in the history of the liberation of the individual from the collective. Pannenberg does not want to deny every element of this. Indeed, there is an irreducibly individual element to the work of the Spirit. As he puts it in the first of his summary points,

> The Holy Spirit is the medium of the immediacy of individual Christians to God as he lifts them up to participation in the sonship of Jesus Christ and grants them, as a permanent gift, the Christian freedom that enables them to call confidently on God as our Father because the Spirit gives them assurance that they are God's children (3.134).

Yet this trinitarian work of giving believers immediate access to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit is not opposed to what he has said earlier about the common confession. For, since the Spirit unites *individual* believers *in common* to the Son, the freedom of our new identity is a freedom with and for others. In other words, the particular ec-stasy in the individual appropriation of salvation is the Spirit lifting us out of

ourselves to participate in the salvific work of Christ to be members of His body. Pannenberg writes,

> By the event of this elevation of our own particularity, we as individual believers are also linked with others in the fellowship of believers, a fellowship whose common setting is the *extra nos* of faith in the one Lord (3.135-136).

Hence,

> 'raising up to existence outside the self in Christ...does not simply assure individuals of their freedom in Christ but in so doing brings them to the place of believers' fellowship. Not just the individual, but the church, too, in its liturgical life has its existence outside itself in Christ. In this way it shows itself to be a fellowship of the Spirit' (3.130).

The independent existence of human creatures, which is the goal of God's action in the economy is not autonomy either from God or from fellow humans, but the mature life before God in the community of faith. And this too is achieved by specifically trinitarian action. For against other common causes that may be most 'unholy' Pannenberg states that 'by the Spirit the future of Jesus Christ is already present to believers as their personal and common future of salvation' (3.134). It is thus that the Spirit 'releases and reconciles the tension between the fellowship and the individual in the concept of the church' (3.130). The form that this takes in the lives of Christians as well as its trinitarian outworking is the subject-matter of our next thesis.

4. The Holy Spirit's ecstatic work in raising believers outside themselves into Christ takes form in individual Christians as faith, hope, love, adoption and justification, and is signified in the church community in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

'In all their forms of manifestation the works of God's Spirit have an ecstatic character' (3.135). As befits the procedure of seeing the Spirit's soteriological work as gift within the context of His more comprehensive activity as Giver of Life, the spotlight moves from the general to the particular: what is the case in all of creation and in all human life,[26] applies

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[26] 'Every living thing lives its life by existing outside itself, namely, in and by the world around it' (3.135). Cf. 2.33-34, 128ff.

also for all human faith and finally for specifically Christian existence. This is so both for what Pannenberg calls "The Basic Saving Works of the Spirit in Individual Christians" and for "The Significatory Form of the Presence of Christ's Salvation in the Life of the Church." These two topics, which form a large part of Pannenberg's discussion in chapter 13, also shape the rest of our treatment of his doctrine of the kingdom and the church.

The Spirit's ecstatic work in individual Christians

The particular ec-stasy in the individual appropriation of salvation is the Spirit lifting us out of ourselves to participate in the salvific work of Christ to be members of His body. By the event of this elevation of our own particularity, 'we as individual believers are also linked with others in the fellowship of believers, a fellowship whose common setting is the *extra nos* of faith in the one Lord' (3.135-136). Hence, individual ecstatic existence in Christ and its spiritual fruit – faith, hope and love as well as adoption and justification – are irreducibly ecclesial.

Faith

The '*extra nos* of faith in the one Lord,' Pannenberg says, has its basis in God's historical revelation. That is, knowledge of the history of Jesus and assent to its truth and dependability as well as to the future it presents to us is faith's presupposition, and it is '[b]y putting one's trust in the future God will bring' that 'one has faith in God Himself (3.138). Such in very general terms is Pannenberg's presentation of Christian faith.

What has this to do with the trinitarian God? Two answers can be given to this question, the one more complimentary, the other less so. The more complimentary answer in the light of the avowed trinitarian ambitions is that in Pannenberg's account the Trinity provides the context and foundation for faith. There is a trinitarian context since it is within the framework of sharing Christ's sonship by the Spirit that Pannenberg deals with the phenomenon of faith – such is the '*extra nos* of faith'. Also, the foundation is trinitarian, as the Trinity is more than simply a 'thought of faith' consisting of an interpretation of the history of Jesus, although trinitarian doctrine is that too (3.160). For ultimately God's historical revelation has its ground in the trinitarian God, since it is the

God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit who, Pannenberg says, is 'the final and material basis of the historical reality of Jesus' (3.160).

The less complimentary answer to the question, 'What has this to do with the trinitarian God?' is – frankly – 'Not much.' While not denying that the trinitarian context and foundation do exist, one must admit that their role in the discussion is very much back-stage rather than centre-stage. Notably, of all the "Basic Works of the Spirit in Individual Christians" the section on faith is by far the longest, and its references to and reliance on trinitarian thinking by far the fewest. In our opinion the conspicuous silence on the Trinity here is part of a general lack of trinitarian reference on matters to do with our knowledge of God, which we shall examine in the conclusion where we shall return to Pannenberg's treatment of faith.

Hope

Since faith is trust in God's saving action in time, and since this action is directed towards future consummation, faith necessarily implies hope. For Pannenberg this is part of the same trinitarian dynamic. Sharing in His Spirit 'believers in Christ, to whom they are united in the ecstatic "outside-the-self" of faith, acquire a hope beyond death,' enjoying the permanence of filial relationship to the Father. This is the basis for the Christian hope that endures beyond the grave, and thus 'faith lifts us above our entanglement in the vicious circle of sin and death' (3.177).

That Christian hope results from this trinitarian dynamic safeguards it, Pannenberg argues, from rival false versions that hold it to be either generated by the self or exclusive to the self. Pannenberg's account of the ecstatic work of the Spirit in general distances itself from self-generation and self-limitation, but his treatment of hope provides a helpful illustrative example.[27]

Firstly, it is not generated by the self, because it is a trinitarian possibility rather than a human power. 'In keeping with its nature as Christian hope,' Pannenberg writes, 'it has its basis outside itself, namely, in Jesus Christ.' Because of this different basis Christian hope is distinct from all other human hopes, and thus 'its content exceeds all that we may

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[27] E.g., the treatment of love shows that its trinitarian enabling entails its generation by God rather than us and its necessary inclusion of all those who have a share in Christ (3.182ff).

hope for or expect according to human experience' (3.174). Thus, in contrast to self-generated expectancy it can rightly be considered as a promise addressed to us.

Second, it is not exclusive to the self, since spiritual ecstatic existence provides a basis 'for overcoming the egotistical structure of human hopes.' For by faith we are snatched from self-centred ambition and 'find the fulfillment of [our] personal life precisely in the fellowship of the body of Christ and the work for the future of humanity in the kingdom of God' (3.177).

Love

That Pannenberg believes faith mediates our inclusion into the divine fellowship of love means that he understands Christian love on the basis of faith, and thus along the lines of standard Lutheran treatments that 'love...ought to follow faith.'[28] Yet much of Pannenberg's account of Christian love is intended to correct certain understandings common in Lutheran theology, partly understandings of grace in Western theology, and more specifically the idea common in certain strands of 20th century Lutheran theology that Christian love is only expressed in downward and outward love of neighbour rather than peculiarly upward longing for God. Pannenberg's trinitarian resolution of these issues concerning Christian love affect all three of the sub-sections he includes.

First, on the matter of love of God and love of neighbour, Pannenberg understands the latter as inclusion in the dynamic of love – we love others because God first loved us together with the rest of humanity. But Pannenberg wants to say something more, and for trinitarian reasons. In particular he is seeking to correct a rival understanding of Christian love, one which makes a sharp distinction between two sorts of love, *eros* and *agape*, the former an upward movement of our self-seeking and self-justifying love for God, and the latter a downward movement of God's giving and suffering love for us.[29]

The trinitarian underpinnings to Pannenberg's theology allow him to endorse both a downward and an upward element to Christian love. Love of neighbour, he says, is

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[28] *Apology for the Augsburg Confession* II, 74.

[29] The classic statement of this position is A. Nygren *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1953), esp. pp.53-55. Perhaps the most eloquent critique of the view of Nygren is to be found in J. Burnaby *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine: the Hulsean Lectures of 1938* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938). See also O. M. T. O'Donovan *The Problem of Self-love in Augustine* (New Haven:

'participation in the Father's love for the Son that extends also to the world of creatures and embraces it' (3.187), and thus grounds our love outwards.[30] But our understanding of agape must be 'trinitarian' and therefore include the reciprocity that characterises the divine life. So, Pannenberg writes that Christian love also has an upward element since it shares in Christ's filial relationship to the Father, and that 'as a response that the Holy Spirit makes possible to the love received from God, we have a part in the intratrinitarian life of God, in the mutuality of fellowship between Father, Son and Spirit' (3.193).

Second, this trinitarian understanding is fundamental for his treatment of love and grace, in particular the tackling of the longstanding issue within Western theology of whether love should be understood as gracious favour or as infused gift. 'Only the ecstatic structure of faith,' Pannenberg writes,

> 'enables us to understand that the Spirit of God and therefore also the love of God that is poured into believers' hearts do not become part of our creaturely reality when God's Spirit is imparted to us as a gift and he pours God's love into our hearts' (3.200).

In this way Pannenberg affirms on the one hand that the Spirit really is given to us and that Christ really is in us, and on the other that this grace is not independent of the history of Jesus Christ, since it is not autonomous but only exists as we are taken up to exist in Him.

Third, the trinitarian construal informs Pannenberg's treatment of prayer. The context for prayer is the mutuality in the filial relationship to God Christians have, 'the mutuality,' he says, 'that has its basic eternal form in the mutual perichoresis of the trinitarian persons' (3.204). Our participation in divine love includes a responsive love to God that expresses itself in spontaneous address to God and intercession for others. Thus, he says, 'the link between love of God and love of neighbor finds concrete manifestation in Christian prayer' (3.205).

Yale, 1980) for further insights into how common views such as Nygren's were in 20th century Lutheran theology.

[30] That the Father's love for the world is in the Son also guarantees the independence of God's love from its creaturely object (3.187).

If Pannenberg's trinitarian rubric for understanding the Christian life, i.e., that by the Spirit we share in the Son's relationship with the Father, had a significant effect on certain Lutheran understandings of immediacy to God and of love, the effect is even greater on Lutheran interpretations of justification. There are a number of points at issue in Pannenberg's treatment,[31] such as the meaning and importance of baptism, and the plurality of metaphors of reconciliation of which justification is only one. For our purposes, however, the focus here is on the importance of the Trinity for the reinterpretation and relativising of the doctrine of justification.

As we have seen, Pannenberg's trinitarian construal of reconciliation is that by the Spirit we exist outside ourselves to share the Son's relationship to the Father. Indeed it may be more than coincidence that since justification, on Pannenberg's reading, is not a mere declaration *extra nos* but is a consequence of our being joined by the Spirit to Christ the Son of God, *ST*'s treatment of justification comes after faith as one of a series of works of the Spirit's reconciling action. And it is this basis of ecstatic fellowship with Christ by the Spirit that controls the treatment of justification, too.

This basis in sharing Christ's filial relation to the Father means a special emphasis on adoption. Indeed, for Pannenberg, adoption, understood in terms of this trinitarian dynamic takes us deeper into the mystery of salvation than does justification. 'As the children of God,' Pannenberg states,

> '...believers are caught up both in the Son's fellowship of love with the Father and in the obedience of the Son of God on his path to the world. In other words, those whom the Spirit of God impels are God's children...Being God's children is thus of the essence of the Christian life' (3.211-212).

This, Pannenberg thinks, is the message of Paul and Jesus himself (3.212), and has rightly been retrieved in modern theology view that adoption is not merely an effect of justification,[32] but its equivalent. It is, he argues, also the understanding of Luther, for whom 'ecstatic fellowship with Christ, to whom believers entrust themselves, forms the basis...of justification' (3.215).[33] 'Being declared righteous is not the basis of the

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[31] On justification see also *Hintergruende des Streites um die Rechtfertigungslehre in der evangelischen Theologie* (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), and the relevant articles in *BST*3, where the impact of the doctrine of the Trinity is less obvious.
[32] E.g., A. Ritschl *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (trans. J. S. Black) (Edinburgh: Edminton & Douglas, 1872).
[33] 3.215-219 chronicle Pannenberg's reading of Luther's doctrine of justification, and how it is consonant with his own.

righteousness of faith,' writes Schwoebel. 'Rather, the righteousness of faith is the basis for being declared righteous.'[34] We are first united with Christ through faith, *then* we are accounted righteous on the basis of Christ's merits; we are not first declared righteous and *then* adoption ensues. Justification follows adoption.

Here, in Pannenberg's view, Reformation accounts, Luther aside,[35] need to be corrected, both Tridentine theology and the Lutheran tradition stemming from the later Melanchthon. The Council of Trent, he says, 'did not pay adequate attention to the decisive significance of faith for the relation of those born again by baptism to God' (2.324). Yet the more direct critique is directed at those of Pannenberg's own denomination, a critique that has particular relevance given the recent Lutheran-Catholic rapprochement that led ultimately to the *Joint Declaration on Justification*, which still remains contentious among German Protestants.

The position, august within Lutheranism, that he is questioning is represented by some words of Quenstedt, who writes:

> 'The immediate effect of faith is the remission of sins, adoption, union with Christ, access to God, and peace of conscience. Among these effects of faith, *justification is the principal*, to which all the rest can be referred.'[36]

Contrast this with Pannenberg's judgement: 'There is no reason to *subordinate* these other descriptions to the idea of justification,' he writes, 'particularly as Paul himself already presupposed faith fellowship with Christ in the verdict of justification and then this theme in terms of adoption into the filial relation to the Father.' Indeed, justification has for Pannenberg 'only a partial function' (3.235) in describing the trinitarian action of regeneration, certainly an important function in emphasising the present and assured participation in salvation, but still partial.

The Spirit's ecstatic work in the Church's Sacramental Signs

Pannenberg's focus turns from the individual to the church community, where also the Spirit's ecstatic work is basic for its being and work. His discussion deals with both the

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[34] (1996), p.518.

[35] Pannenberg's reading has been much influenced by the Finnish interpretation of Luther associated with T. Mannermaa's *Der im Glauben gegenwaertige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergoettung: zum oekumenischen Dialog* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1989). On this see 3.215-216.

church's being lifted above itself in Christ and its living in the world as the locus of Christ's presence and action through the Spirit. This includes in chapter 13 the topics of sacraments, ministry and the relationship of the church and the people of God as well as chapter 14's focus on the election and sending of God's people into the world and its history. The focus of our particular treatment of trinitarian themes will be directed only to the topic of sacraments.

Does this limited focus obscure unique insights into Pannenberg's trinitarian credentials available in the other sections? It has been argued, for instance, that in the section on church ministry the concern of unity is much to the fore, at the expense of a view popular in some ecumenical circles that unity is expressed in a communion of churches based on their reconciled diversity. Noting this, Christoph Schwoebel says that 'Pannenberg seems to operate with a notion of unity in which diversity is a shortcoming that is to be overcome,' one which he believes is ultimately rooted in his view of the Trinity. 'Could it be,' he asks, 'that the element of personal particularity associated with the three persons of the Trinity is not strong enough to allow for a relational view of the church, its communal life, its ministry *and* its unity?'[37] It may be that Schwoebel is correct; and it may also be that Schwoebel's comments might rely on a version of social trinitarianism that neither we nor (we argue) Pannenberg would endorse. Yet, however the matter rests, there seems to be no reliance on trinitarian thinking that is notably different from the trajectories Pannenberg has already outlined in his discussions of the work of the Spirit in individual Christians and in the church's sacramental life.

The focus for the rest of this chapter, then, will be on how Pannenberg understands the trinitarian rationale of baptism and eucharist. Specific references to the Trinity, it is true, are not so common as elsewhere in *ST*, but they tend to be more explicit and frequent than elsewhere in the latter parts of chapter 13 and chapter 14. Here Pannenberg develops variations on a now familiar theme: 'The issue in both baptism and the Lord's Supper,' he writes, '...is the fellowship of individuals with Jesus Christ' (3.238). Just how this is so we now investigate

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[36] *Theologia Didactico-Polemica* IV, 286, in H. Schmid *The Evangelical Theology of the Lutheran Church* (tr. C. Hay & H. Jacobs) 3rd rev., (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1961), p. 426.
[37] (1996) p.521.

Baptism

The form that fellowship with Jesus Christ takes in baptism is its 'unique grounding' (3.238). For according to Pannenberg baptism is the regenerating event whereby the believer 'is now constituted by this relation to God and concretely by participation in the filial relation of Jesus to the Father' (3.239), and thus forms the basis for believers' adoption and hope in God. Indeed Pannenberg even surmises that the practice of Christian baptism is referred back to Jesus' own, thus reinforcing the significatory power of the act in effecting our incorporation into the Son of God. 'The link between baptism, reception of the Spirit, and addressing God as Father, with at least the implied thought of a filial relation to God,' he claims, '...refers the baptismal practice of primitive Christianity back to Jesus' own baptism' (3.280).

Specifically, fellowship with Jesus Christ means fellowship in His death and resurrection, for the exalted Christ does not govern His disciples 'independently of his earthly way or apart from his history' (3.242). Thus Christian baptism is our sharing 'in the fruit of [Christ's] death and in the new and eternal life that his resurrection manifested and that vanquished death' (3.240). It is the enacted sign of our dying and rising with Him.

By definition Christian baptism is also a spiritual act, as Pannenberg notes from the NT's frequently relating it to the eschatological gift of the Spirit.[38] For the Spirit is the One 'by whom the new life of the resurrection of Jesus is already present to the baptized and its future consummation is guaranteed' (3.240). As the one whose ecstatic work lifts humans above their finitude into the eternal fellowship with the Father in Jesus, His Son, the Spirit is the agent by whom we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection and share His destiny. Thus it is that our receiving the Spirit is the conferring on us of a new identity (3.469) as we come to be who we are outside ourselves in Christ in the power of the life-giving Spirit. So, baptism too is for Pannenberg a significatory action of the church properly understood as being to the Father, in the Son and by the Spirit.

