ANTICIPATION IN THE THOUGHT OF WOLFHART PANNEMBERG

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Abstract

This thesis presents an interpretation and assessment of the thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg by studying the role of anticipation. A review of critical appraisals of Pannenberg’s work, and his own descriptions of his approach to theology lead to the identification of major questions for understanding and assessing Pannenberg’s theological project, especially the relationship between theology and philosophy. The discussion also shows that Pannenberg’s work can be examined for internal coherence and for coherence with the claims of other fields of study.

In an initial exposition of Pannenberg’s use of anticipation it is shown that in the discussion of revelation the concept of anticipation enables him to understand revelation as God’s self-revelation in which the content and form of revelation are identified with God’s essence and also hold that God’s existence remains debatable.

An examination of Pannenberg’s philosophical milieu concludes that the atheism associated with the “end of metaphysics” is the primary philosophical challenge for Pannenberg. He responds to this challenge in the context of the “relational turn” which means that he takes the demand for a historicist hermeneutic with full seriousness, while refusing to abandon metaphysical claims. It is shown that in order to achieve this, Pannenberg offers a metaphysical proposal in which reality can be understood in relation to the true Infinite only as the true Infinite is understood as the triune God and that this understanding requires an account of reality which appeals to Christian eschatology and views reality as developing to a completion which is granted to it from eternity. In this proposal anticipation plays a key role.

The assessment of Pannenberg’s thought examines three areas of doctrine. In christology, the concept of anticipation allows Pannenberg to present an account of the unity and distinction of the Son and the Father constituted in the historical, human life of Jesus. In doing so, Pannenberg differs from classical christology by identifying Jesus’ humanity, not the Logos, as the acting subject in the incarnation. While this
allows him to emphasis the humanity of Christ, it also introduces potentially problematic elements into his christology. It is argued that the affect of these problematic elements can be seen in Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation in which Christ’s death is actualised as reconciling and, therefore, expiatory, in the work of the Spirit as sinners are included in that death. It appears that Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology restricts the expression he can give to God’s gracious action in the work of Christ while a Chalcedonian account of the hypostatic unity is able to present this more satisfactorily. In the doctrine of God anticipation allows Pannenberg to relate the multiplicity of temporal reality to God’s eternity so closely that he can understand the immanent Trinity as constituted by God’s actions in the economy of reconciliation. On this basis he can argue that all reality is already, in anticipation, bound in ‘unity in distinction’ in the love of God. It is argued that this position means that the theme of God’s wrath creates an ambivalence in Pannenberg’s thought. As a final step in assessing Pannenberg’s use of anticipation his presentation of the ‘now-not yet’ tension in terms of ‘anticipation–actualisation’ is contrasted to the New Testament ‘achievement-consummation’ schema.

The conclusion of the thesis summarises the insights that have been gained into Pannenberg’s thought and his use of anticipation. It outlines the achievements of his project that have been highlighted and the critical questions that have been raised.
I affirm that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed: ______________________________________________________________

Date:  _______________________________________________________________
Preface
The origins of this thesis lie in my undergraduate study of theology at Moore Theological College. Dr Peter Jensen challenged us to give eschatology a place in systematic theology as a structural element and not simply as a topic. One way in which I could explore how that could be done was to study a systematic theologian who had allowed eschatology to shape theology. I knew a little of the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg, enough to recognise that eschatology was important in his thought, and as I read further in his work I realised more fully how important it was. So I decided that a close study of Pannenberg’s use of eschatology would be a project for post-graduate study. That study has since developed through several stages over many years to produce this thesis. In the process, I have met many new ideas and questions, yet my interest in the place of eschatology in systematic theology has remained and reading and re-reading the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg has only continued to stimulate that interest.

This thesis is an attempt to understand and assess the thought of one of the great theological thinkers of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Pannenberg has made an important contribution to systematic theology, and I hope that my study of his thought makes some contribution to the ongoing discussion of our understanding of God in the light of Jesus Christ and his life, death, and resurrection.