Eucharist

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[38] 3.240, for instance, cites Acts 2:38; 19:5-6 and 10:44ff.

'[T]he fellowship of individuals with Jesus Christ' is important to Pannenberg's understanding of the eucharist too, though not so dominant as in his remarks on baptism. It is, he says, 'the assuring and demonstrating' of this fellowship, and so forms part of the individual history of appropriation of the new existence of Christians that is constituted by baptism' (3.238). Yet since Pannenberg understands the eucharist more as signifying the form of the reign of God, there is perhaps greater stress on the common fellowship of believers with each other on the basis of their fellowship in Christ rather than on the basis itself.

In traditional treatments the role of the Son is particularly significant, since usual loci focus on the institution of the supper by the Son and the nature of His presence in the elements. Both are here also in *ST*, the former considered as the continuation of table fellowship in Jesus' ministry that prefigures the eschatological banquet (3.283-287), and the latter as symbolically present in the bread and wine (3.293-304). Yet what is of greater interest here is the role of the Spirit. Important for our trinitarian concerns are Pannenberg's attempts to incorporate pneumatology into the nature of the church's eucharistic practice, in particular an increased focus on the role of epiclesis, i.e., the invocation of the Spirit onto the elements.

Much of what Pannenberg says corresponds both to recent ecumenical developments and to the trinitarian framework for ecclesiology outlined in the early sections of *ST* volume 3. The ecumenical developments include revived dialogue with Eastern theology and movements of liturgical renewal and find their expression in the Lima report. This document states that 'at the eucharistic meal the Holy Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ truly present for us by fulfilling the promise of the words of institution' (3.321-322).[39] The coherence with the account of trinitarian actions and relations outlined earlier is the complementary emphasis on both Son and Spirit in the being and action of the church. And, not surprisingly given his earlier critique, here too Pannenberg detects a deficiency in Western formulations of holy communion, which he thinks have obscured the epiclesis and increasingly linked the consecration of the bread and wine exclusively to the priest's recitation of the words of institution.

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[39] Pannenberg cites the WCC Lima Report II *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 14. See P. Scrotenboer (ed.) *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry with an Evangelical Response* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992).

This treatment of eucharistic matters with particular focus on pneumatology carries with it several implications. For one thing, it resists restricting the presence of Christ in the elements to the recitation of the words of institution as might certain understandings of the transsubstantiation of the elements *ex opere operato*. 'As such,' Pannenberg states, 'it does not itself effect Christ's presence in bread and wine. Only the Spirit himself to whom prayer is made can do that' (3.322). And since Pannenberg refuses to separate the action of Son and Spirit, he does not regard the words of Christ and the coming of the Spirit as competitive. In eucharistic celebration too, then, Christ's presence does not by-pass the person of the Spirit, for it is the Spirit that makes Christ present.

For another, it shows the "medium" or "locus" of Christ's spiritual presence in the eucharist. By the Spirit, Pannenberg writes, 'the promise of the Lord...that he would be present to his disciples in the bread and the wine of the Supper, finds its fulfillment' (3.323). Christ, he says, is *actually* present to His community by the Spirit, and this is what provides the basis of His *real* presence in the elements, as was the case when on the night on which He was betrayed the Son was present with His followers and made Himself present in those elements. For the Spirit unites us with *this* Christ in *this* supper.

In addition, it means the changing of the worshipper. The Spirit, as the One who ecstatically lifts us above ourselves into Christ, makes possible the invitation to 'lift up our hearts' in the communion service. 'Liturgical participants, in faith,' Pannenberg says, 'are outside themselves with Christ as they recall their Lord's passion' (3.307). Hence he believes that a trinitarian understanding of the Lord's Supper safeguards anamnesis from being any mere 'act of human remembering of which we are still the subjects.' Rather, it is the 'self-representing of Jesus Christ by his Spirit' (3.306).[40]

And this ecstatic existence that the Spirit enables in the eucharist inevitably involves a transformation in the attitude and behaviour of the celebrant. By the Spirit we are 'drawn into the movement of the life of Jesus Christ,' which produces in us two fruits. Firstly, it instils thanksgiving, both for the Son's faithful sacrifice for us and for the gifts of creation. Second, it produces dedication, as we too participate in Christ's offering and ourselves become spiritual sacrifices to God (3.324).

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[40] A similar dynamic is present in Pannenberg's understanding of baptism and confirmation (3.271).

Pannenberg's discussion of the kingdom and the church, like his doctrine of creation, contains a large amount of dogmatic material and makes widespread use of the doctrine of the Trinity to give it form and content. The trinitarian construal of the kingdom and the church eschews the doctrine of the Trinity associated with the Christian West, which holds to the *filioque* and understands the Spirit's work primarily as the outflow of that of the Son, instead of also seeing the Son as dependent on, and constituted by, the Spirit. We see this in Pannenberg's qualification to calling the Spirit the divine gift: He is the triune gift in His reconciling action, but this too should be understood in the context of, and is only possible because of, His first of all being the Giver of life who consummates the creation. We see this too in how Pannenberg understands the triune persons to be active in the formation of the divine kingdom and the church. The second and third triune persons are irreducibly involved in a relationship of mutual dependence, the Son being the one into whom, and the Spirit the one by whom, creation is gathered, so both Son and Spirit are unique, complementary and equal. It is as this creative Life-Giver, the principle of life and fellowship within and outside the inner-triune life, that the Spirit works in the church. As in His creative work in general, He enables creatures to live outside themselves in ec-static existence, but His reconciling work involves lifting creatures into participation with God the Son crucified and risen. For all Christians this means that the Spirit lifts them up into Jesus' filial relation to the Father, and thus into the triune life. And for the Christian life, this ec-static existence by the Spirit takes form in individual Christians as faith, hope, love, adoption and justification, and is signified in the church community in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

The thrust of Pannenberg's trinitarian construal of the kingdom and the church, then, is to understand the ongoing work of God's reconciliation of the world with greater emphasis on the integrity and particularity of the Spirit than have many other treatments. In particular, the breadth of the Spirit's creative work provides the context within which to understand the application of the fruits of Christ's passion. For all the insights within Pannenberg's treatment, we have had cause to query both his negative assessment of the role of the Spirit in Western discussions of the Trinity as well as how far his account allows for the newness of the Spirit's work in redemption. We must return to these matters in another context, but only after we have completed Pannenberg's account of the work of the triune God in the final consummation.

Chapter Eight

PANNENBERG'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF THE FINAL CONSUMMATION

Pannenberg has often been characterised as an eschatological theologian – correctly. 'Eschatology,' he writes, 'is not just the subject of a single chapter in dogmatics; it determines the perspective of Christian doctrine as a whole' (3.351). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that despite all the emphasis on the centrality of eschatology - and perhaps even because of it - what Pannenberg actually has to say on the matter is surprisingly thin. Among such critics are Gunton,[1] Jenson[2] and Bradshaw, who writes:

> The great problem for Pannenberg comes when time runs out, because he is left with the whole finite process gathered up as the perfect ontological self-expression or revelation of the free God, and he seems compelled either into going back into some kind of correspondence, two-tier structure of finitude with God, or else of an identification of *all* finitude with the Son - and the Son will be seen *always* so to have been, according to the retroactive principle... He is committed to an eschaton at the end of history as the very nerve of his system, hence he cannot posit an endless course of history. It is interesting that idealists, ancient and modern, from Origen to neo-Hegelians, have great difficulty in developing a beginning and end for creation.[3]

Bradshaw's point is that Pannenberg, like other idealists throughout the ages,[4] has monistic tendencies that make it difficult consistently to maintain that the created order

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[1] *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity. The Bampton Lectures 1992* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp.92-93.
[2] *Systematic Theology. Volume 2: The Works of God* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.310.
[3] (1988), p.342

[4] It is most likely correct of Bradshaw to call neo-Hegelians idealists, much less so Origen and, I would argue, Pannenberg. Despite Pannenberg's respect for and reliance on Hegel at several points, as noted above, at times it is misleading to categorise Pannenberg as an idealist theologian whose emphases as well as strengths and weaknesses naturally mirror those of the broader philosophical movement. Merely on the matter of eschatology at issue here Pannenberg sets clear water between him and the 'idealism' of Kant, Hegel and their followers (3.533). Whatever the points of similarity with

can remain truly itself and not be ultimately subsumed into divine reality. Hence the alleged reticence on creation's consummation.

Whether such critics are ultimately satisfied with the material content of his eschatology need not obscure the fact that at least in *ST*, Pannenberg has provided an eschatology that is not merely formally determinative, but also materially substantial. Indeed a mere formal significance for eschatology is not nearly enough for Pannenberg, and in his view was a failing of some of the dialectical theologians of the first half of the previous century. Barth, he says, did little to give shape to the final future of humanity and the world (3.536-537). Pannenberg, then, *is* aware of the danger that Bradshaw highlights. Formal importance for eschatology as in Barth and Bultmann will not do without material content. Pannenberg is not only aware of the traditional topics of resurrection from the dead, the kingdom of God, the last judgement and Christ's return, but also deals with them in novel ways.[5]

Since the consummation has been formally determinative throughout his whole theology, substantial aspects of Pannenberg's material eschatology germane to our topic have appeared in the foregoing discussion that he does not feel the need to expand at length in *ST* chapter 15. Perhaps the most important of these is one which was a significant theme in the chapter especially devoted to the Trinity, namely the idea that at the consummation the Son, having brought about the rule of God in creation, will hand the kingdom over to the Father. At one point in the discussion he writes:

> As already in his earthly proclamation Jesus prepared the way for the lordship of God, so at his return the lordship of the risen Lord and its consummation will have as its only goal the definitive establishment of the kingdom. The kingdom of the Father whose imminence Jesus proclaimed on earth, and which broke in already in his work on earth, is indissolubly bound up with the Son and his work and will thus find its consummation when Jesus Christ returns in glory (3.608).

In both Pannenberg's discussion and in our treatment of it this point will be presupposed and explicated indirectly, rather than given direct and extended treatment. The action of the trinitarian God at the end of the ages is to be described as the handing over of the

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philosophical idealism Pannenberg, like his predecessor Origen, is first of all a Christian theologian, and it is as such that he should primarily be judged.

[5] See also "Die Aufgabe christlicher Eschatologie" in *BST3*, pp.271-282.

kingdom from the Son to the Father, but it also takes other forms, which we shall discuss here. Four points in particular merit our attention.

1. Our eschatological destiny is to participate in God's trinitarian life.

Pannenberg's emphasis on the future as the ultimate determination that shapes our present has always had as one of its central elements – if not the central element – that this future is participation in the divine life. It has shaped our creation: hence Pannenberg asserts, 'the destiny of all creaturely occurrence and existence is oriented to fellowship with God himself' (2.7). And it is our hope: 'Christians,' he says, '...expect a future in which all their temporal life will be permeated by praise of God and will be glorified as incorruptible fellowship with this eternal God' (3.602).

More precisely, Pannenberg means by this that in the eschaton we will share in God's *trinitarian* life. 'God wills fellowship with us,' he says, 'namely, our participation in the fellowship of the Son with the Father by the Spirit in the life of the Trinity' (3.582-583). Again he writes, 'The aim of giving creatures independent existence was that they should be able to share in the relation of the Son to the Father and hence in the trinity's eternal fellowship of love' (3.630-631). The fullness of eternity, which is the trinitarian life, will one day become ours when God brings our temporal sphere to an end.

To be even more precise, we should note that this participation in God's trinitarian life is God's allowing us a share of the *Son's* relationship to the Father. The ultimate goal of the divine action, this 'fellowship of creatures with their creator is to be thought of as participation of the Son with the Father through the Spirit' (2.7). The purpose of the whole economy of divine action has been our fashioning after the image of the Son, a destiny which marks not only our creation (2.138) and our reconciliation (3.12), but our glorification, too.

Some eschatologies have been criticised for positing an end-time divinisation of humanity with our participation in the trinitarian life becoming the end of our creatureliness and entailing a blurring of divine and human reality. Bradshaw, for instance, fears this is the case with certain idealist constructions of eschatology, Pannenberg among them. Pannenberg, he says,

> has not yet produced a clarification of how his system continues to distinguish finite reality from the eternal Son when temporality ceases and the Son is constituted as eternal. When time ends and God's triune being is wholly consummated, when God is all in all and the whole creation is summed up as permeated by the Spirit, then is there a hypostasis of creation to be God's *partner*? Will not God be communing with himself, having enriched his pure freedom through the variety of finite history?[6]

Pannenberg, however, is on guard against this danger: participation is not absorption. We have noted this already in his treatment of other doctrines, in the treatment of reconciliation above all. The emphases there have been retained here, and the consummated life of humanity, just like its reconciled life, is an independent one that is distinguished both from the Father and from the Son.

There is, for Pannenberg, no fusing of Creator and creature in the eschaton. The Son, in whose image we are being conformed, is the one who eternally and freely differentiates Himself from God His Father. As the formal principle and source of our destiny, therefore, He fashions for us a life like His, one that is in true relation to God because it is independent, freely self-differentiated. 'This independence does not end in the eschatological consummation,' Pannenberg states, and the mutuality of the divine-human relationship is not transcended. He continues,

> We can speak of this mutuality only because creatures have an existence with its own centre and characterized by spontaneity in relation to God and their fellows. Hence the glorification that accrues to them cannot simply imply their absorption into the life of God. Instead the spontaneity of the glorification of the Father who is manifested in his glory by the Son is the medium in which the glorification of creatures themselves takes place by the Spirit (3.643).

Indeed the independence of the creature, which does not cease at the eschaton, but is maintained as God's purpose for creation, is to be understood in terms of the Trinity.

Moreover, this would be to misunderstand our participation in the Son's relationship to the Father. We shall remain distinct, not just from God the Father, but also from the Son. Pannenberg writes,

> The distinction between head and body preserves the individual distinction of Jesus from his people notwithstanding his unity with them in the fellowship of his body.

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[6] Bradshaw (1988), p. 341.

> Similarly we must say of the resurrection of believers that their individuality will not disappear even though their separation from each other in their earthly existence is one of the things that will be profoundly changed by the eschatological transformation of this mortal life into the new corporeality of the resurrection from the dead (3.629).[7]

Distinction is not done away with in our life to come, only the separation that comes from human rapacity and the sin of seeking to be as God. In our glorified state we will accept one another and be for one another, just as we accept the Father as God and Jesus Christ as Lord. We will relate properly to, but not become, the other. 'In all these relations,' Pannenberg states, 'not only particularity but also its positive acceptance, and therefore also self-distinction, are still the condition of fellowship, the same being true in relation to God' (3.629).

2. As the end-time gift that makes present the eschatological future to all creation, both for the individual and for the whole created order, it is the Holy Spirit to whom the divine work of glorification is to be appropriated

The previous chapter considered Pannenberg's understanding of the Spirit as gift. The Giver of Life, that is, is given to believers as pledge and possession. Yet, to be precise, we must add that He is the *end-time* gift, the one who – both given and giving – is primarily concerned with the end-time consummation. It is '*in the eschatological future*' that He 'will transform believers, and with them all creation, for participation in the glory of God' (3.553).[8] How this is so and how it affects the other operations of the Spirit we shall explore further here.

The Spirit makes present the eschatological future...

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[7] Such a differentiation between Christ and believers in the future consummation has been a feature of Pannenberg's writing on the subject earlier in his career and is neither novel to the later *ST* nor a reaction to critiques such as Bradshaw's. See e.g, *GST2*, pp.185-186.

[8] Emphasis added.

For all his stress that future eschatology must determine the whole of Christian doctrine and that this eschaton comes as a spontaneous act of God without any human co-operation, the end, for Pannenberg, is neither remote nor alien. This is so, because of the activity of the Spirit. For the Spirit, whose proper work is the final consummation, is also active in our present as the power of the future.

This emphasis characterises what Pannenberg says about the work of the Spirit in the Christian believer, who is given the Spirit both as assurance of a right relationship with God and as a pledge of future glory. For, 'By the Spirit the eschatological future is present already in the hearts of believers' (3.552)

Yet by this Pannenberg also wants to state something, on which other theologies often lay less emphasis. That is – a point Pannenberg has made much of throughout his theology – the work of the Spirit beyond the assurance of the individual believer. The matter is well summarised in the following quotation:

> If by the creative presence of the divine Spirit within it creaturely life is already a foretaste of eternity, by the reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ this creaturely life is kept and saved for eternity, and even now is assured of future salvation by the *gift* of the Spirit (3.644).

We should note here the three elements to the Spirit's work in bringing God's future into the present, i.e., present assurance, reconciliation in Christ and creaturely life.

The first is his presence as the gift that brings assurance of salvation for believers. Again, even though this is the personal and subjective aspect of the gift of the Spirit, it should not be understood merely within the confines of the ecstatics of human consciousness. The assurance of the Spirit is not only emotion. Rather, 'the gift of the Spirit, as the pledge of future glory, constitutes the eschatological assurance of salvation for those who are linked to Jesus by faith and baptism' (3.552), for it is 'an advance...on the life of resurrection from the dead' (3.241). The Spirit is assurance and pledge to us in view of this more extensive work, namely His work in Christ and creation.

The second is the reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ. As we saw earlier, the work of the Spirit in reconciliation cannot be seen merely as the fruit or application of the Spirit, as has often been the case in Western theology. Rather, in line with other implications Pannenberg draws from Jesus' life, he states that the Spirit's eschatological action is not limited to His being given *by* the Son but includes – and flows from – His

being given to Him. Hence, Pannenberg says, we already see anticipations of eschatological salvation

> 'in the incarnation of the Son in time, which took place by the Spirit's power; not in Jesus' birth alone, but also in his baptism by John, and finally in the confirmatory event of the resurrection of the Crucified' (3.552).

Here Pannenberg sees his own conclusions as an advance on the eschatology of Gerhard Ebeling, the third volume of whose dogmatics[9], like Pannenberg's own, is structured around the twin foci of pneumatology and eschatology. In both, according to Ebeling, the world is transcended, though in different ways,[10] and this difference requires 'christological bracketing of the two in the person of Jesus Christ.' Yet, Pannenberg thinks, this structure fails to pay due note to the fact that Jesus Christ too, both His person and work, is 'already an expression of the dynamic of the Spirit.' He continues:

> The relation between the future and the present of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus was itself already mediated pneumatically, both in the historical situation of the earthly proclamation of Jesus and with reference to the relation between the Jesus of history and the returning Christ who now exercises his lordship by his Spirit (3.553).

Hence, 'we must,' Pannenberg writes, 'expound the relation between pneumatology and eschatology not merely christologically but also in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity' (3.554). Each of the triune persons' identity and activity is to be treated with integrity and not reduced to an outcrop of the others, Pannenberg argues, and so the Spirit's subjectivity in eschatology should not be put in what he considers to be christological parentheses.

The third is the Spirit's work and activity in all of creation. This is, he says, 'already a foretaste of eternity' (3.644). From beginning to end, God's economic action not only has been fully trinitarian, but is also directed towards creation in its entirety. The eschaton, as we shall go on to investigate, is the transformation not just of the "religious" sphere but of the material also, and not just of individuals but of the whole universe. Hence it follows that the Spirit in bringing this eschaton into the present, has been at work since creation imparting His life and dynamic to all creatures. As Pannenberg puts it,

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[9] *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens: Band Drei* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979).

> 'the creation of each individual creature is itself already an expression of the divine love that grants existence to each creature, enabling it during the time of its existence to share in the vital power of the divine Spirit' (3.644-645).

For, as he writes elsewhere, Pannenberg believes that the present age shows manifold evidence of the 'proleptic manifestation of the Spirit who in the eschatological future will transform believers, and with them all creation, for participation in the glory of God' (3.553).[11]

...both in general and in particulars

This distinction of general or universal eschatology on the one hand, and particular or individual eschatology on the other, provides the basis for the structure of the central sections of Pannenberg's eschatology. The second paragraph, 'Death and Resurrection' picks up the theme of individual eschatology, namely the question of our individual human destiny after death (3.555). The totality of individual life requires fulfillment beyond the grave of both soul and body. And the third paragraph, 'The Kingdom of God and the End of Time', deals with universal eschatology. That is, there will come the consummation of human fellowship through peace in righteousness when the full reality of the kingdom is inaugurated and revealed with Christ's return.

This division of the last things into individual and universal eschata, common since the time of Rahner, is, for Pannenberg, a fruitful procedure.[12] In *Theological Investigations* Rahner thereby provides an anthropological basis and interpretation for eschatological statements, which Pannenberg considers so necessary for a plausible and sufficient treatment of the doctrine. Citing Rahner, he writes, 'If the future means the future of salvation as the fulfillment of the *whole* person, then knowledge of this future,

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[10] As Pannenberg notes, citing Ebeling *ibid.*, p.29, 'the present that is filled with the Spirit can experience the eternal as present already, whereas eschatologically the present that is oriented to the eschaton grasps the eternal as future' (3.553).

[11] There have been statements of this already in *ST*, e.g., the remarks on creation's praise of God on 2.174.

[12] 3.546. Rahner's classification of eschatological topics is to be found primarily in his article "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions" in his *TI4*, pp.323ff., and in his article "Eschatologie" in *Lexikon fuer Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed., III (Freiburg, 1959), pp. 1094-98. This division of the last things into individual and universal eschata is not novel to Rahner, however. For instance, see J. W. Baier *Compendium Theologiae Positivae* (Halle: 1685), p.353.

regardless of its hiddenness, is constitutive of human life as it now is' (3.543).[13] So, since as persons we are both individuals with body and soul and social beings in community, the fulfillment of our wholeness requires eschatology, therefore, to be both and at once individual and universal.[14]

Yet the anthropological presuppositions and basis are insufficient and bare without the content of the promise,[15] the promise which is provided by God's triune action. The inbreaking work of the God of the future is the ultimate determination of this anthropological basis and gives content to this empty form. The debatability of Christian claims – especially this most contested one of end-time expectation – is answered by the work of the Trinity, which is both individual and universal.

This twin focus characterises the work of the Son. The foundation of the promise of complete fulfilment in both its individual and universal aspects was laid in the work of Jesus. This occurred both in his ministry in calling individuals to faith and bringing people into fellowship in anticipating in sign the feast of God's rule, and in his resurrection which 'manifested the individual salvation of the resurrection of the dead that is linked to the collective consummation of salvation' (3.550). Hence as a result of belonging to Jesus, individually believers already have a guarantee of future participation in the eschaton by baptism, and communally they already celebrate God's future kingdom by the eucharist.[16]

And this two-fold eschatology, both individual and universal, is also – and for Pannenberg chiefly – the work of the Spirit, as we shall discover in our next point on how Pannenberg appropriates to Him the work of glorification.

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[13] *TI4.*, pp.329ff., 333-334.

[14] One should note here another instance of Pannenberg distancing his position from that of Hegel (see 3.636). Pannenberg, in agreement with Habermas's opinion in *Theory and Praxis* (Oxford: Polity, 1973) believes Hegel's *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte: Einleitung in die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* 3rd ed. (ed. G. Lasson) (Leipzig: Meiner, 1930), especially pp.48-49, 76-77) is guilty of sacrificing individuals to the collective.

[15] The discussion of the relation between anthropological basis and promise in chapter 15 is both subtle and important. In saying that both are required he means that there are corresponding approaches both from the creaturely condition and from the divine Word, the former being taken up into the latter – this is another example of what Shults and Camino have identified as Pannenberg's method of sublation. Pannenberg is correcting certain inadequacies in the post-Barthian recovery of eschatology as practised in, e.g., P. Althaus *Die Letzte Dinge* (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), W. Kreck *Die Zukunft des Gekommenen: Grundprobleme der Eschatologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1961), J. Moltmann *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 2002) and G. Sauter See his *Zukunft und Verheissung: Das Problem der Zukunft in der gegenwaertigen theologischen und philosophischen Diskussion* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1965). See the comments on 3.550.

[16] The importance of the eucharist as the church's sign of the end-time universal hope is reiterated in *Freude des Glaubens* (Munich: Claudius, 2001), p. 310.

Glorification is to be ascribed to the Spirit.

We noted above that Pannenberg apportions the one divine action to the various trinitarian persons by appropriation, and that to the Holy Spirit he appropriates the work of consummation. Here we see how and why he does so. 'It is from the Spirit of God,' he writes,

> '...that the Christian world expects the eschatological fulfillment of believers, the changing of our mortal life into the new life of the resurrection of the dead...and creation's waiting for the manifestation of the children of God...suggests that its own corruptibility will be vanquished by the power of the life-creating Spirit as the world is transformed into the new creation of a new heaven and a new earth' (3.551).

Both the individual Christian, then, and all of the surrounding creation wait on the Spirit in particular for the fulfilment of their glorious destiny.

The full sweep of the divine action can only be properly explained with reference to the complete triune identity. It needs the completion of the Holy Spirit. While noting what he considers the inadequacy of the concept of promise as the framework for eschatological statements, since it pays insufficient attention to the 'event of fulfillment that has taken place already' in Jesus, it is not, Pannenberg avers, only the role of the second divine person that we overlook at our peril. For, he says, 'salvation has not yet been definitively actualized already for humanity merely by the mission of the Son.' As Messiah, the work of the Son 'relates to something distinct from himself, namely, the people of God, which is to find its definitive form through the faith in the one God to which he summoned' (3.551), a faith not *of* the Son but *in* Him arising from the related yet distinct work of the Spirit.

Not only the completion of the external activity of the triune God, but also the, for Pannenberg, key issue of individual and universal eschatology is properly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. This befits His work both in creation, where 'in virtue of its ecstatic nature the life of individuals is linked in many ways to that of others and their fellowship,' and in reconciliation, in which 'by baptism individuals receive the Spirit as an abiding gift. The gift is not for each in isolation; it binds all of them into the fellowship of the church'

(3.552). And as the fulfilment and integration of individual and universal blessedness is primarily a future expectation rather than present reality, it is, if anything, more fitting of the one who brings the future into the present. For, as Pannenberg continues:

> This twofold function of the Spirit for the lives of individuals and the establishing of fellowship among them relates his work to the twofold form of eschatological hope, which on the one side aims at the totality of individual life and on the other side at the consummation of fellowship through peace in righteousness. The consummating work of the Spirit integrates these two aspects and in this way overcomes the antagonism between individuals and society that holds sway in this present world (3. 552).

The Spirit, then, is for Pannenberg, no less than the Son, the executor of both individual and universal destiny. Indeed He is more so.

It is to the Spirit, then, that glorification is ascribed, but why *glorification*? The meaning and significance of this glorification will become clear as we examine the two key reasons he adopts the term here.

The first is that glorification best describes the wide variety of the Spirit's eschatological actions in the economy of salvation in all its many functions and applications, for Pannenberg the most common categorisation of the Spirit's work is as 'the source of salvation, of the new and eternal life' on the one hand, and as 'the organ of judgement' (3.623) on the other. But both these activities too are aspects of the one activity of the Spirit. 'The whole compass of [the Spirit's] work comes into view,' Pannenberg writes, if we think of it distinctively as a work of *glorification*.'[17] He continues:

> The thought of glorification links the new life of the resurrection to the moment of judgment that carries with it the transfiguration of this earthly life by means of the relation to God the Father and to the praise of God. The glorifying of God in this comprehensive sense is the proper and final work of the Spirit' (3.623-624)

There may be many facets to His work of purification and vivification, for the Spirit is also the Creator of life, the source of all knowledge, faith, hope, love, freedom and peace, and hence of the common life of both the church and God's kingdom. Yet,

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[17] Emphasis added.

> [I]n all these areas the work of the Spirit always aims at the glorifying of God in his creation, and in his eschatological work this aspect will come to the fore in an overwhelming way, gathering together and transforming all else' (3.624).

The second is that the term 'glorification' highlights how the Spirit's end-time action in the economy corresponds to his eternal activity in the immanent Trinity. Pannenberg writes:

> Relating the third and final phase of the economy of salvation to the Holy Spirit seems to make sense only from the standpoint that we can also ascribe to the Holy Spirit, who as the Spirit of fellowship between the Father and the Son fulfills the unity of the Trinity, the eschatological participation of creation in the life of the Trinity by its glorification, the glorification of God by creatures and that of creatures by God being two sides of one and the same event (3.554).

There will be mutual glorification in the *eschaton*, then, of God and His creation by the Spirit, just as in eternity there is the mutual glorification, again by the Spirit, of the Father and the Son. And we see this intratrinitarian mystery as its actualisation is exhibited in Christ's ministry, in particular the fourth gospel's account of the relationship of Father and Son.

> The Son has glorified the Father (17:4) by proclaiming his lordship. He now asks the Father to glorify him by reaccepting him into his original fellowship with the Father. In this way, and by the participation of believers in the common glory of the Son and the Father (v.22), the glorifying of the Father by the Son will come to fulfillment. This event, however, is mediated by the work of the Spirit, who will glorify the Son in believers (16:14) by bringing to remembrance Jesus and his message and therewith the Father (3.626).

The Spirit is then for us both end-time gift and the divine agent of glorification, since in the fullness of the immanent Trinity He is both eternally, that is, the gift bestowed and received by Father and Son, and by whom the one glorifies the other.

3. Eschatological judgement is a trinitarian act since all three persons are at work: the Father as the ultimate Judge; the Son as the one executor and criterion of the judgement; and the Spirit as the means of purification and transfiguration.

'Eternity is judgement' (3.610). Creatures, then, can only participate in eternity once they have undergone a radical change, a change, that is, both from temporality to eternal simultaneity and primarily from earthly sin to glorified holiness. This radical change may be anticipated in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, as well as its counterpart in penitence, baptism and believers' acts of mortification.[18] It is seen most clearly in 'the history of Jesus of Nazareth,' where 'the eschatological future, and with it the eternity of God, really enter[ed] the historical present' (3.604), including the power and purity of His divine judgement.[19] Yet its concrete form, which ultimately gives substance to all these other instances of judicial purification, lies in the definitive establishment of the kingdom at Christ's return (3.608).

Father

Who will execute this judgement? In many accounts of eschatology the final judgement has been appropriated to the Son. So Francis Turretin, for example, in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, writes,

> Christ will be the judge in that very visible nature in which he was condemned for us. For although judiciary power is common to the whole Trinity, still it will be specially exercised by the incarnate Son. Judgment is said to have been given him by the Father (Matt. 28:18; John. 5.22; Acts 10.42; 17:31) as being the King of his church, the avenger of his elect, the most strict punisher of the wicked and rebellious, the Lord of all.[20]

Pannenberg acknowledges the NT evidence that (following Turretin *et al*) this is the work of the Son: He is the One who delivers from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10), and judgement is clearly meted out at his hands according to other texts (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 10:32-33). Yet, Pannenberg cannot follow unreservedly the appropriation of earlier theology. For one thing, judgement in the NT is also – and most

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[18] See 3.612, where Pannenberg sees these as present instances of future purging.

[19] On 3.604-5 Pannenberg demonstrates that judgement is an integral part of Christ's first coming, and is not exclusive just to His return.

[20] F. Turretin *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997), vol. 3, p. 599. Not only judgement, but also universal and final resurrection is appropriated to the Son (whereas Pannenberg seems to ascribe this to the Spirit) in H. Bavinck *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), p.562.

often – ascribed to the Father (e.g., Rom. 2:3ff; Matt. 6:4; 1 Pet. 4:5). And for another, notwithstanding the references already considered Pannenberg highlights Christ's specific denials that He is the Judge (John 3:17; 12:47).

This ultimate taking up of time into eternity at the end, with its judgement and transfiguration, is – unsurprisingly – dealt with in trinitarian terms along the lines of Pannenberg's revised understanding of the doctrine. And as such it deals not just with the exegetical difficulties of the traditional appropriation of judgement to the Son, but also with other issues associated with Christ's return.

Son

Judgement, as we have noted, is the work of the Father. But how does Pannenberg envisage the work of the Son in this, in order to account not only for Christ's denials that He is Judge but also for the references to his very real role in the final reckoning? There are two elements: He is the executor of judgement and its criterion.

Eschatological judgement is something 'that is put in Christ's hands' (3.619). As the obedient Son commissioned to establish the Father's rule in creation He brings it into submission both in His incarnation and ultimately in His return. Indeed what Pannenberg calls 'the first and decisive function' in judgement by the Son is that He is the executor of the will of the God of heaven:

> 'In proclaiming the presence of the saving rule of God, Jesus also brought conversion and purification from sin. In so doing he guaranteed deliverance from the coming wrath of judgement' (3.613).

For, by the Son's first coming there has been an irreversible intervention of eternity into time bringing restitution, repentance and renewal – both judgement and the disarming of the forces of this world had become present reality.[21] And by His second coming He shall reveal and enact His commission to establish the Father's rule with ultimate and final effect.

The second way in which the Son is operative in the Father's judgement is as its criterion. Pannenberg writes,

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[21] See 3.605.

> '[I]t is by [Christ's] person and words that our future will be decided at the last judgment. Those who do not believe are judged already, for the word that he has spoken will condemn them on the other' (3.614).

Such a criterion is not so concerned about individual encounter as the litmus-test, but entails a basic conformity and allegiance to the Son as revealer and executor of the Father's rule. For the will of the Father as Christ preached it, is that all be conformed to the Son's likeness, which purpose Christ serves both by purging us from all that is incompatible with our destiny of filial fellowship with God and by completing the rule of God in our lives. As Pannenberg states,

> 'The risen and returning Christ is his word in person. The reality of the returning Christ that the image of fire represents is thus seen to be identical with the one who became incarnate for our salvation and may thus be understood as the completion of what began then: the transformation of our human existence into the image of the Son' (3.620).

And it is as such, rather than as an arbitrarily distributed badge of elitism, that He is the measuring rod for inclusion in the Father's kingdom.

Pannenberg thinks that this understanding of Christ's role in the judgement can, on the one hand, avoid 'any appearance of an unfair particularism' such as John Hick alleges,[22] and on the other maintain the biblical emphasis on the advantage believers will have on that final day. As for the former, Pannenberg believes that such a focus on Christ's word, rather than just an event of personal encounter, can

> 'reconcile the Christian thesis that only fellowship with Christ guarantees a share in eschatological salvation with the fact that all people, whether Christian or not, have the chance of participation in the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed' (3.615-616).

For the message can function as a norm for all, those who have heard and those who have not, and all, again without distinction, to whom the Beatitudes apply will share in the coming salvation.

As for the latter, the advantage Christians have

> 'is that in the person of Jesus they *know* the standard for participation in eternal salvation and hence also the standard of judgment. By relating their lives to Jesus

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[22] Pannenberg has in mind here the arguments of J. Hick's *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976).

> Christ in baptism and faith they can also be sure already of future participation in salvation. In Christ they already receive justification and pardon at the hands of the future Judge' (3.616).

Christian assurance then is a reality of knowing and sharing in the blessings of the age to come.

Spirit

As elsewhere in his dogmatics Pannenberg seeks to give the Spirit a greater profile in God's external actions than previous theology has often allowed. Usually, he claims, the Spirit's eschatological work has been primarily concerned with anticipation of the end, rather than a distinct role at the consummation itself. Yet, as befits the One who brings the future into the creaturely present, the Spirit in His work of anticipation must properly be understood in terms of His work of consummation. Pannenberg writes:

> the gift of the Spirit can have for the believer's present the significance of an anticipation and pledge of future salvation only because the Spirit is also the power of God effecting future salvation itself (3.622).

It is the Spirit of life who raised Jesus and has brought things into being since the creation who is the source of the new eschatological life that is roused and permeated by the Spirit. This life, for Pannenberg, is 'a spiritual life, a life wholly permeated by the divine Creator Spirit,' one 'that will also be immortal by virtue of this indissoluble relation to the divine Spirit' (3.622).

And this extension of the role of the Spirit applies to the specific topic of the end-time judgement, where Pannenberg's remarks offer a more sustained pneumatological perspective than one often finds in the tradition.[23] Yet, as the matter is presented here, the pneumatological focus aids the discussion. The judgement of Father and Son, Pannenberg has stated, 'is no longer destruction but a fire of purging and cleansing' (3.619). And the Spirit, the argument continues, is the means by which Christ accomplishes that very purgation and cleansing, both for believers and strangers to the

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[23] Compare, for instance, the absence of eschatological reference in that otherwise unjustly neglected classic of pneumatology, John Owen's *Pneumatologia: or A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: 1674).

gospel. The various activities of the Spirit in glorification that we noted earlier come together:

> 'One and the same divine light of glory brings believers liberation from the scum of sin and death even as the wicked have to fear it as a consuming fire. The power at work here...is the Spirit of God, who will lead creatures to the eschatological praise of God' (3.625).