I have avoided gender specific language in generic references to people, though occasionally it has been impossible to avoid gender specific language when quoting directly from Pannenberg and other writers. My language about God is gender specific. I follow Pannenberg’s lead in this matter; beyond that I am persuaded by the argument that God’s own revelation of himself as the One God who is Father, Son and Spirit is best reflected by retaining the biblical pattern of using male personal pronouns for God.

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Acknowledgments

I record my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Christiaan Mostert who supervised this thesis. Chris has extended me considerable grace and shown great patience with my intermittent bursts of work on the project. I have greatly appreciated his thoughtful suggestions and encouragement. He has been a reliable and inspiring guide into the thought of Wolfhart Pannenberg and a model of Christian scholarship.

Dr. Robert Doyle helped awaken me to historical theology and the importance of theological method, as well as fortifying my conviction about the importance of eschatology. He was my supervisor when this thesis first began to take form as a thesis for an MTh. He suggested that I should move into a doctoral program and has had made an encouraging inquiry about my progress whenever I have seen him since.

My colleagues at the Presbyterian Theological Centre have been a constant encouragement over the last seven years. Dr. Ian Smith delayed his own study leave in order to allow me to complete this thesis, he also proof-read the thesis just before submission. Dr. John Davies has been a wonderful principal and a reliable advisor on all sorts of matters related to this thesis. His proof-reading helped sort out many of my inconsistencies and some very consistent errors. Peter Moore has been an excellent discussion partner about theological research and willing listener to my ruminations on Pannenberg. The Theological Education Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales granted me two semesters of study leave, in 2006 and 2009, without which this thesis would not have been completed.

My church family at Springwood-Winnmalee Presbyterian Church has been a source of encouragement in my teaching ministry and in my writing. Some of them were among the many Facebook friends whose comments kept me motivated in the last stages of writing.

My journey as a Christian, a theologian and a student began with the influence of my parents. My mother, Marslaidh McClean (1939-1987), taught me the basics of study as well as the basics of the Christian life. Twenty-two years after her death, her absence remains a source of pain which will only be healed in the eschaton. I dedicate this work to her.

My father, William McClean, was the interlocutor in my first theological discussions and has remained an engaging and encouraging discussion partner and a source of wise advice.

I owe an inestimable debt to my family. Michael (b.1995) and Brianna (b.1998) have grown up knowing that Dad was working on “his thesis”. They are both a great delight and I am privileged to see them maturing. I pray that I may be able to pass on to them something of what I have learnt about God and his ways through my study of Pannenberg and that they will feel, in time, that my efforts have been worthwhile. Elizabeth knew she was getting a theologian when she married me 21 years ago, perhaps she did not know how painful that would sometimes be! She has been patient with me in so many ways, putting up with my very early mornings, my esoteric conversation topics and my various states of distraction. She has been generous with her time and in coping with my absences. Elizabeth has read this thesis at least twice at different stages of its development and has had many useful suggestions about writing-
style and presentation. Like everything else in my life, this thesis is a product of our partnership and only achieved because of her love. I dedicate the work to her (and excuse her from any expectation to read it again!)

Finally, I give thanks to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pannenberg has helped me appreciate more deeply the wonder of God’s love in the work of creation, reconciliation, and consummation. My prayer is that the words I have written, which fall so far short of the God they seek to describe, may be taken by the Spirit and used in the praise of the infinite, triune God.

To the two women who shaped the two stages of my life,
my mother, Marslaídh
and my wife, Elizabeth.
Abbreviations
The full reference is given for each of Pannenberg’s works when it first occurs in the thesis. Thereafter, each work will be referred to by the abbreviation given below. Other works treated in the same way are also listed below.

Journal articles and chapters which do not have an author attributed in footnotes are written by Pannenberg.