That is, the Spirit's work of glorification comes to most intense expression in the purification of a people for God in order to fit them for life in glory.

For what the Spirit is eternally in the immanent life of God, the medium of the mutual glorification of the Father and Son, He becomes for us in God's acting for our salvation. For at Christ's eschatological manifestation,

> 'by the power of the Spirit believers will glorify Jesus Christ and the Father and will themselves be changed from glory to glory by the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (3.627).

For it is the same Spirit that is working renewal and transformation into glory in the lives of believers right now that will consummate His work at Christ's return.

4. This world will ultimately be shown to be the creation of the triune God of love, as by the Spirit the economic work of the Trinity will be completed in the consummation of creation.

The discussion here deals with aspects of Pannenberg's discussion thus far, which have had to be held over until this point. In simple terms, the matter at issue is what has been known as the theodicy question. What Pannenberg is objecting to is rather easy to denote, namely, the attempt to justify the providential action of God in purely rational terms, such as Pannenberg believes Leibniz did in his *Theodicy*.[24] For Pannenberg, every rational theodicy has at best only provisional significance, and he questions whether even the mere attempt may itself be already an expression of unbelief (3.632). What he has suggested instead for the greater part of his career is an eschatological resolution to the

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[24] G. W. Leibniz *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origins of Evil* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

issue,[25] and in the final section of *ST* he frames this in trinitarian terms, as indicated by its subtitle, "The Justification of God by the Spirit."

What is this trinitarian construal, so that theodicy is *by the Spirit*? Key to understanding Pannenberg's meaning is the point noted before that God's being Trinity entails that His action is to be understood as a process. 'From the doctrine of creation to eschatology,' he says, the subject is 'the action of the trinitarian God.' And so, he continues,

> 'It is only in the light of the conclusion, i.e, of eschatology, that we can give material definition to this one act that spans the whole economy of salvation and that is the work of the trinitarian persons in concert even though they appear in different ways in its individual phases' (3.630).

That God's being and action are trinitarian means, as Pannenberg demonstrated earlier in *ST* chapter 7, that it is complete only when all three persons and their appropriate activity have been taken into consideration.

It should also be noted that in *ST* the treatment of the divine actions in the economy has as an *inclusio* the posing and testing of the claim that 'In the answering of the question, 'In the rule of God's wisdom there may be seen the power of love over the march of history.' Pannenberg then asks:

> But is this really so? Even two thousand years after the birth of Christ does not humanity offer the picture of an unreconciled world? Have Christians made much change? Has not the church itself been drawn into worldly conflicts?...Has not the Christian God of love proved to be powerless against the march of events in the world, powerless even in the lives of Christians and the fellowship of the church? (1.441)

Moreover the particular sort of divine unity that interests Pannenberg in *ST1* (as we noted before) is the unity of the almighty and infinite God of history on the one hand and the triune God of love on the other. Provisionally, as we have already noted, Pannenberg answers that the triune love sublates (takes up and fulfils) the idea of God as true Infinite and all-determining principle. So, at the end of that volume, having already established that there must be some "True Infinite" that is responsible for the existence of the world, and having explicated the triune God of love revealed in Jesus Christ, Pannenberg writes:

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[25] E.g., Tupper, p.304.

'What we have not yet shown, however, is how God's relation to the world is to be understood in the light of the trinitarian understanding of God' (1.447).

The intervening discussion of God's economic action, then, from creation through to consummation (i.e., *ST* chapters 7 to 15), constitutes Pannenberg's answer to the theodicy question. The world is shown to be God's in that its full course as determined by the infinite power underlying it clearly shows itself to be the work of the triune God of love revealed in Jesus Christ. In this way we see both the confirmation of the truth of Christian doctrine and the goodness of the Creator God.

And since, in Pannenberg's view, the answer to how a world of suffering can be the creation of a God of love is achieved not by rational reflection, but by the economic activity of the triune God, it is in the conclusion of the economy of salvation, i.e., the work appropriated to the Spirit, that divine justice will be vindicated. The reconciliation of the world, as we noted in an earlier chapter, has to be understood in trinitarian terms, and thus as completed only once the work of the Spirit in His enabling others to have their own share in the work of Christ is finished that creation can rightly be said to have moved from being "unreconciled" to being "reconciled."[26] It is the 'eschatological perfecting of the world' that will both 'show how wrong is unbelief with its doubting of God's existence' and 'will prove the love of the Creator for his creatures' (3.632).

There is another aspect to the fact that justification is by the Spirit, i.e., that the coexistence of a world of suffering and evil on the one hand and a Creator God of love on the other, includes humanity's independent and spontaneous response. This growth into independence has been a recurring theme in Pannenberg's theology. Independence not only is what we are destined for (3.580) and requires the succession of time to be achieved,[27] but it is also our Spirit-enabled participation in the creative Logos, Christ the Son. The same Spirit who enables the relationship in distinction of Father and Son that is characterised by genuine mutuality, achieves for us a similar independent communion with God our Father in Jesus Christ. So, continuing his insistence that our inclusion within the triune life does not mean absorption, Pannenberg writes:

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[26] Short of this vindication by the Spirit Pannenberg refers to creation's "unreconciled" state in 3.631.

[27] See 2.95, 2.272, and especially 2.138-9.

> 'the spontaneity of the glorification of the Father who is manifested in his glory by the Son is the medium in which the glorification of creatures themselves takes place by the Spirit' (3.643).

For eschatological glorification is a mutual affair. It is 'the glorification of individuals, along with that of the Father and the Son by them,' and it is only then that 'the justification of God in face of the sufferings of the world will be not only achieved but also universally acknowledged' (3.636).

Pannenberg, then, understands theodicy in trinitarian terms as the justification of God by the Spirit. There is, however, another way he describes it that bears on our theme, namely the unity of the economic and immanent Trinity.

Pannenberg's view, as noted already, is that '[t]here is a distinction, but also inseparable unity between the eternal trinity and its revelation in history.'[28] At one point he likens it to the relationship of love of God and love of neighbour. Love of neighbour is distinct from and depends on love of God but it is the same love, not 'two wholly different realities but two aspects of human participation in one and the same love of God' (3.193). And so the relationship is more intimate than repetition or correspondence, for the two are 'one and the same' (2.393), but not so that the one collapses into the other.

Pannenberg's conception of economic and immanent trinities also contains a temporal dimension that bears especially on the matter of theodicy. The eschatological reality that meets us is one in which the immanent life of God has been actualised in the course of human history. It is, he says, 'the incursion of the eternal future of God to the salvation of creatures and thus a manifestation of the divine love' (3.646), which is itself the economic action of the triune God.

What does this mean? According to *ST*, God already exists in trinitarian fullness, in the complete life He shares with Himself in the multifaceted relations of Father, Son and Spirit. And what He is already in Himself He also is for us in the outworking of his action for us, in which He perfectly expresses and realises His identity. So, it is the entirety – and not just part – of God's economic action in temporal creation that actualises the fullness of God's immanent identity. This is the temporal dimension of the unity of economic and immanent trinities.

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[28] "DEET," p.2.

Living as part of the temporal order in which the trinitarian fullness of God is actualised in the economy, we live with the final revelation of the goodness of God in all His works ahead of us. And since we do not yet see but merely expect the full correspondence of the economic Trinity with God's eternal immanence, we live in the period when His reality and goodness are questioned and await demonstration. For, as Pannenberg says at one point,

> 'Viewing the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as one presupposes... a concept of God which can grasp in one...the eternal self-identity of God and the debatability of his truth in the process of history, along with the decision made concerning it by the consummation of history' (1.333).

It is by outlining the account of the trinitarian God in the way he does that Pannenberg offers such a concept of God. The immanent trinitarian God of Father, Son and Spirit that is given in the revelation in Christ is displayed for us in the process of His economic self-unfolding. The final unity of the immanent and economic trinities is for us an eschatological matter, just as the divine demonstration that the true Infinite that determines the universe really is the triune God of love that Christianity proclaims.

Pannenberg's *ST* finishes, then, with a trinitarian resolution of the claim that this world is the creature of the Christian God of love. It is the divine love that

> is the eternal basis of God's coming forth from the immanence of the divine life as the economic Trinity and of the incorporation of creatures, mediated thereby, into the unity of the trinitarian life. The distinction and unity of the immanent and economic Trinity constitute the heartbeat of the divine love, and with a single such heartbeat this love encompasses the whole world of creatures (3.646).

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of our study we stated that it answers two questions: (1) what does Pannenberg mean by his theology being thoroughly trinitarian; and (2) how far has his subsequent work been successful in realising his stated goal? As for the second question, we have already evaluated how far the high trinitarian ambitions have been fulfilled. A fuller answer to this question, however, requires a second section where we move beyond critical analysis of Pannenberg's theology and in order to construct our own theological proposal that is offered in the light of – and as an alternative to – Pannenberg's own approach. We shall nevertheless offer here some points in answer to this second question insofar as they have been addressed thus far in our presentation, while leaving our final remarks to the next section. As for the first question, chapters 1 to 8 have provided a detailed answer to it, and we ought here to summarise the main points we have discovered.

What Pannenberg means by his theology being thoroughly trinitarian is both that the theological locus dealing with the Trinity itself should offer a precise and compelling account of the God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that such an account of God's triunity should inform every part of his theological system. So, we shall summarise what we have discovered about how both his treatment of the Trinity and his discussion of the other doctrines are trinitarian.

How is Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity trinitarian? For Pannenberg, to be trinitarian means that any doctrine of the Trinity must be based on God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ, and thus must deal with the Father, Son and Spirit insofar as they disclose themselves in the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth. The doctrine of the Trinity cannot, then, rely on modes of thought that can be reduced to a pre-trinitarian monotheism, as Pannenberg thinks has too often been the case in Western theology, which tends to view the Trinity after the likeness of the individual subject and to derive God's trinity from His unity. For this reason Pannenberg opts for the term 'self-distinction' – rather than relations of origin – as the basic means of distinguishing the trinitarian persons, and for 'mutual dependence' to denote how the persons depend upon each other reciprocally both for their personal identity and for their deity, and are thus

the one God. And since the triune God should be understood from revelation rather than from pre-trinitarian conceptualities, Pannenberg understands the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity to be identical, intending to threaten neither the integrity of the three persons nor the priority of the immanent Trinity.

The other doctrines that Pannenberg approaches from a trinitarian point of view deal both with God's being and His action, which we shall deal with in turn. What does it mean, then, that God's being, i.e. the doctrine of God's essence and attributes, is trinitarian? We noted five implications that the priority of the Trinity has on how Pannenberg treats the divine nature. Firstly, the divine unity should be thought of as still hidden, since its revelation is not fulfilled until the completion of God's economic action. Second, the divine essence is to be conceived primarily as the infinite rather than as the first cause, since such a concept better allows God to be defined by his trinitarian action in and to the world, rather than by deductions from creaturely phenomena. Third, since we must understand God as the irreducibly triune agent, we should speak of Him as field rather than as a mind to describe how He is spirit. Fourth, the attributes of God's true infinity, i.e., one that is not the negation of creaturely limits but is their overcoming, find their concrete form not in a monadic divine other, but in the trinitarian God's loving approach. Fifth, God is understood as being love rather than as merely having love, for it is as the trinitarian God of love – and not as a unitary subject – that the divine spirit finds its actualisation.

For Pannenberg, all of God's economic activity, which is the subject of volumes 2 and 3 of *ST*, must be understood both within a general trinitarian context and by detailed reference to the being and action of the trinitarian persons and their relations one with another. The trinitarian frame of reference is provided not only by the trinitarian account in volume 1's account of the subject being triune, but also by Pannenberg's appropriating spheres of God's economic activity to individual divine persons and by his understanding God's trinitarian self-unveiling as a process. In *ST* creation is appropriated to the Father in chapter 7, the consummation is appropriated to the Spirit in chapter 15, and it is clear in chapters 10 and 11 that reconciliation occurs as a result of the coming into time and obedience of the Son. Pannenberg, then, understands and employs appropriation in a way similar to much of the theological tradition, although there tends to be more profiling of the specific activity of each of the divine persons within the discussions of the various

theological loci. God's action is not just appropriated to the trinitarian persons but it is also sequential in a way that corresponds to the divine life. That God as Trinity is a multiple unity rather than just a simple one allows the diversity of divine activity to be one and the same creative action. In the same way, God's one creating action that is consummated in the eschaton is not monochrome, but is a process with sequence and multiplicity that are grounded in the trinitarian plurality of the divine life. So, for instance, *ST* chapter 11 includes within God's reconciliation of the world the church's ministry of reconciliation under the Spirit's action, and chapter 15 states that it is only in the light of the completion of divine action by the Spirit that we can present the final content and vindication of all God's ways. How each of the various elements of God's economic activity is conceived as trinitarian we now go on to ask.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that the doctrine of creation is trinitarian? It means that, in creating, God's action is genuinely free, since as the triune God is already active in and towards Himself in His intra-trinitarian life. Though appropriated to the work of the Father, Pannenberg emphasises how this also involves the distinct work of both the other triune persons. As for the Son, He is creation's Logos and Mediator, for just as He distinguishes Himself from the Father, so this very self-distinction gives rise to creation's existence and independence. For as the principle of differentiation within the triune Godhead, He is the noetic and ontic basis for creation, and the ultimate source of its pluriformity. As for the Holy Spirit, it is He who makes possible both God's presence with His creatures and the creatures' participation in God. For, as the medium of fellowship of the eternal triune relation of Father and Son, He enables creation to share in the eternal self-distinction of the Logos. Finally, Pannenberg's view that God's act of creating does not concern merely the world's beginning, but refers to all world time, is also trinitarian, since he understands creation to be completed by the taking shape of the Word and the moving of the Spirit in space and time.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that theological anthropology is trinitarian? Pannenberg's own trinitarian approach differs from other accounts of understanding humanity in terms of the Trinity, since he does not see the Trinity primarily as a model for understanding either the human mind or human society, but sees the Trinity as the essential framework within which to understand humanity. This framework is provided by the being and action of the Son and the Spirit. The relevance of the Holy Spirit for

Pannenberg's theological anthropology is that He is the Life-Giver who animates all our being and on whom humanity depends in every part. The relevance of the Son is that humanity is destined to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, a destiny which is realised as by the Spirit we accept our finitude just as Christ, the image of God, distinguished Himself from the Father.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that christology is trinitarian? Within the context of a trinitarian presentation such as *ST* Pannenberg lays significant emphasis on the ontological basis for Jesus' divine sonship being the Son's eternal self-distinction from the Father. A trinitarian christology of this sort should be confused with attempts to understand Christ's divine person by presupposing a version of the Trinity from which one derives the incarnation – this would, he thinks, be the wrong sort of christology "from above to below." Rather, we know that Jesus is the Son of God incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, as the reasonable and necessary explanation of His history. Furthermore, Pannenberg emphasises that the incarnation is the self-actualisation of the whole Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and so in Jesus Christ we are dealing with the divine reality in its triune fullness.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that the doctrine of reconciliation is trinitarian? It means that God's reconciliation of the world to Himself must be understood in relation to each of the triune persons. Reconciliation is the work of the Father, who gives His Son for us and sends Him to die for our salvation. It is the work of the Son, who actively obeys the Father in giving Himself for our sins as our Representative, and as the ascended Christ is our Prophet, Priest and King. Finally, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who completes reconciliation by lifting us up into ecstatic union with Jesus Christ, by enabling us to live in joyful differentiation from God.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that the doctrine of the kingdom and the church is trinitarian? It means understanding the formation of the kingdom and the church as the work of the Spirit, not just as the gift of the Father and the Son involved only in the application of redemption, but as the divine Life-Giver who unites believers to Jesus because He is powerfully active at every stage of the consummation of creation. The kingdom and the church are the work of *both* the Son and the Spirit, the Son as the One into whose body believers are gathered, and the Spirit as the one by whom they can thus belong to church and kingdom. This work of the Spirit is part of His general activity of

enabling ec-static existence as the medium of fellowship both in God's internal and external actions, and so also marks His action in and to the church. For all Christians this means that the Spirit lifts them up into Jesus' filial relation to the Father, and thus into the triune life. And for the Christian life, this ec-static existence in Christ by the Spirit takes form as faith, hope, love, adoption and justification, and is signified in the church community in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

What does it mean for Pannenberg that eschatology is trinitarian? It means that both the destiny of the whole created order as well as how creation reaches that destiny are shaped by the God of Father, Son and Spirit. Our eschatological destiny is trinitarian in nature, since it is to participate in the very inner-triune divine life. Although, as we have already noted, Pannenberg's emphasis is on the Holy Spirit, to whom as the end-time gift glorification is to be appropriated, the other two persons are integrally at work. All three persons are involved in the eschatological judgement, the Father as the ultimate Judge, the Son as the one executor and criterion of the judgement, and the Spirit as the means of purification and transfiguration. Finally, the eschatological vindication of God's justice must itself also be understood in trinitarian terms, since it is with the completion of the Trinity's economic work, i.e. the consummation of creation by the Spirit, that we shall definitively see that the true God really is the loving Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is very much to commend in *ST*'s account of the being and action of the triune God. In answer to our second question, how far Pannenberg's theology been successful in fulfilling his trinitarian ambitions, we must state that there is a significant body of evidence to suggest that he has gone a long way to realising his goal. We note six points.

Firstly, the Trinity controls the fundamental structure of Pannenberg's theology. God, the central topic of Pannenberg's entire theological project, is clearly shown to be triune in nature. The answer to the question 'Who is God?' which takes up the latter chapters of volume 1, is determined not by some monad, or even a version of the Trinity that is liable to some pre-trinitarian conceptuality, but by the God of Father, Son and Spirit who was revealed in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. And the answer 'What does He do?' which is the subject matter of the second and third volumes, is shown to be sequentially and simultaneously the action of no other God than that of Father, Son and

Spirit. According to *ST*, all reality is comprehended by the prevenient, sequential and active love of the triune God.

Second, Pannenberg does not separate God *in se* from God *pro nobis* – the God who is, is the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One of the central emphases of trinitarian theology is that the God who is eternally is the very same that appears in our history for our salvation, and so it is this triune God of revelation that shapes everything that theology goes on to say. Pannenberg maintains this insight and in some ways even intensifies it with his founding trinitarian dogma on revelation and his rejection of thought forms that are reducible to pre-trinitarian monotheism. Also, his adoption of Rahner's Rule and his understanding of the incarnation as God's self-actualisation do not spring from a desire to undermine either the immanent Trinity or the significance of God's temporal action. Rather, they assert that God's action in Jesus Christ is not the completion of an otherwise incomplete God, not a repetition of divine reality, but is very God Himself.

Third, Pannenberg has offered new trinitarian terminology that befits his close correlation of God *in se* with God *pro nobis*. While not rejecting the importance of relationships of origin, Pannenberg's unfolding of the triune being and action is not bound by them. The use of self-distinction does better maintain what scripture records of the subjectivity of each of the persons and the reciprocity of their relations, than does a sole reliance on the processions. And when shorn of notions that tie the being of God to dependence on either the world or His economic action within it, the idea that the persons depend on one another for their deity makes it clearer than traditional terminology that the Father is not God *a se*.

Fourth, Pannenberg maintains for the most part emphasis on the divine oneness that does not compromise the divine threeness and emphasis on the divine threeness that does not compromise the divine oneness. Some commentators have criticised Pannenberg for making the divine unity the result of the trinity, and so veering towards tritheism. Although we have misgivings about some of his statements, especially in our second chapter, he is not prey to fundamental modalist or tritheist tendencies. According to Pannenberg, to see the unity as something that produces the divine trinity (e.g., by the mental analogy) is to posit a basis of pre-trinitarian monotheism, and to see the Trinity as something that produces the divine unity (e.g., by perichoresis) is the very tritheism that

he criticises both in antiquity and in the present. Perhaps the most significant contribution in this area is Pannenberg's adoption of terminology from field theory. By understanding the divine essence as field rather than mind, his account in *ST* chapter 6 allows for a genuine and underived trinitarianism in talk of God that other theological models cannot achieve.

Fifth, Pannenberg's account of God's activity in and to the world offers a particularly intricate profiling of the actions of the different persons. Beyond his appropriation of various spheres of divine activity to the different persons, the doctrines he covers in *ST* volumes 2 and 3 are invariably structured around the work of the Son and Spirit. Chapter 11 on reconciliation is a striking example of how Pannenberg takes great pains to delineate the specific work and importance of each of the persons in turn in the work of atonement. And the chapters on creation and eschatology show how his use of appropriation is highly nuanced, as his attribution of spheres of divine activity to the Father on the one hand, and the Spirit on the other, accommodate detailed accounts of the subjectivity of the other persons.

Sixth, in *ST* Pannenberg breaks new ground in applying the Trinity to a Christian understanding of reality. His use of the doctrine of the Trinity both as the general framework for his systematic theology and in the detailed exposition of the various doctrinal topics, demonstrate that he is in the most august company of trinitarian theologians. Indeed, at points he even seems to go beyond them. We see this in some of the topics he discusses in *ST* chapter 5 where trinitarian terminology is better fitted to the triune persons' economic action. In the later chapters, too, we see this particularly in his treatment of the divine essence and attributes, where his account stands out since unlike most other discussions he pays attention both to trinitarian theology and to the locus *de deo uno*, as well as in his discussion of creation, whose details are worked out with an intricate trinitarian detail that one would be hard pressed to find elsewhere.

These are significant matters worthy of commendation, and as a piece of trinitarian theology *ST* is a very impressive work that brooks few rivals. There do seem to be many areas in which Pannenberg's theology ranks with some of the most perceptive work on the Trinity available, and some at which he takes understanding of the being and action of the triune God further than it has been before. We, therefore have substantial evidence

that Pannenberg's high ambitions might be met and that this may well be a theology more trinitarian than any he knows of.

Notwithstanding the undoubted rigour with which Pannenberg has undertaken to write a theology more trinitarian than any he knows of, we have had cause to raise points of criticism. Our survey has questioned Pannenberg on a number of matters, especially those that directly relate to his success in realising his trinitarian ambitions. These criticisms cluster around five issues that seem most germane to the particular topic we are concerned with here.

Firstly, one might want to question Pannenberg's historical judgements. His own positive proposals are often made in critical interaction with Western understandings of the Trinity. Admittedly, in this he is not alone, since much contemporary literature on trinitarian theology sees fundamental weaknesses in the tradition of trinitarian thought deriving from Augustine. Yet these historical details are more than incidental matter, but help to shape Pannenberg's own presentation. In the later chapters of *ST* volume 1, for instance, he offers an account of mainstream Western trinitarian thought as prey to modalising conceptualities, and then contrasts this with a questionable assertion of the present revelation of God's Trinity and a present hiddenness of His unity. And in his account of the work of the Spirit he offers another questionable proposal by presenting it as the alternative to a less than generous account of Western pneumatology.

Second, Pannenberg's belief that God's trinitarian activity to and in the world is fundamentally one action appears to be in tension with the biblical witness. Pannenberg often uses the Trinity to emphasise the continuity in all of God's economic action, either to understand God's action as a process (as in his treatments of creation and theodicy) or to understand the person and ministry of Christ not as new creation but as the completion of the existing one (as in his christology). Yet, as we noted in discussing the Spirit's role in reconciliation, the unity of the divine agent (which is one of the key points of trinitarian theology) entails that each person is involved in the work of recreation. The emphasis on the unity tends to mute the fact that the triune work of salvation is one of radical discontinuity, the death of the old and its resurrection into newness.

Third, there are problems with how Pannenberg relates God in His immanence and God in the economy. On Pannenberg's adoption of Rahner's Rule of identity, we are not

so critical here as some others have been, detecting a Hegelianism that fundamentally negates God's freedom. Nevertheless, his identification of God's being with His rule is in tension with his emphasis on the primacy of the immanent Trinity. It seems that what is decisive for the reality of God is not the divine Trinity but the course of history in which He acts. And the impression is also created that full knowledge of God is achieved not so much by the direct action of Son and Spirit, but by the natural completion of the course of history. In some of Pannenberg's formulations, then, it is not so clear that the abiding initiative is with the triune God and his free action rather than the course of creaturely time.

Fourth, Pannenberg's christology is unclear on certain matters where one would expect the primary importance of the Trinity to be asserted. On the one hand, Pannenberg does not make the distinction that Christ's divine identity is revealed in but not in virtue of His human nature, thus not making clear that Christ's self-unveiling is not solely dependent on His trinitarian power. On the other hand, Pannenberg believes that the Trinity functions as a basis for our understanding of Jesus only ontologically and not noetically, and so is the basis for Christ's personal identity, but not for how we come to know Him.

Finally, there are those passages in *ST* where the Trinity does not appear to be operative. Among the topics we have already considered, those of faith and the method of christology have been striking examples of reticence on the Trinity where in other theologies trinitarian construals are common. Even more strikingly we can also include the early chapters on the concept of God and the nature of religion, as well as his treatment of revelation, which with a few exceptions is silent on the Trinity. This would seem to be the most serious reservation we should have in concurring with Pannenberg that his is the most trinitarian of theologies. It is an arguable matter to criticise a trinitarian theology where the Trinity is used in different ways and where different versions of the Christian Trinity are adopted from what one might prefer oneself. It is much more clear-cut when the criticism is not about the wrong sort of trinitarianism, but about no trinitarianism at all.

It is this final area of criticism that we go on to examine in more detail in a second section where we go beyond offering a critical analysis of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology, and provide a constructive theological proposal in the light of what Pannenberg

has to say about the Trinity in *ST.* Not only is this the most serious of our criticisms, but there also seems to be a pattern to these instances of trinitarian reticence. The Trinity tends to fall from view when Pannenberg is dealing with how one comes to know God, when he deals with faith, the basis of christology and the doctrine of revelation and what one might call his theological method[1]. The desire to be the most trinitarian of theologies is undone by a prior commitment which seems to get in the way of the Trinity being put to work in all areas of Pannenberg's theological thought. Rather than giving the Trinity full sway and saying that all our knowledge of God has a radically trinitarian basis and is possible only by the Spirit, Pannenberg maintains that God can be known in a way that is open and impartial, a natural consequence of our deliberation on the historical process. The Trinity is clearly operative in what one has to say about God, but it is not so clear how – or if – the Trinity is operative in Pannenberg's account of how we get to know and talk about God. There is scarcely any account of how the Trinity affects the practice of theology. And it is for this reason above all others that we cannot give an unequivocally positive answer to our second question, how far has Pannenberg's subsequent work been successful in realising his stated trinitarian ambitions.

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[1] By method we mean how the dogmatic material about the trinitarian God sublates, i.e., fulfils, corrects and transforms, the given of the knowledge of God in experience which to which we can apply suitable philosophical criteria. On this see Shults and J. Martinez-Camino "Aufhebung: Zur Architektur des ersten Bandes der 'Systematischen Theologie' Wolfhart Pannenbergs' in *Kerygma und Dogma* 45 (1999), pp.91-101.

PART TWO

ON BEING A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGIAN

'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8)

Trinitarian theology has been a flourishing part of the theological academy in recent years and has spawned numerous examples of academics described as trinitarian theologians. One of the features of this phenomenon has been the importance of the Trinity, not just as a doctrine to be affirmed, but as regulative for the explication of other *loci* in Christian systematic theology. That is, it has been a matter not just of forcefully stating the doctrine but also of using it to deal with other topics in Christian teaching. From being the last word in theology as in Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*, it has become not just the first word, but also a constant point of reference throughout Christian doctrine.

In many ways Pannenberg's *ST* represents one of the most accomplished retrievals of trinitarian doctrine, even among the many trinitarian theologies that have been written during the renaissance of the doctrine in the 20th century. His contribution to this recovery and advancing of the centrality of the specifically trinitarian God in all parts of Christian theology, as we have seen, is very impressive. Questions have had to be raised, however, about how far the high trinitarian credentials Pannenberg has set himself have been met, in particular in his account of how we come to know God. In this conclusion we shall give some structure to these criticisms and offer a theological proposal that gives a better account of what must be said in light of the God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

From a trinitarian perspective the central misgiving with *ST*, in our view, is that Pannenberg offers no account of what it means to be a trinitarian *theologian*. What do we mean by this? Crucially, we do not have in mind only how one should write *about* the Trinity, as if only the product of the theologians' intellectual efforts should meet the rigors of trinitarian orthodoxy. It is not so much a matter of writing a trinitarian *theology*. Rather in dealing with the specific issue of how to be a trinitarian *theologian*, we question what it means for the *practice* of theology to be trinitarian, not just its conclusions. What role, that is, does the Trinity play in the formation of the theologian and in the discipline of doing theology? And what sort of practice or method of doing theology is most fitting for study of the God who is trinitarian?

The two issues, how to write a trinitarian theology and how to be a trinitarian theologian, are, of course, not wholly separate. The practice of theological reflection, no less than its results, has to be located dogmatically. For the *habitus* or piety of the

theologian is neither basic nor primary, but is itself based on a state of affairs determined by the triune God and so is secondary to His reconciling action in the economy of salvation. Yet the question how to be a trinitarian *theologian* is distinct and important. It is not exhausted by the mere fact that one concludes that God is indeed the triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, regardless of how in fact one arrives at such a conclusion. A rigorously trinitarian theology must be trinitarian here too.

The trinitarian rigour seems to be absent from Pannenberg's account at such points. That is, for all that he is concerned with how to write a trinitarian theology, he provides scarcely any account of how to be a trinitarian theologian. The stated aim for the *ST* to provide a theology 'more trinitarian than any I know of' and the rich trinitarian explanations of the various doctrines of God's economic activity need to be qualified by this important observation: it is difficult to see how the Trinity affects how Pannenberg understands the theological task. Indeed when he comes to talk about theological method the trinitarian language becomes markedly sparse in a way that is striking given its prolixity elsewhere. In this concluding part of our study we examine why this is so, and how in dogmatic terms one can be not merely a writer about the Trinity, but a genuinely trinitarian theologian.

The dogmatic shape of a systematic theology is affected by a trinitarian account of the practice of theology. In particular it requires both particular understandings of certain theological loci and also an account of theological disciplines or virtues. The particular loci affected are those of theological method, revelation, faith and christology. All of these topics are highly significant for an account of how the self-revelation of the triune God is given and received. And the theological disciplines or virtues that are an integral part of an account of being a trinitarian theologian include the ones we shall treat here, namely humility, prayer and faith. All three of these follow from a trinitarian account of how we come to know God, as we shall see. It is worth noting that in *ST* what Pannenberg has to say on those theological topics is less than clear, and when one looks for an account of the virtues involved in theological study, it is not to be found.

We have studied Pannenberg's theology by analysis of his major writings and have distilled the relevant points into thesis form. To conclude our study of Pannenberg's doctrine of the trinitarian God we shall also provide three theses of our own that supplement and correct the points in *ST* where we consider Pannenberg's theology to lack

an account of being a trinitarian theologian. The misgivings we have earlier voiced about his handling of, among other things, christology, pneumatology, the doctrines of revelation and faith, we shall not only explicate in more detail, but also consider as part of our own constructive proposal for how the Trinity rightly affects not the results of theological endeavour, but the very task of theology itself.

1. The Trinity has to determine not just the results the theologian comes to, but also the method and practice of arriving at them. For this reason to be a trinitarian theologian requires humility, since knowledge of the triune God is not possible without the sanctification of the Spirit who bestows it.

The Trinity does determine Pannenberg's practice of theology. In the foreword to the final volume of *ST* he writes:

> 'above all I thank God, who has daily given me strength to work on the book..., the purpose of which is to serve the praise of the glory and truth of God so far as my feeble powers allow' (3.xvi).

Both his faith and his theology are sustained by the triune God of Father, Son and Spirit, the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, and this is a truth he is happy to acknowledge in the foreword.[1]

Yet within the main text of *ST*, as in his other works, there is a marked reticence to explicate the importance of the trinitarian God in the task of theology. For all Pannenberg's insistence that one has to write a trinitarian theology, there is no account of how the Trinity affects what it means to be involved in the task of theology. That is, despite the claim to write 'a theology more trinitarian than any I know of,' nevertheless the practice and method of arriving at the truth about God, as Pannenberg presents them, for all that they lead to the Trinity in the end, are not a trinitarian possibility from the beginning – or if so, it is far from clear.

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[1] On 1.50 Pannenberg mentions the presuppositions of Christian theology, but they are all historical givens: 'the fact of Christian teaching itself...the varied reality of Christianity in history...its cultural impact...the church's proclamation and its liturgical life.' Subjective faith, he states, does invariably precede theological reflection. Nevertheless, there is no intimation that knowledge of God might bring with it, or require, obedience. Moreover, that Pannenberg does not offer an account of the theological virtues in *ST* in no way means that Pannenberg, either as man or as theologian, lacks the humility, prayerfulness or faith that the task of theology requires.

We note two examples. Our first is Pannenberg's discussion of faith, whose problematic nature we intimated earlier. In answer to the question, 'What has this to do with the trinitarian God?' we answered 'Not much.' We granted that the overall context and ultimate basis for the discussion were trinitarian, but the treatment in *ST* vol. 3 is worth investigating in more detail

We shall investigate Pannenberg's actual understanding of faith in three steps. Firstly, he says that faith is the proper attitude towards truth that lies in the future. Unlike knowledge, which is oriented to the present things or experience, faith 'directs itself to the future, as trust,' reaching beyond temporal boundaries to 'a future knowledge of the truth (the stable reality) on which it relies' (3.137). It is related to the future, which is the future God will bring – and therefore related to God.

Second, faith rests on knowledge and assent. While differing from Greek conceptions of knowledge due to its inherent relation to history, faith – like knowledge - 'is a form of the way we relate to truth' (3.136). It is knowledge of, and assent to, the facts of history in which God revealed Himself first, and only then is it trust or assurance, for which the knowledge and intellectual assent are presuppositions. This, Pannenberg argues, was the understanding of Luther. His, and the Reformation's, idea that faith is above all trust 'does not rule out the elements of knowledge (*notitia*) and assent (*assensus*) but instead presupposes them' (3.138). For it was '[f]rom the thought of the assent of faith,' Pannenberg states, that Luther 'moved on to a much bolder idea of the immediacy of faith to God and its fellowship with God' (3.140).

Third, faith requires reliance on the results of historico-exegetical knowledge. Again taking up the language of the medieval and Reformation ages, Pannenberg says that 'knowledge (*notitia*) of the facts of history in which God revealed himself and assent (*assensus*) to these are essential presuppositions of Christian trust (*fiducia*)' (3.150). And since in our critical age there is no easy identification of the 'facts of history' with either the traditions of the church or the witness of scripture, then,

> 'If under these new conditions Christian theology clings to the authoritative form of establishing its teaching, especially as regards its historical foundations, then in a way that was not true in earlier centuries it comes into basic conflict with reason' (3.147).

There would not be the *notitia* or *assensus* to legitimate the *fiducia*.

Pannenberg expresses this with a key distinction he takes over from Wilhelm Herrmann. On the one hand there is the ground of faith, which is the events, historically considered, of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. On the other there are the thoughts of faith, which are conclusions about the nature of God, human experience and the Christian life, drawn on the basis of that history. And the legitimacy of such thoughts of faith, which necessarily remains provisional during the course of history, is their correspondence to and derivation from this ground of faith in the historical Jesus.

What should we make of this account of faith? Christoph Schwoebel has noted sympathetically:

> 'Pannenberg's discussion of faith is a constant tacit dialogue with his critics in German theology, who have either challenged Pannenberg for not giving faith a constitutive role in his theology or for reducing faith to assenting to historical facts.'[2]

Hence Pannenberg emphasises that he is concerned with

> 'a more nuanced conception of the essential structure of faith itself quite apart from purely historical inquiry or from any limited and restricted presentation of the matter that is normative from a confessional standpoint' (3.139).