AC  The Apostle’s Creed in the Light of Today’s Questions
ATP  Anthropology in Theological Perspective
BQT  1-3 Basic Questions in Theology Volumes 1-3
BWE  Beginning with the End: God, Science and Wolfhart Pannenberg
FR  Faith and Reality
HN  The Historicity of Nature
IST  An Introduction to Systematic Theology
JGM  Jesus—God and Man
MIG  Metaphysics and the Idea of God
RaH  Revelation as History
ST 1-3 Systematic Theology Volumes 1-3
TaH  Theology as History
TKG  Theology and the Kingdom of God
TPS  Theology and the Philosophy of Science
TTN  Towards a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith
TWP  The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg

ABD  Anchor Bible Dictionary
CD  K. Barth, Church Dogmatics
CDP  Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy
DJG  Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels
Inst.  J. Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion
NPNF  Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
Summa  Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica

Abbreviations of Journal Titles
AD  Ars Disputandi
ATJ  Ashbury Theological Journal
CC  Christian Century
CSR  Christian Scholars’ Review
CTJ  Calvin Theological Journal
CTM  Currents in Theology and Mission
CTQ  Concordia Theological Quarterly
CTR  Criswell Theological Review
ET  Expository Times
EQ    Evangelical Quarterly
FT    First Things
IJPS  International Journal of Philosophical Studies
IJST  International Journal for Systematic Theology
Int   Interpretation
JAAR  Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JBS   Journal of Biblical Studies
JES   Journal of Ecumenical Studies
JETS  Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JR    Journal of Religion
JSHJ  Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus
JTS   Journal of Theological Studies
MT    Modern Theology
NZSTR Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie
PRS   Perspectives in Religious Studies
RBL   Review of Biblical Literature
SWJT  Southwestern Journal of Theology
SJT   Scottish Journal of Theology
ST    Studia Theologica
TS    Theological Studies
TZ    Theologische Zeitschrift
TT    Theology Today
TrinJ Trinity Journal
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Chapter 1 Plotting Pannenberg’s Theological Project

Introduction

Wolfhart Pannenberg’s theological project is marked by a concern to be both comprehensive and carefully integrated. This means that an adequate approach to his thought must attempt to view it as a whole and not in a piecemeal fashion. While such an overview is essential, Pannenberg’s project is so wide-ranging and complex that it is, in fact, very difficult to grasp in its totality and thus make a full assessment. One way of understanding and assessing his project is to select a key theme in Pannenberg’s work and to study the use he makes of it and to then make an assessment of his thought from that perspective. This thesis will take this approach by examining the motif of ‘anticipation’.¹

In examining anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought, this thesis has two goals. It seeks to elucidate the function and significance of anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought, and to use the study of anticipation as a way to examine and evaluate Pannenberg’s thought. This first chapter outlines Pannenberg’s theological project. Chapter 2 examines Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation, since this exposes the motif of anticipation in its more straightforward usage. Chapter 3 examines the philosophical challenges which Pannenberg seeks to address and shows that he meets them by deploying the notion of anticipation and that his use of anticipation is part of a more general metaphysical proposal. Chapter 4 then outlines this metaphysical proposal. The rest of the thesis makes a critical assessment of Pannenberg’s thought. The Transitio outlines the methodology which will be adopted for the assessment and the following chapters examine three areas of Pannenberg’s theology, namely christology, the doctrine of reconciliation, and the doctrine of God, in order to show the place of anticipation and to consider how the motif assists in Pannenberg’s exposition of theology. Chapter 8 offers a study of Pannenberg’s use of anticipation in relation to some strands of biblical eschatology as a part of the assessment of Pannenberg’s use of the motif. The final

¹ The term ‘anticipation’ is used consistently in this thesis to denote a particular concept that Pannenberg uses. Because the term occurs so commonly, it will not be given scare quotes apart from this first use in the text and the notes.
chapter summarises the conclusions about Pannenberg’s use of anticipation and offers an assessment of Pannenberg’s thought from the vantage point gained by the consideration of anticipation. The claim that anticipation is a key theme in Pannenberg’s thought and that his project depends on the associated metaphysical proposal will receive some validation if the study of the motif provides useful insights into Pannenberg’s work as a whole.

Anticipation is a pervasive motif in Pannenberg’s thought. Christiaan Mostert says of anticipation, “Pannenberg has given it an importance in systematic theology unparalleled by any other theologian”.2 LeRon Shults notes that ‘prolepsis’ (a synonym for anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought) is often identified as the Grundprinzip (‘key concept’ or ‘basic principle’) of Pannenberg’s thought.3 Shults argues convincingly that the concept should not be identified as a Grundprinzip; nevertheless, it is a key theme in Pannenberg’s thought. It will be shown that anticipation and the associated metaphysical proposal allow Pannenberg to present Christian theology in a way that meets a range of contemporary challenges.

Before turning to Pannenberg’s treatment of anticipation, an orientation to the whole of his project is necessary. This is in keeping with Pannenberg’s own view of hermeneutics, which involves a constant interaction between the parts and the whole. This first chapter, then, will plot Pannenberg’s project.

\[ a) \quad \textit{Publications and Pannenberg’s project} \]

Across his career, Pannenberg has published a vast number of articles and several monographs.4 The monographs and collections of articles mentioned here are the most significant in showing the development of his thought and receive the most attention within the thesis. Pannenberg announced his theological project in \textit{Revelation as}

\begin{footnotesize}
4 For a full listing of Pannenberg’s works see Stefan Dienstbeck et al., “Bibliographie der Veröffentlichungen von Wolfhart Pannenberg 1953-2008”, \textit{Kerygma und Dogma} 54 no. 3 (Jl-S 2008): 159-236.
\end{footnotesize}
History, the collection of essays to which he contributed an important “Introduction” and “Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation”. In the “Introduction” he sets out his understanding of the idea of revelation in German Protestant theology, his own context. The “Dogmatic Theses” identify divine revelation with universal history and describe this revelation as first realised in “the fate of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as the end of all events is anticipated in his fate”. These theses are programmatic for his project. Pannenberg’s major Christological work, Jesus—God and Man, develops the same program. His theological method and his approach to a range of important themes were signalled in Theology and the Kingdom of God and developed in the essays collected in Basic Questions in Theology. Issues of theological method received a thorough exposition in Theology and the Philosophy of Science. In Anthropology in Theological Perspective Pannenberg relates theological anthropology to the findings of scientific anthropology. Metaphysics and the Idea of God argues that Christian claims imply metaphysical claims, which require a defence in the context of the widespread rejection of traditional metaphysics. The importance of science in Pannenberg’s thinking is reflected in a series of articles collected in Towards a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith. An Introduction to Systematic Theology, a series of four lectures, offers an outline of Pannenberg’s thinking on systematic theology. Pannenberg’s magnum opus is the three volume Systematic Theology. This work shows the wide-ranging scope of Pannenberg’s thought and demonstrates that while his thought has

6 “Dogmatic Theses”, 139.
developed, this has occurred along a consistent line from his earlier thought. Most recently The Historicity of Nature: Essays on Science and Theology collects several essays in which Pannenberg develops his interaction with the natural sciences.

b) Continuity and development in Pannenberg’s thought

This thesis will, for the most part, take a synchronic approach to Pannenberg’s work. This is not to deny that there are some important developments as Pannenberg himself acknowledges. Christoph Schwöbel charts some of the developments in Pannenberg’s thought and notes that through his career Pannenberg has been willing “to subject his arguments to constant reexamination” and he finds “significant shifts in emphasis” in Pannenberg’s thought. Some examples of such development include the following.

1) In Systematic Theology the doctrine of the Trinity becomes central and essential in a way that was not obvious in earlier works. Svein Rise states that “Pannenberg partly synthesises and partly develops in his new dogmatics … the pointers to theological solutions which are found in his earlier writings” and that this “can be clearly seen in the case of his Trinitarian doctrine”. Iain Taylor also traces the development of trinitarian thought in Pannenberg’s work and concludes that the doctrine was present in Pannenberg’s writing from very early and also that “there is a development and increasing prominence of the Trinity” in the later works compared to earlier ones.

2) In Systematic Theology Pannenberg revises his “Dogmatic Theses” in the light of changes in his description of the relationship of word and Spirit in revelation.

3) In Jesus—God and Man Pannenberg states that Christology must be further developed from a different perspective. Systematic Theology then offers this

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19 Iain Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 5-6.
20 ST 1, 249-57.
development, in the course of which he revises his earlier rejection of the Reformation doctrine of the Threefold office of Christ.\textsuperscript{21} That is, while the christology of \textit{Systematic Theology} is largely complementary to the position in \textit{Jesus—God and Man}, there is one clearly identified revision.