Certainly, Pannenberg has clearly demonstrated here that, whatever its other merits, he definitely intends not to do away with faith, but to provide an account of faith that takes account of the modern age's sense of the 'involved relativity of historico-exegetical knowledge' (3.154). Whether on such terms as Schwoebel mentions Pannenberg's account passes muster is a debatable point, but in trinitarian terms the discussion is certainly deficient.

Above all, we should notice what Pannenberg does not say. Beyond the fact that this discussion of faith in volume 3 of *ST* comes within a section dealing with the works of the Spirit in individual Christians, there is no account of what this account of faith has to do with the Trinity, since it is not worked out in terms of the being and action of the divine persons. Here, it would seem, the high trinitarian credentials have not been met. Yet this is all the more remarkable, since it is not too difficult to see how a trinitarian account of faith could be given. One can readily think of faith as, for instance, the human response, effected and enabled by the Holy Spirit that receives the grace of God the Father accomplished by God the Son, and many other theologies provide an account of faith

along these lines or with variations. So, to take an example from his discussion, Pannenberg is right to note that '[k]nowledge of the history of Jesus does not necessarily move us to faith.' The trinitarian rationale for this is that what is missing is the action of the Holy Spirit. But it is not such a trinitarian rationale that Pannenberg offers. Instead, he continues:

> Where the motives behind faith's assent may really find their basis is in the broad sphere of the ineffable relation of human existence to the divine mystery that surrounds and sustains our living of it' (3.150).

Our other example, which we shall deal with much more briefly, is Pannenberg's discussion in the early chapters of *ST* of theological knowledge. This is not the major theme in these chapters which deal with the meaning and truth of the term "God" on the one hand, and the nature of religion and the religions on the other. Nevertheless there is a cluster of questions that combine to make the issue of theological knowledge an important sub-theme. These include what general awareness of God we have as humans, what criteria we should offer for accounts of the basis of the general awareness, and how religions may offer explanations for this awareness.

As human beings we have, Pannenberg says, awareness of this all-pervasive, all-determining something, which, though not identical with anything in the world, is nevertheless the basis of the universe and its operations. This nameless power Pannenberg calls the all-determining reality, for it is only such a God that could be the author of a world such as this; and he also calls it the true Infinite. For, in distinction from concepts that define God's essence either by identifying Him with created reality or one of its parts, or by conceiving Him as the opposite of world reality and again making description of the divine dependent on the world, the term true Infinite preserves the real distinction of God from everything creaturely. And it is God in His revelation that fulfils such a requirement of the divine absolute: 'the making finite of the Infinite...is transcended in the event of the revelation of God' (1.187).

We need not deal with specific details from this complex and wide-ranging discussion in *ST* chapters 2 and 3, but should notice just one important point. Again, it is striking is that trinitarian language and talk of the specifically Christian God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is really very sparse. In a lengthy discussion there are a mere handful

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[2] (1996), p.517.

of references, none of which seem to be essential to the argument.[3] In view of Pannenberg's aspirations this might seem surprising, since here too, it is far from impossible to see how a trinitarian account could be given. Many theologians have drawn on John 1:18 where the evangelist says 'No-one has ever seen God, but God the one and only who is at the Father's side, he has made him known' as well as other passages in the New Testament. According to these, knowledge of God is a reality eternally immanent within the Trinity *in se* and becomes a possibility *pro nobis* by the action of the economic Trinity. Yet, as with Pannenberg's account of faith, such a trinitarian construal is not given.

Why does Pannenberg do this? Why in a presentation of Christian truth so replete with discussion of the specifically triune God in treatments of the divine essence and works, from creation right through to consummation, does talk of the Christian God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit retire from the scene when the subject under discussion becomes how we come to know about God? In part this arises from material reasons, namely how Pannenberg thinks of the substance of Christian theology, in part also from apologetic reasons, namely with how Pannenberg conceives the state of contemporary Western society, especially its intellectual attitude towards Christian truth claims.

The material reasons for this approach that arise from the substance of Christian theology will have to be treated only cursorily. Key is Pannenberg's belief that God makes Himself known in and through the course of history. God's acts of self-manifestation are not, he says, 'original and new communications' but are part of, and derive their authority from, the whole course of history.[4] The self-revelation of God, that is, is only complete as the whole of history comes to its end and is taken up into eternity. It is then that the deity of God will be clear to all, and that the universe from its beginning has been the creation of the Christian God

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[3] 1.6 notes the reliance on the question of the identity of economic and immanent trinities of the claim that theology is the science of God. 1.30 cites the Trinity as part of the essential content that is intended by the Protestant doctrine of the clarity of scripture. 1.80 notes that Augustine believed contemporary Platonist natural theology included knowledge of God as Trinity. 1.81discusses medieval debates on whether both God's unity and trinity are accessible to rational knowledge.

[4] This even applies to scripture. In a recent paper he has written: '[T]he divine authority of the Scriptures themselves has to be argued for, not merely presupposed, and this can be done only, if the God to whom the Scriptures witness is truly God, the creator of heaven and earth and of every human being, and that not only in the perspective of a particular faith, but with plausibility for all, at least in principle, in the sense that such plausibility may be claimed and argued for with good reasons' ("Theology examines its status and methodology", p.4).

This clarity arises because at the *eschaton* there will be a correspondence between on the one hand the whole course of earthly history, and on the other the triune God of love. Even though, in Pannenberg's view the whole of history has come to light in the life of Jesus as a 'proleptic anticipation,' and before then all Christian claims to truth can be presented only as hypotheses, not as self-grounded dogmas. Christianity's truth, he says, comes not from some *a priori* authority, but is corroborated by its coherence with all that is true. That is, it must correspond to the evidence of human history. As Pannenberg puts it,

> 'The systematic investigation and presentation itself entails also a very specific understanding of all that is true. Systematic theology ascertains the truth of Christian doctrine by investigation and presentation of its coherence as regards both the interrelation of the parts and the relation to other knowledge' (1.21-22).

For it is inevitable, he continues, that 'tension arises between systematic theology and conceptions in which the truth of Christian teaching is assumed prior to any systematic ascertainment,' whether this be the authority of divine revelation or church consensus.

This provides a material basis for the debatability of God. 'We cannot,' he writes, 'definitively determine the true meaning of things and events in our world so long as the course of history continues.' [5] For this reason, all our theological statements, like other statements, rest on anticipation and are either falsified or confirmed by the ongoing historical process. For, 'as time advances it brings to light what is constant and true in the world of our beginnings, and what is unreliable – firm and lasting though it might seem to be' (1.55). Speech about God, then, takes place, not by theologians deciding what is true, but by the open process of their repeating and anticipating the coherence of divine truth itself, in hope that the corroboration of theological statements comes from the validation of history.

There are also apologetic reasons for this approach, which are occasioned by the specific conditions of late modern Western society. Pannenberg writes:

> 'Enlightenment criticism of both scripture and church doctrine has made it impossible ever since, in the presentation of Christian doctrine, freely to use them as authorities for divine revelation as medieval theology and the older Protestant theology did, and in their historical situation could rightly do' (1.26).

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[5] See *BQT* I, 156ff and 163ff.

Corroboration of claims to theological truth or hypotheses could, for Pannenberg, rightly demonstrate the plausibility of revelation merely by the scriptural record of Christ's history and significance as the church has received it in an age that was pre-critical. Yet if, with the onset of enlightenment and historical criticism of scripture and church doctrine,

> 'Christian theology clings to the authoritative form of establishing its teaching, especially as regards its historical foundations, then in a way that was not true in earlier centuries it comes into basic conflict with reason' (3.147).

The contemporary church in the West can no longer adopt this strategy, since it would appear authoritarian and subjective, and so would lack credibility. Otherwise faith would appear 'as irrational commitment to a content which is regarded as "true" only in a private perspective.'[6] Religious need would therefore easily assume the form of irrational commitment if the church recognised and affirmed as such.

Such material and apologetic motivations, however, are not sufficient. To find biblical warrant for such an approach as Pannenberg adopts is far from obvious. Confirmation of the truth of the gospel in the New Testament is always spiritual in nature, that is, it is a work of the Holy Spirit. As the apostle Paul writes,

> 'My words and my gospel were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, in order that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God' (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

To one without the Spirit of God the Christian message is 'foolishness' and cannot be understood, because 'spiritual things are spiritually discerned' (v. 14).

Pannenberg does not deny this, and at certain points will affirm it, even at times without reservation.[7] Significantly, however, he will not let this truth be operative in the rationality and plausibility of Christian theology, or in how the theologian goes about the task of discerning divine truth.

So, how to be a trinitarian theologian? To be a trinitarian theologian, firstly, requires humility. 'All right knowledge of God,' Calvin said, 'is born of obedience.'[8] For the Spirit by whom alone we come to know God in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2.10) is also the same Spirit by whom we mortify the flesh (Rom. 8:13). In other words, there is no knowledge of God

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[6] *Christianity in a Secularized World* (London: SCM, 1989), p.44
[7] See for instance 3.623.
[8] *Institutes* 1.6.2.

that is not itself obedience. To know God is not just something that demands obedience, or that accompanies obedience, or that when properly conceived should lead to obedience. It is not as if we can know God independently of us being put at His service. Knowledge of God is itself obedience, as our epistemological capacities are put into free subjection to the divine truth. And knowledge of God is sanctification, as the Spirit commandeers and transforms our cognitive processes to show us God in the face of Jesus Christ. To know God is not just something that demands holiness, or accompanies holiness, or that when properly conceived should lead to holiness. Knowledge of God is not independent of, but is part of, sanctification by the Spirit. It is itself holiness, holiness of the mind.

This is a theme that is common within the theological tradition. And it is interesting to note that it is a theme that Pannenberg explains away either by being hostile to it or by downplaying it. We can see examples of this in two striking, if also questionable, historical judgements he makes.

The first example is one he is hostile to, namely Pietism. In particular we note Pannenberg's treatment of Pietism in volume one's handling of theological prolegomena, where the movement is presented in an unabashedly negative light. What is specifically in Pannenberg's sights here is the Pietist view, 'which maintained that a theologian's faith is necessary to theological knowledge and doctrine' (1.37). For Pannenberg this is simply 'subjectivism' that has bedevilled modern theology at least since the time of Schleiermacher. Yet here Pannenberg confuses faith that is obedient to the content of the gospel with faith-consciousness that absorbs it. To say that faith is necessary for the theological task is quite a different matter from 'viewing theology as simply the expression and presentation of the theologian's piety' (1.37), as he then goes on to describe the Pietist position.

What Pietism did realise in reaction to what it perceived as tendencies to rationalism is that knowledge of God, and therefore theology too, involves the transformation of the knower. It is legitimate, therefore, for dogmatics to include the theme of the theologian within its presentation, for although the faith of the theologian does not exhaust or absorb its subject matter, the subject-matter of theology, i.e. the triune God of Jesus Christ, is the One who dwells in unapproachable light, and whom without holiness we cannot see. And in this, whatever may be their errors or excesses in other matters, the Pietists were

correct. Knowledge of God is a spiritual possibility rather than a natural one, for it requires new birth – 'without holiness no-one will see the Lord.'

The second is his interpretation of Reformation views of faith. We noted before that a key defence of Pannenberg's argument is that Luther, too, believed that faith as trust (*fiducia*) presupposes the elements of knowledge (*notitia*) and assent (*assensus*). Again, as with his treatment of Pietism, he makes the historical material be fitted into what can only be called a false dichotomy. Of course Pannenberg is correct to say that '[t]he Reformers...took for granted the authoritative imparting of knowledge of the historical data underlying historical teaching' (3.145-146). But it is too much to say that *notitia* and *assensus* form the foundation or presupposition for *fiducia* in their theology.

There are numerous examples of this within the Reformers' thought, but we shall examine Pannenberg's own example, Martin Luther. His understanding of faith certainly does not fit Pannenberg's description of *fiducia* presupposing *notitia* and *assensus*. We note two remarks in his *Table Talk*:

> 'Before we come to faith and the knowledge of God, our reason is darkness; in the believers, however, it is a most useful...Faith then is aided by reason, rhetoric, and language which were such great obstacles before faith. Enlightened reason which is incorporated into faith receives gifts from faith.'[9]
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> 'Reason enlightened by the Spirit helps us to understand the Holy Scripture...Reason, insofar as it is enlightened, serves faith in thinking about something...Enlightened reason receives all of its thoughts from the Word.'[10]

If anything, for Luther, it is knowledge and assent that presuppose faith, not *vice versa* as Pannenberg suggests. Reason needs to be enlightened, and rather than being the foundation for faith it is its recipient. And central to his understanding of how our intellectual capacities can be made fit to receive the divine gifts is that which remains in the background in Pannenberg's own presentation, i.e., the person of the Spirit. For Luther, as for the rest of mainstream Reformation theology, faith is the 'direct effect of regeneration.'[11]

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[9] "The Place of Reason in Christian Life" in *Luther's Works* vol. 64 "Table Talk" (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p.183 (*WA*, TR 3, 2938).
[10] "The Right and Wrong Use of Reason", *ibid.*, p.71 (*WA*, TR 1, 439).
[11] H. Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum hominibus libri quattuor* (Utrecht, 1694), III.vii.I, cited in Heppe, pp.526-527. According to Witsius, 'The principal act of the spiritual life implanted in the elect by regeneration and the true source of the consequent vital operations is faith in God through Christ.'

The remarks of Berkouwer are a surer guide. He may overplay the rationalism of Pannenberg's account of faith, but he deftly exposes the falsity of his understanding of the Reformers. 'The reformers,' he says,

> 'were not strangers to Pannenberg's problem. They also thought about the nature of faith and they, too, used various words to get at it: words like *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*. Interestingly, they never thought it necessary to set these off into different time periods of Christian experience. Calvin used the word *cognitio*, but did not reduce faith to intellectual knowledge with it because he insisted that this *cognitio* was directed to "the benevolence of God toward us" and was more an affair of the heart than of the head. They were not offended either by words like *notitia* and *assensus*. Intuitively, they refused to isolate aspects of faith from one another. "How could it be *fiducia* without at the same time, and because it is *fiducia*, being *notitia* and *assensus* too?" (Barth *CD* I/1, p.269). The reformers never talked as if one first accepted and agreed to something and thereafter believed and trusted.'[12]

These two historical examples are pertinent for any account of how to be a trinitarian theologian. Both rightly state that knowledge of God, including that of the theologian, is irreducibly and primarily a spiritual affair. And since the decisive factor is the Spirit of the crucified and risen Jesus, knowledge of and faith in God requires the mortification and vivification of the mind that the Spirit brings. Naturally, this does not fit well with attempts, such as Pannenberg's, to offer a presentation of Christianity that seeks to meet the world on neutral territory where the theologian adopts a position of impartiality. It is difficult to imagine the following comment on the lips of the Reformers, for instance:

> Theologians can do justice to this task [i.e. the systematic presentation of Christian doctrine] only if they examine the Christian truth claim as impartially as possible. They cannot begin, then, with a firm presupposition of the truth of Christian revelation. If they did, they would make thus truth a matter of mere subjective conviction, which would be little more than an objective untruth and perhaps even an in many ways attractive fable (2.xiii).

Unlike both the Reformers whose support he mistakenly claims and the Pietists whom he misrepresents, Pannenberg's procedure does not pay due attention to the truth that the practice of theology too is the triune God's act of saving grace, that it is in the words of Johannes Gerhard a *habitus theodotus*, a "God-given aptitude." Or, to put it in

terms of a generalisation: Pannenberg gives the impression that the triune God transforms everything except the practice of doing theology. The impression is created that both the theologian and her theological activity are detached from the world's reconciliation to God and the transformation they must undergo. Whereas all of creation is commanded to lay its weapons of war at the feet of the King of love, the conceptual tools of theological analysis still await their full decommissioning. Yet this procedure is not an option for the theologian, far less with any self-confessed trinitarian theologian. Our knowing, just as much as our being, needs to be crucified and raised with Christ, and to be quickened by the life-giving Spirit. And the practice of theology, like other tasks of Christian discipleship, is a treading of the path He bids us follow.

2. **The Trinity has to be not just the conclusion to, but the presupposition of, the doctrine of revelation, since it is the gracious human participation in the knowledge that is already enjoyed by the trinitarian persons. For this reason to be a trinitarian theologian requires prayer that we too might share in knowledge of God.**

In terms of the dogmatic structure it was Barth who famously put discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his doctrine of the Word of God, rather than after his treatment of the one God (the standard procedure of orthodox Western dogmatics) or even before a treatment of the divine essence and attributes but after the discussion of revelation.[13] Pannenberg will not take this step, however, and puts the chapter entitled 'The Trinitarian God' after 'The Revelation of God' and before 'The Unity and Attributes of the Divine Essence.'

This matter is worth investigating, not least because at least in some ways one might have thought that he would have followed Barth's positioning. For one thing, as we have seen, Pannenberg maintain that his theology will be of the highest possible trinitarian credentials, and right from the beginning he asserts that our knowledge of God can only be rightly understood as the revelation that is made possible by God alone. He writes,

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[12] G. C. Berkouwer *A Half Century of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) p.175.
[13] See *CD* I/1, esp. pp.295-304 on "The Place of the Doctrine of the Trinity in Dogmatics."

> 'human knowledge of God can be a true knowledge that corresponds to the divine reality only if it originates in the deity itself. God can be known only if he gives himself to be known.'

Otherwise, he says, it is 'inaccessible to us' (1.189). For another, he too, like Barth is critical of the sort of natural theology that suggests that the knowledge of God is a possibility at our disposal (1.75). Furthermore, after he has treated the doctrine of revelation, Pannenberg provides remarks that demonstrate that our knowledge of God is to be understood in trinitarian terms. So, for instance, in his discussion of the divine essence, he states, 'The God who dwells in inaccessible light is made known by the Son. To know the incomprehensible God, therefore, we must hold fast to the Son' (1.339).