4) Mostert notes that Pannenberg moves from stressing God’s ‘futurity’ to thinking in terms of ‘eternity’, which is understood as God being his own future, and of eternity entering time from the eschaton.\textsuperscript{22} As in the other cases mentioned above, this shift is primarily one of emphasis. Jenson claims that Pannenberg has revised his position to moderate the radical implications of his earlier position.\textsuperscript{23} This thesis will argue that the “radical” implications of Pannenberg’s position have been retained as his thought about God and time has been clarified.

Despite developments of this kind, Pannenberg’s work can be viewed as a unity. The fact that commentators can so precisely isolate developments in his thought is testimony to the consistent line of development that characterises it. Charles Gutenson gives an overview of Pannenberg’s publications that he can describe as “recounting a course of research that led to … \textit{Systematic Theology}”.\textsuperscript{24} Pannenberg himself records that “when I search my memories and other evidence, I find it difficult to discern any fundamental change in my theological perspective since 1959, when I published an article on ‘Redemptive Event and History’”\textsuperscript{.25} Thus, a largely synchronic understanding of Pannenberg’s thought is possible.

\textbf{Assessments of Pannenberg's project}

Pannenberg’s project, which has developed over several decades, deals with every Christian doctrine, and interacts with many disciplines, has provoked a wide range of

\textsuperscript{21} See ST 2, 446 cf. JGM, 212-225. In ST 2, 289, Pannenberg states that Christology from below and Christology from above are two complementary lines of argument.
\textsuperscript{22} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 128-31.
\textsuperscript{24} Charles E. Gutenson, \textit{Reconsidering the Doctrine of God} (New York, T&T Clark, 2005), 8.
There is a variety of assessments of its basic methods, its structure, and its value. This section will review some of the critical responses to Pannenberg’s work as a whole. The review demonstrates some of the issues which have attracted the attention of commentators and which are key to a proper understanding of Pannenberg’s thought. This section will note these issues in general terms and the following sections will consider them in more depth and directly from Pannenberg’s work.

Stanley Grenz’s first review of responses to Pannenberg’s work deals with literature produced before the publication of Systematic Theology, focussing on criticisms of Pannenberg. He finds that methodology, especially the relation of faith and reason, and questions of history and hermeneutics have been matters of criticism. In Reason for Hope Grenz surveys responses to almost every area of Pannenberg’s presentation in Systematic Theology, though the interest at this point in the thesis is on general assessments of Pannenberg’s work. Grenz observes that some consider that Pannenberg is “too optimistic and too bold in constructing a systematic theology” since he admits that theological claims are provisional and yet presents his work as “in some sense transcultural and transtemporal”. Similarly, Pannenberg has been criticised for being rationalist, allowing “rational inquiry as the central, if not the only, arbiter of truth”. Pannenberg’s appeals to the general human religious instinct and to universal history as basic elements for developing a systematic theology have also attracted criticism. Grenz himself is appreciative of Pannenberg’s work and lists several significant contributions to various areas of theology. Concerning his project as a whole, Grenz judges that Pannenberg views the central task of theology as giving a rational account to the world of the Christian faith, especially in its orientation of the future of the kingdom.

26 James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb Jr, eds., Theology as History (New York: Harper, 1967); Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton, eds., The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques with an Autobiographical Essay and Response (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988); Carol Rausch Albright, Joel Haugen, eds., Beginning with the End: God, Science and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Chicago: Open Court, 1997). Each of these offers a view of the reception of Pannenberg’s thought and includes a contribution or response from Pannenberg. Usefully they come about a decade apart and so offer a view at three stages in Pannenberg’s career.


of God. The elaboration of a “reason for the Christian hope” is, for Grenz, the “overarching contribution” of Pannenberg’s work.  

Shults offers a review of responses to Pannenberg, with a particular interest in philosophical foundationalism and theological rationality in the light of postmodernity. He observes that most English-speaking critics have been concerned at Pannenberg’s apparent “foundationalism” and “rationalism”. Shults notes that the common suggestions for Pannenberg’s Grundprinzip have been reason, history and prolepsis. He claims that to treat one of these as primary tends to “privilege one (or a set) of his works over others, and miss the structural dynamics that lie across the whole corpus”. He finds a deeper basic principle in Pannenberg’s “attempt to understand and explain all things sub ratione Dei”. Timothy Bradshaw agrees that despite accusations that Pannenberg is too committed to modernity, Shults is correct to view him as postfoundationalist since Pannenberg holds that all theological claims are provisional.