For these three reasons one might have thought that Pannenberg would have followed Barth's positioning. But he does not. The chapter on revelation itself comes after one on the truth of Christian doctrine as a theme of theology, another on the concept of God and its truth, and a third on the divine reality in the experience of the religions. And it precedes a fifth chapter on the trinitarian God and subsequent chapters on a trinitarian explication of the divine essence and activity. So, for a self-avowed trinitarian theology written in the wake of Barth's *CD* (whatever the intricacies of the relationship between the men of Basel and Munich and their theological *magna opera*), this choice of systematic placement has to be among the most startling of all the points of Pannenberg's trinitarian theology.

Yet Pannenberg has more important commitments that explain his systematic placement of the doctrines of revelation and of the trinitarian God, and they are commitments in tension with his desire to write the most trinitarian of theologies. They have been hinted at already in the remarks on the material and apologetic reasons for Pannenberg's general theological approach, but here some more specific comment is required.

Pannenberg's procedure in dealing with how we come to know God is to separate ontology and epistemology. The ontology, i.e., the material substance of theology, is, for Pannenberg, the primacy of the triune God. The epistemology on the other hand, i.e., his theological method and account of how we come to know about God, is to clarify a general notion of God and see how the history of the divine action clarifies, fulfils and transforms it. As he puts it,

> 'Dogmatics, although it treats all other themes *sub ratione Dei* and thus discusses them in exposition of the concept of god, cannot begin directly with the reality of God...[I]ronically God is then only a human idea...The question how we come to count on God as a reality needs careful clarification. In the process the reality of God to which scripture bears witness can be publicly discussed as true reality and the way can thus be cleared for dogmatic presentation in the true sense' (1.61).

That is, although God precedes and determines all things, He must not be allowed to precede and determine the discussion, lest this appear authoritarian or subjective.

And this procedure is operative too in his account of divine revelation in *ST* chapter 4 – or at least mostly so. To summarise the discussion, Pannenberg notes that revelation in the biblical record comes in many forms, invariably to modify an existing idea of God, rather than as original and new communications of deity. Hence it is insufficient to conceive revelation merely as a special divine communication, but also as the summation of human history. According to Pannenberg this is the understanding of the biblical record. Not only in the OT is there a general knowledge of God as elohim, but it is only through witness of faith of Israel, i.e., special revelation, that one can know Him as YHWH, but also

> 'the NT statements about the revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ seem to be totally shaped by the basic thought of a revelation of God by historical acts' (1.227).

It is also the view of the early church, in distinction to that of the church of the medieval, Reformation and modern eras:

> 'the fulfilment of prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth was the basis of belief in his divine sonship and therefore of the revelation of God in him by the incarnation of the Son...The concept of revelation was not, then, the basis of the argument but its goal' (1.218).

> The tendency of much recent theology, which in Pannenberg's opinion at least is to reduce the revelation of God to divine speaking as the origin of all our knowledge of divine reality, he therefore considers to be mistaken. God's revelation is not an original or self-grounding address, but is the series of God's actions in the world that give form and content to a pre-existing inchoate knowledge of divine reality.

What about the Trinity in all of this? Well, in *ST* chapter four there are several references to a trinitarian explication of divine revelation. They fall into what could be termed three groups.

The first group is of what we might call historical references, where the reference to the Trinity is not in Pannenberg's own voice. Rather, it is a citation in one of Pannenberg's historical surveys of the view of another theologian, whose account of divine revelation is in terms of the Son's revelation of the Father by the Spirit.[14] The second group is of direct references to the Trinity as part of Pannenberg's own constructive account. For this one has to wait until page 257, the penultimate paragraph of the chapter on revelation, where Pannenberg states that the 'implication of the self-revelation of God by his Word is explicated by the doctrine of the Trinity.' The Trinity, then, is in Pannenberg's presentation the conclusion one reaches on the basis of evidence and premises that are not of themselves avowedly trinitarian.

The third group of references do in fact concern the role of the triune persons in our reception of revelation. And it is here that we take up the ambiguity in Pannenberg's position when we noted that it is 'mostly so' and not always that Pannenberg resists the idea that the Trinity might be the explicit presupposition of our knowledge of God, rather than the reasoned conclusion we reach as the content and basis of revelation. The overall shape of the argument is as we have already presented it, the Trinity being presented merely as the conclusion reached on the basis of premises that are not explicitly trinitarian. Yet, when writing against some of the criticism directed against *RaH* his apologetic remarks point in a different direction. So when dealing with *RaH*'s claim that the revelation of God 'is open to anyone who has eyes to see' and does not need any supplementary inspired interpretation,[15] he allows a reading of it that includes a role for the Son and Spirit:

> 'The thesis that we may know eschatological revelation without any supplementary inspiration is not directed against the function of the Word, the apostolic kerygma, relative to faith in the saving event of Christ's person and work, nor is it directed against the interrelation of Word and Spirit. On the

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[14] E.g., the treatments of Ignatius, Irenaeus, Justin and Origen on 1.215ff., the reference to the debate between Basil Mitchell and Maurice Wiles on 1.234, and discussion of Barth and Juengel on 1.235ff.
[15] *RaH*, pp.135ff.

> contrary, it presupposes the relation of the Spirit to the Word in virtue of the latter's content' (1.250).[16]

We note the qualification or clarification represented by these references. We cannot judge it as sufficient, however. The importance of the Trinity in how one comes to understand God's revelation is at best very much in the background in both *RaH* and *ST*. Indeed, *ST* chapter 4 enlarges on the theme only to meet the criticism that the Trinity was not excluded from *RaH* or that it could not be operative in any way at all, but its own positive account of divine revelation does not show that the Trinity is operative in any significant sense. By Pannenberg's own understanding of what a trinitarian theology is, the doctrine of the Trinity must be not just affirmed but also put to use, and while we acknowledge the former there is not much evidence of the latter. Are not the 'eyes to see' a gift that can only be given by the special action of the Son and Spirit, and so not generally or naturally available? If revelation and its reception are really possible only by the prevenient action of Son and Spirit, why are they not mentioned in more than a handful of remarks? And, more importantly, why are they not mentioned in a systematic theology that seeks to be more trinitarian than any other? There is, then, a decided reticence when it comes to explaining God's revelation in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity.

This reticence on the matter of the Trinity comes at a price. As well as contributing to unduly complex argument where trinitarian language would get to the point more straightforwardly and arguably more successfully,[17] it also leads to some highly questionable theological judgements. To take an example, the reason Pannenberg gives for why dogmatics cannot begin directly with the reality of God is that 'the reality of God is initially present only as a human notion, word or concept' (1.61). Yet is not one of the central implications of a doctrine of the Trinity that God's reality is fully realised and sufficient before and without creaturely reality and comprehension and that it can only

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[16] Indeed, closer attention to *RaH* reveals statements such as that on p.136: 'the gospel...which for its part belongs to the sphere of the Spirit'. Pannenberg thinks that he dealt with this matter 'too cursorily to ward off the misunderstandings which came to light in discussion of the thesis' (1.250). See also "Christologie und Theologie" pp.134-135.

[17] Take for instance Pannenberg's extended discussion of how, if at all, revelation can be conceived of as the Word of God. Until the final paragraphs Pannenberg will employ the phrase 'Word of God,' not in its trinitarian sense as the second divine person, but only on the analogy of human words, that is as a special communications. Were he to follow the prologue to the fourth gospel and being by identifying the divine Word with Jesus Christ, then there would be no need subsequently to marry together two

be understood as such? Again, Pannenberg dismisses as subjectivist the methodology of theologians like Dorner, who do in fact seek to begin their account of the being and knowledge of God not with human experience but the immanent Trinity. So, for instance, he can write that 'According to I. A. Dorner "Christian *experience* or Christian *faith*" is the "noetic source" of dogmatics as well as ethics' (1.43), whereas Pannenberg's own remarks elsewhere on Dorner[18] and the research of Pannenberg's own pupil, Christine Axt-Piscalar suggest otherwise.[19]

Yet the point at which the highest price is paid is in the very separation of ontology and epistemology that is the key to the procedure Pannenberg adopts. We shall investigate this by answering two possible defences of Pannenberg's approach. One would be to say that one gets to the Trinity at the end, and that this is sufficient. The other would be to make the point that we can only legitimately talk about the Trinity, once we have worked out how we come to know Him.

We offer two responses to such defences. The first is the incompatibility of Pannenberg's method with his self-stated aim. Even were such objections legitimate – and in our view they are not – and even were Pannenberg right to argue that the only sufficient grounding of Christian truth is to suspend talk of the God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and in our view he is not – his self-avowed trinitarian aspirations come under suspicion. By refusing to make the doctrine of the Trinity operative here, in contrast to many other theologians, Pannenberg undermines the credibility of his claim to write a theology 'the most trinitarian he knows of.'

An account where the Trinity is operative only at the conclusion of the argument and only accounts for the content of our knowledge of God is by definition less trinitarian that one in which the Trinity is also operative throughout the argument and within the

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elements that otherwise might seem separate or opposed, i.e., God's special, personal address with his action in history. In Christ, the Son incarnate, we see that they are given to us together.

[18] 'Dorner worked out the fundamental significance of the knowledge of God for the religious certainty of faith' (1.126).

[19] In *Der Grund des Glaubens: Eine theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Verhaeltnis von Glaube und Trinitaet in der Theologie Isaak August Dorners* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), pp.254-255, she writes: 'Gegen Schleiermacher und die primaer am religioesen Bewusstsein orientierte zeitgenoessische Tehologie setzt Dorner daher um willen des Glaubens die konstitutive Bedeutung der immanenten Trinitaet und die Begruendungsfunktion der Trinitaetslehre fuer die Glauhenslehre ins Recht...Im Durchmessen der theologiegeschichtlichen Entwicklung seiner Zeit im Zusammenhang der Frage nach der rechten Begruendung der Theologie kommt er zu der bestimmten Ueberzeugung, es werde der Glaube als die unveraeusserliche Basis der theologischen Reflexion richtig verstanden und absolut begruendet nur durch die Lehre von Gott als dem in sich trinitarischen.'

account of how we come to know about God. As Barth wrote in defence of his placement of the doctrine:

> When we ask: Who is the self-revealing God? the Bible answers in such a way that we have to reflect on the triunity of God. The two other questions: What does this God do and what does He effect are also answered primarily...*by new answers to the first question*: Who is He? The problem of the three answers to these questions...is the doctrine of the Trinity. In the first instance the problem of revelation stands or falls with this problem.[20]

The second is that such objections presuppose some neutral, impartial position from which we might view the triune God, some place that is not altogether constituted by His reconciling action. If it is indeed the case that to God, through God and for God are all things, what possible correspondence with reality could there be by postponing both talk of the world and our position in it in terms of this trinitarian reality? And if it is indeed the case that God is known only through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, what possible way of knowing God could there be that is not the special work of the triune God? There does not exist, then, any empty space we may occupy that is immune from the presence and work of the triune God of holy love. And we are not immune from this as knowers either. We cannot retire to some epistemological hinterland to talk of God in the abstract or of knowledge of Him in the abstract. Again, as Barth realised,

> 'The knowledge bestowed upon us through [God's] revelation cannot be fulfilled without the confession in humility that we not only do not know Him apart from His revelation, but that even in His revelation we know Him only in consequence of the fact that knowledge of God is real as God's own hidden work in His being as the triune God from eternity to eternity.'[21]

The placing of the doctrine of the trinitarian God within and not just after the treatment of revelation helps to safeguard this truth. It makes clear both that it is this triune God that we know, and that it is this triune God that enables us to know. That is, on the one hand, it makes clear that at every point in theological discussion one has to do with this God of Father, Son and Spirit, rather than some unspecified notion of a first cause, a nameless Other or a True Infinite. We know this God and not any other. And on the other hand it makes clear that our knowledge of this God is made possible not by

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[20] *CD* I/1, p.303, emphasis added.
[21] *CD* II/1, p.50.

human wisdom, insight or deliberation but by the gracious intervention of this triune God who by the Spirit enables us to know the Father in the Son. We know God in this way and not any other. There is no room for any other God, or for any other way of approaching Him. So, when Pannenberg does on occasion offer remarks such as this – 'one does not enter this circle of the divine life, unless one is already within it'[22] – his emphasis on our deliberation on the course of history rather than the work of Son and Spirit, together with the reasons for his arrangement of the doctrinal loci, suggest that the work of the Trinity is not the necessary and sufficient condition for our knowledge of God.

Let us be clear on what is being argued here. It is not that a mere positing of a section dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity on pages numbered within or before the doctrine of revelation will of itself ensure that one's theology, including its methodology, will meet the highest trinitarian credentials. Indeed in our view in practice such placement of theological topics has not of itself commended or condemned theologies. So, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, at least on our reading, is not guilty of making the doctrine of the Trinity incidental either to his doctrine of the divine essence or to his understanding of our knowledge of God, even though his section discussing the triune God comes after that of the one God.[23] Nor does placing the Trinity early on in the systematic structure guarantee exemption from the sort of rationalism that immunises human reason from the obedience and humility that make up knowledge of God. Take, for instance, Hegel's attempt to understand our knowledge of God as the trinitarian unfolding of God's being as spirit.[24] What is being argued here is this: the fact that Pannenberg places the doctrines of Trinity and revelation the way he does and his reasons for doing so are problematic for a theology that is thoroughly trinitarian. A re-ordering of the doctrines, with the doctrine of the triune God before or within the treatment of revelation, reflects both the ontological and epistemological primacy of the triune God in

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[22] *GST*, p.134.

[23] See for instance *STh* 1.32.1 ad.3: 'To know the divine persons was necessary for us for two reasons. One in order to have a right view of the creation of things...The other and more important reason is so that we may have the right view of the salvation of mankind.'

[24] Similar charges have been laid against Robert Jenson's recent *Systematic Theology*, e.g. by George Hunsinger in "Robert Jenson's Systematic Theology: A Review Essay" *SJT* 55 (2002), pp.161-200. P.199 especially criticises Jenson's alleged 'resort to rationalistic metaphysics.' Hunsinger continues, 'Jenson's alliances...represent a vexed commitment to rationalism at the expense of the ecumenical tradition.' Whereas we do not find all of Hunsinger's criticisms of Jenson equally convincing, they at

His dealings with us. And it is a re-ordering that, for the reasons we have stated, Pannenberg not only does not, but also cannot consistently make.

So, then, how to be a trinitarian theologian? To be a trinitarian theologian requires prayer. Knowledge of God is a divine reality already, and a self-sufficient one at that. Knowledge of God by God is natural, since by the Spirit the Father knows the Son and the Son the Father. And no other entity – certainly no creaturely entity – is necessary for this self-knowledge to be actualised. Knowledge of God by human creatures, on the other hand, is another matter entirely. It is not natural, for it is a matter of God's grace and choice. It is not something we have at hand, since by its very nature it is something that can only be bestowed by His hand. It is a gift of the divine freedom. For, 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.'[25]

For this reason knowledge of the triune God can never be achieved by our unaided efforts. It is not the result of our deliberation or decision. Rather it must be sought from the turning of the gracious God in answer to our petition. There is, of course, more to the task of constructing a contemporary account of the reality of the God of Jesus Christ than a confession of our own unaided inability to meet such a task, just as prayer by itself is insufficient if it does not also lead to action and to praise. But to conceive of the theological task as an autonomous or natural exercise of corroborating and systematising God's revelation, is a temptation that we must ask our Father to lead us out of.

3. **To understand Jesus rightly, full and irreversible priority, both ontological and epistemological, must be accorded to God the Son, the one who became incarnate, and so is incompatible with approaches such as the Quest of the Historical Jesus, which allow epistemological priority to Christ's humanity as such. For this reason to be a trinitarian theologian requires faith, for it means the miraculous enabling of sinful humanity to perceive what is in itself invisible and unapproachable.**

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least show that the idea of a theology that starts with the doctrine of the Trinity and yet is guilty of rationalism, is by no means impossible, as the case of Hegel would also suggest.

[25] Matt. 11:28.

'Only God can reveal God.' This truth was given fine expression by that most trinitarian of theologians, Augustine. His *De Trinitate*[26] proves to be particularly relevant to how christology operates within many modern systematic theologies, including Pannenberg's.

In *De Trinitate* Pannenberg argued at length against the idea, held both by anti-Nicene Homoians and within the mainstream theological tradition of the West, that the Son is the visibility of the Father.[27] The view that the Son is the visible image of the invisible Father had been, it seems, the favoured approach of the West in combating modalism, but by Augustine's time was subject to the weakness of separating the Son who is visible by nature from the Father who is invisible.

Augustine argued therefore in the early books of *De Trinitate* that in all the appearances in the world of the Son of God, including the incarnation, it was only the creaturely form He assumed that was visible, and His divine person itself remained invisible. For in this age, Augustine believed, we do not see the Son in the form of God, but only under the form of a servant. For, 'divinity cannot be seen by human sight in any way whatever; it is seen by a power of sight which makes those who already see with it not human but superhuman.'[28] And since, he continues, we do not perceive God directly, but only indirectly under the creaturely form, we have to understand man's knowledge of God as the knowledge of faith, which is the superhuman perception we receive by the gift of the triune God.

Understanding Jesus as the second person of the Trinity, then, involves both an ontological and an epistemological claim. Ontologically it means that all the qualities of Godhead that are properly the Father's are properly the Son's also, and that in Jesus we are dealing with nothing less than God himself. And epistemologically it means that our knowledge of God the Son is not in terms of, but only by means of, the human nature he assumed. We know God the Son in virtue of the eternal deity that He already possesses and that He shares with the Father. Knowing Jesus, then, involves a special type of knowing that is not applicable to any other part of created reality.

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[26] The following references are from Edmund Hill's translation *The Trinity* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1991).
[27] For details see Michel Rene Barnes "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400" *Modern Theology* 19 (July 2003), pp.329-353.
[28] 1.2.11

> 'the bad...will only be able to see [Christ] in the form by which he is the Son of man... The form of God, however, in which he is equal to the Father, this the wicked will undoubtedly not see.'[29]

All other creatures are to be understood just as that, as creatures, with all their creaturely particularities and similarities. They are thus suited to creaturely knowing. Yet this one creature cannot be understood just as that, but in terms of His divinity, which is unique both in number and kind.

> '"He who believes in me does not believe in what he sees" or our hope would in that case be in something created, but he believes in him who took a created form in which to appear to human eyes, and thereby to purify our minds for contemplating him by faith in his equality with the Father.'[30]

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son who is God forever with the Father and Spirit, has to be known by faith.

In modern theology there is a most conspicuous failure to pay heed to this truth outlined by Augustine, an attempt to get at a true account of who Jesus is that is readily available, or at an account of his deity that is naturally visible. The meaning and significance of the man Jesus is to be perceived in terms of general principles equally applicable to other historical figures, and in this way such an approach by-passes faith. That is the so-called Quest of the Historical Jesus, which seeks to understand Jesus' identity by applying tools of historical method applicable to any other human figure. And in terms of the trinitarian arguments set out by Augustine, this quest is, in trinitarian terms, a step backwards.

Here we return to Pannenberg and to the misgivings we noted in our treatment of the trinitarian christology of *ST*. Two points were noted in particular. Firstly, we noted that Pannenberg is unclear on whether Jesus' uniqueness and significance are to be understood in virtue of the Trinity. Second, we criticised the fact that the ontological basis of Pannenberg's christology was trinitarian, but not the noetic basis. Notably, both points are necessary for a coherent defence of discovering Jesus' identity by means of historical investigation, and both points are an assault on the sufficiency of trinitarian doctrine.

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[29] 1.4.28.
[30] 1.4.27.

Pannenberg's defence of the Quest of the Historical Jesus articulated famously in *JGM* is still operative in the later *ST*, and we shall investigate it in some detail to develop the criticisms we suggested earlier and to show that his reliance on this historical quest both fails to deal adequately with compelling critiques raised against it, and is inimical to thoroughgoing trinitarianism. The chief target in the opening pages of *JGM* is some dominant strains within 20th century Lutheran theology, represented by Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Althaus. Yet, Pannenberg seeks to take the rug from under the feet of such thinkers not by dealing with them directly, but by demonstrating how they recapitulate problems most evident in the work of Martin Kaehler's *The So-Called Historical [historisch] Jesus and the Historic [geschichtlich] Biblical Christ*.[31] There are two problems with this. For one thing, he misrepresents Kaehler's position, and for another, he sidelines the trinitarian rationale at the heart of Kaehler's reasoning.

Pannenberg misrepresents Kaehler's position by aligning him too closely to other modern theologians who derive Jesus' significance from the faith-consciousness of those who believe in Him. So in *JGM*, for instance, Pannenberg seems to conflate Kaehler's position with Ritschl's comment that 'One can attain the full extent of [Jesus'] historic reality only out of the faith which the Christian community has in him.'[32] And he considers Kaehler's arguments to be crucial for the later views of Bultmann.[33]

That this critique is unjustified we can see in two ways. Firstly, Kaehler was not just asserting a dogmatic or ideal Christ against a Jesus of historical substance. As he states,

> 'The Jesus of the Life-of-Jesus movement" is merely a modern example of creativity, and not an iota better than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. One is as far removed from the real Christ as is the other. In this respect historicism is just as arbitrary, just as humanly arrogant, just as impertinent and "faithlessly gnostic" as that dogmatism which in its day was also considered modern.'[34]

Kaehler was equally critical of the 'pallid outline'[35] of the dogmatic Christ as he was of Hegel's substituting of an ideal Christ. And insofar as the Quest of the Historical Jesus

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[31] (tr. C. Braaten) (Philadephia: Fortress, 1964).
[32] Ritschl *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* p.3, cited in *JGM*, p.22.
[33] 'The idea that theology, when it deals with Jesus Christ, must take its starting point in the proclamation of his community has become very influential since Martin Kaehler' (*JGM* p.22)
[34] p.43
[35] p.44.

was 'set[ting] the Bible against an abstract dogmatism,' it was, he said, 'completely in the right.'[36]

Second, *Geschichte* is opposed to *Historie* not as event (*contra* Bultmann) but as method of investigation. Kaehler makes clear what he means by *Geschichte*, and it is not the general critique of the objective view of history advocated by Bultmann.[37] For Kaehler, *Geschichte* is

> 'a term coined to designate what...would not even exist apart from history but whose significance is not exhausted in the historical effects of a particular link in the chain of history or in the beginnings of a new historical movement, because in the supra-historical what is universally valid is joined to the historical to become an effective presence.'[38]

So, for Kaehler, it is the historical, or *historisch*, investigation into the life and psychology of Jesus that is the more speculative. The documents we have, i.e. the gospels, are not biographies, so biographical or psychological profiles can only be reconstructions - even constructions - that are the refraction of the historian's self-image.

The reason for this is not a general view about history, but a specific view of the person of Jesus Christ. This leads us to the second problem with Pannenberg's treatment of Kaehler, where the important implications of this otherwise insignificant piece of historical theology come into view.

This second problem with Pannenberg's treatment of Kaehler's critique of the Quest of the Historical Jesus is that he sidelines the trinitarian rationale at the heart of Kaehler's reasoning. Kaehler's is not just an argument about texts and philosophies of history that query human ability to comprehend history in general, but is one that reasserts the indispensable primacy of divine agency in perceiving the identity of Jesus Christ. *Geschichte* finds its determinative meaning therefore not in the faith-consciousness of the religious community, but in the powerful action of the triune God. Kaehler asks,

> 'Now if the Word became flesh in Jesus, which is the revelation, the flesh or the Word? Which is the more important for us, that wherein Jesus is like us, or that wherein he was and is totally different from us? Is it not the latter, namely, that

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[36] p.46.
[37] For Bultmann's more philosophical understanding, that the essence of history in general – rather than just the history of Jesus Christ – cannot be grasped by viewing it, see e.g., his *Jesus and the Word* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1935), pp.3-15.
[38] p.47 fn.2.

> which he offers us, not from our own hearts, but from the heart of the living God?"[39]

And it is for this reason that the epistemological basis for our confession of Christ as God cannot be history in itself. We believe not in virtue of the intrinsic self-evidence of certain events or indeed of any creaturely phenomena, but in virtue of the intrinsic power of the trinitarian God.

Indeed, Pannenberg often reads those who urge an objective foundation for Christ's person and significance within God's immanent triune life as actually advocating a subjective foundation within the human faith-consciousness.[40] It is a failure to appreciate the trinitarian rationale at the heart of positions such as Kaehler's, that informs his evaluation of such thinkers as subjectivist.

In our fifth chapter we noted Pannenberg's failure to observe a distinction that is present in other christologies, namely that although Christ's identity is revealed *in* his human nature, but not *in virtue of* it. Our discussion of Pannenberg's christology and his reading of Kaehler has shown that failure to respect this distinction leads to problems that are of moment for Pannenberg's trinitarian credentials. According to Pannenberg's understanding of how we perceive Christ's identity, there is either an epistemological basis in Jesus' history, in particular his resurrection insofar as it is accessible to general historical investigation, or a foundation in Christian experience. Yet there is another option, namely that the epistemological basis is the Trinity itself, God Himself in the person of the Son. The ontological basis is also the epistemological basis, i.e. the eternal Son who alone sustains and directs Christ's person and His knowability. The fact that Pannenberg does not adopt this third – and trinitarian – option presents problems for his theology. Not only would this resolve some of the difficulties we have noted in his christology as well as in other doctrines, but it would allow Pannenberg better to fulfil his trinitarian ambitions. Christ would be knowable as the Son of God in virtue of His being the Son of God, not in virtue the particularity of His humanity independent of its being assumed. And the ontological basis of His person as well as the epistemological basis would be His being God the Son, rather than the phenomenon of an empty tomb and a resurrected body. That is, Pannenberg rejects the 'subjective' basis in Christian experience in favour of the 'objective' basis in history *per se* and what can be verified on

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

general historiographical criteria, whereas he could have located a basis in the ultimate objectivity of the eternal Trinity.

In practice Pannenberg's approach – and here he is in line with the quests of the historical Jesus in general – has two implications, both of which wrest away the primacy from the incarnate Son of God and give it to the humanity as such. The first is that Jesus' significance or uniqueness has to be found in his human nature, otherwise how could one ever notice anything below to move above from. This, as we have seen, Pannenberg does, but in doing so he himself admits that there is little support for this within the theological tradition. Of course, this in itself does not decide against Pannenberg, but for a theologian whose theological positions are worked out with close comparison with the history of ideas, it does point to the isolation of his position within the church's thought. Pannenberg says that even the most likely patristic precedent for developing a purely human uniqueness of Jesus, namely the christology of Antioch, did not do so. 'This theology,' he writes,

> 'like that of Alexandria, firmly accepted the deity of Jesus, even before his birth, as a presupposition throughout his human history. There was thus no need to make a special theme of the human uniqueness of Jesus and his history and to treat this as a basis for what was said about his deity' (2.301).

On this matter the weight of argument rests with the traditional approach rather than Pannenberg's. For there are two major problems with his finding a basis for Christ's significance in his humanity *per se*. For one thing, it lacks exegetical foundation. In the gospels, both in the Synoptics and in John, whether by accounts of incarnation in the virgin's womb,[41] prologue[42] or reference to Christ as the "Lord" of the OT,[43] it is made clear from the very outset that the significance of this one is the coming into time of almighty God. For another Christ's uniqueness and significance are not explained by means of the Trinity. Of course, since Christ is God-become-man His uniqueness and significance are also human, but Pannenberg is arguing for something more. Pannenberg

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[40] See for instance his readings of Dorner and Barth.
[41] Matt. 1:18-25, esp. v23; Luke 1:26-45, esp. vv32, 43
[42] John 1:1-18.
[43] Mark 1:2-3.

requires a part of Christ's significance that is to be found not in trinitarian terms, but solely in human terms. Yet none such exists.[44]

The second implication that wrests primacy away from the Trinity is that confirmation of Jesus' authority is not something He already possesses in His person, but it is granted to Him by the course of His earthly life. For Pannenberg Christ's authority is to be discerned, not first of all in His person, but in His message, miracles and especially in the resurrection, all of which confer authority on Him as the Messiah of God. It is 'the resurrection of Jesus,' Pannenberg says, which 'confirmed not merely his message and work...but Jesus himself.'

Again this does not match the witness of the New Testament. For in the gospels, both in the Synoptics and in John, right from the beginning of His ministry this authority is not something conferred on Him by His life and work, but revealed through them is the fact that He is already 'the one having authority' (Mark 1.22). Indeed the despoiling of Satan that takes shape in Jesus' miraculous ministry, occurs because the strong man has already been tied up (Mark 3.27). In John also Jesus' miracles are not instances of Jesus receiving glory from His deeds, but of Him revealing the glory He already has.[45]

Knowledge of Jesus, no less than knowledge of the triune God – for is it not the same thing? – is not a natural possibility achieved by human deliberations on the earthly history and reality of Jesus of Nazareth. Our knowledge of the incarnation is and remains only a trinitarian possibility, as was the event of the incarnation itself. The divine power and wisdom, which is the person of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected, are invisible to unaided human perception. For they are visible only spiritually. As Paul says:

> 'We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

Here too, it is not a matter of human deliberation but of the Spirit's action.

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[44] For the same reason we find problematic Pannenberg's adoption of 'mutual conditioning' in his doctrine of creation. See, e.g., 2.xiv.
[45] See 2:11

So, then, how to be a trinitarian theologian? To be a trinitarian theologian requires faith. In this age we do not see God face to face, and such knowledge as we do have of the God of Jesus Christ appears in a hidden form. Faith is a perception of and clinging to the invisible God by means of the visible mask. It is trust in Jesus, the Son of God who has become incarnate, by means of the humanity to which He has united Himself.

It is not just a matter of the provisionality of our knowledge being lifted by the conclusion of the temporal process. Rather, we shall be changed, fitted for direct perception of the God who dwells in inapproachable light. The Son of God, although He became part of creation, is not known in virtue of His creatureliness. He is known in virtue of His divine saving power, a knowledge that cannot be achieved by any natural process. We can characterise this by some terminology borrowed from Hans Urs von Balthasar. [46] It is not just that we eschew an 'epic' approach that takes an external perspective on the completed history, in favour of a 'dramatic' approach that takes the perspective of a participant in the drama. It is not that we are in *a* drama, but that we are in *this* drama, the drama of the reconciliation of the world to God through Christ's death and resurrection. What needs to be overcome, therefore, is not so much temporality, as it is sin. The difficulty we have in knowledge of God is not so much that we are historically situated, but that we are at enmity towards Him. We live in the history of a world that is radically at odds with its Maker, but that He has miraculously entered to save and renew.

What we require, then, is supernatural salvation: the transcendent God must intervene by becoming and transforming created reality. And what we require is supernatural knowledge: the incomprehensible God must take on visible form and transform our epistemological capacities to be fitted to His divine reality. That is, we require faith, which is the knowledge of the invisible God that is possible only by the Spirit. And this faith is not just divine cognitive help that is provisional to the completion of history. Faith passes away, but not because the course of earthly things is completed but because all things are eschatologically renewed, and it is surpassed not by the fulfilment of the historical process but by beatific vision which is no less a supernatural work of the Spirit.

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[46] H. U. von Balthasar *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 1 (tr. G. Harrison) (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988). The contrast of epic and dramatic is taken up by Nicholas M. Healy in his *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000).

Pannenberg's theology is of the dramatic type, but it often sounds as if it is dealing with the wrong sort of drama, i.e., a general one which must come to its conclusion but in which we undergo no transformation. The most blatant examples of such remarks are his comments on faith itself. For instance,

> 'Naturally, knowledge of the historical data in which God has revealed himself according to the church's proclamation is at best, like all human knowledge, a matter of probability, and it remains to be exposed to many objections as regards both the facts maintained and the significance. *This is why* historical knowledge has constantly been found insufficient from the days of G. E. Lessing onward if viewed as a basis for the certainty of Christian faith' (3.153-154).[47]

But that is not why. Any amount of knowledge of the historical process will never be enough in itself to reveal Christ or the triune God. His being is not exhausted by His dealings in the world nor is it naturally identical with them. This insufficiency is explained by the fact that faith has to do not with a creaturely reality in the process of its own natural completion, but with a supernatural one, the God become flesh.

By no means is Pannenberg's theology always prey to this wrong sort of dramatic approach. Yet at certain key points it is the natural course of history rather than the direct action of God in history that provides the basis of our knowledge of God. As we have seen, this is the case in Pannenberg's christology. Knowledge of the divine agency in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, according to *ST*, requires a historical foundation that treats its object in the same terms as it would any other natural object.

This 'general-dramatic' perspective is operative elsewhere in Pannenberg's theology. One can see it in many of the applications of the axiom 'God's being is His rule,' where Pannenberg understands God's actions in history to decide for His being and also the course of creation (if not its existence) to be essential for God to be who He is. As we have noted above on Pannenberg's doctrines of the Trinity and of creation, he guards against interpretations that imply necessity within God, but clarity can never be fully achieved since Pannenberg remains tied to the belief that there is a sort of natural necessity to our knowledge of the divine. In addition, the discussions of faith, theodicy and the divine being also suggest that complete and direct knowledge of God is achieved

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[47] Emphasis added.

not so much by the direct and supernatural *action of Son and Spirit*, but by the natural completion of the course of history.

One can see it also in Pannenberg's emphasis on the unity of God's action and the continuity of His saving activity with His creative activity. On his interpretation, the reality of the incarnation, God-in-Christ, does not require the utter transformation of our epistemological faculties; it is one more object that is naturally, and so not of necessity spiritually, visible. As we noted in our conclusion, this emphasis in Pannenberg's doctrines of creation, kingdom and church, as well as his christology and eschatology, on the continuity of the divine-human drama that Pannenberg terms the completion of God's ongoing work of creation, tends to mute the actual and utter discontinuity of the triune work of salvation, i.e., the discontinuity of the death and resurrection of all created reality in Jesus. What we have in Christ is the utter reconstitution of what went before – not its mere completion – and its being made wholly new – not merely its being brought to perfection. It is new, spiritual reality that is made known on new, spiritual terms.

That this approach is incompatible with the object of theology we can see from the following two quotations. The first, from Pannenberg is this:

> 'Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before the eyes, and that its appropriation is a natural consequence of the facts. There is no need for any additional perfection of man as though he could not focus on the "supernatural" truth with his normal equipment for knowing.'[48]

The second is less sanguine about the possibilities of our natural ability to grasp God in His revelation:

> 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God' (Matt. 5:8).

Faith in Christ and knowledge of the triune God in general is not individualist or subjective, but it is neither generally available nor a natural consequence of the facts. It is visible only spiritually, and so only along with the purification that the Spirit's work in reconciliation brings.

Christian theology is charged with the task of giving an account of the being and action of the God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the situation God has placed it. For the contemporary theologian in the West this means in broad terms to speak about the

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[48] *RaH*, p.136.

Trinity within the context of Western modernity, i.e., it means contemporary trinitarian theology. Pannenberg's *ST* is one of the most impressive attempts within recent theology to take up this task. Without doubt it offers a serious and detailed treatment both of the Christian faith and of the intellectual climate of contemporary Western society, and for seriousness and detail it has few rivals.

Yet the encounter of modern society with divine truth entails more than seriousness and detail. Encounter also means transformation. It means the transformation of the world to be addressed by the word of God, and it means the transformation of those charged to deliver that address including the theologians who help formulate it. It means transformation because God is this triune God. He is the God who has made all things new by crucifying and raising them with Christ – the Father commissioning it, the Son effecting it and the Spirit applying it. At each stage He is the God of this total transformation.

Since encounter with this triune God entails transformation, both the modern West and the modern theologian must undergo the mortification and vivification that this transformation involves. If knowledge of God is really to be considered a radically trinitarian possibility and not just a natural one, then we may no longer consider as absolutely final that, as Pannenberg states, 'in the light of secular awareness the step towards an explicit commitment in faith looks like a leap into the irrational.'[49] And if theologising about God is really to be considered a trinitarian possibility and not just a natural one, then the position the theologian must adopt cannot be that of neutrality, impartiality or detachment. For, to speak of God, the theologian too must be miraculously caught up by the Spirit and adopt instead the humility, prayer and faith that He gives.

One must walk the same path that Pannenberg treds in *ST*. If we with him are charged to speak of the triune God within the context of Western modernity, we must follow Pannenberg much of the way, but not quite all.

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[49] *Christianity in a Secularized World*, p.44.

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