Christoph Schwöbel describes Pannenberg’s theology as “rational orthodoxy”. It is “rational” in that “he never ceases to argue for his position and seeks to make his reasoning transparent for his readers” and orthodox in that it displays “wide-ranging agreement with the teaching of doctrinal orthodoxy in regard to the material content”. While Pannenberg’s concern to argue his case carefully cannot be disputed, commentators have taken differing views on the extent to which Pannenberg is orthodox. Clayton notes a “mixed reaction to Pannenberg” on this issue and he considers it “somewhat ironic” that Pannenberg is “criticised both for not doing theology in the traditional mode … and for being too traditional”.

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30 Grenz, Reason, 290-95.
31 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 2-11. His thesis is that while “Pannenberg has not constructively interacted with postmodern critiques of rationality” his “actual theological performance is constant ... with postfoundationalism”, (9-10).
33 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 84-92; quotes from p. 92.
36 Philip Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method” in TWP, 125.
Schwöbel also comments on the “combination and mutual interpretation of historical and systematic reflection in arguing for the truth of dogmatic statements”, which he describes as a historico-dogmatic method. He also observes that Pannenberg’s arguments always relate to historical revelation in Jesus Christ. He further describes Pannenberg’s method as that in which “a historico-hermeneutical investigation, trying to assess the contemporary validity and relevance of doctrine, is constantly combined with the methods and criteria of a systematic-analytical inquiry, attempting to uncover the conditions for the truth of doctrine”.\(^{37}\) Schwöbel’s hyphenated adjectives reflect the complexity of Pannenberg’s method. One reason for this complexity is that Pannenberg demands that theology justify its claims by showing their coherence with a wide range of disciplines. Robert Jenson comments on this feature.

> What makes [Pannenberg’s writings] ... so complexly rewarding, and sometimes so utterly exasperating [is] his unwillingness to leave anything out, to make any point without seeking every possible source of its illumination, whether by exegeting great chunks of scripture or by tracing a question through the whole history of philosophy or by suddenly sketching the present state of cosmological physics.\(^{38}\)

Mark Worthing considers the difficulty of classifying Pannenberg’s theological method. He notes Clayton’s suggestion of “pervasive criticisability” as the central tenet of Pannenberg’s thought, yet finds that while this is a major concern, it “alone does not do justice to the full range and complexity of Pannenberg’s method”. He rejects Schwarz’s grouping of Tillich and Pannenberg as “dialogical”, since this fails to deal with the “significant differences” in methodology between the two. He also observes that describing Pannenberg as doing “theology from below” is too simplistic, for he includes metaphysical and even speculative aspects in his doctrine of God. Worthing offers “pan-critical-historico-hermeneutical” as a description of Pannenberg’s method.\(^{39}\) This tag certainly indicates the complexity of Pannenberg’s thought. A similar indication of the complexity of Pannenberg’s method comes in Jenson’s statement that Pannenberg’s

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\(^{37}\) Schwöbel, “Rational Theology”, 499.

\(^{38}\) Jenson, review of ST 2, 60-62.

“invariable method” is to “let the explicit theologoumen emerge only at the end, from exhaustive—and sometimes exasperating—recountings of the relevant intellectual history”. In Pannenberg’s thought, the task of explication and validation is never finished before the eschaton because truth must be understood in its context, which constantly changes and develops.

The concluding chapter of Timothy Bradshaw’s Pannenberg: a Guide for the Perplexed focuses on the place of eschatology and anticipation of the end in Pannenberg’s thought, suggesting that Bradshaw holds that these lie at the heart of Pannenberg’s thought. The chapter includes general comments about Pannenberg’s project. He describes Pannenberg’s thought as

   a subtle Christian trinitarian theological ontology working off an Hegelian base and seeking to revise it through a profound engagement with the figure of Jesus in his thought context, particularly apocalyptic, in continual dialogue with the secular world.

He praises it as “a patient and meticulously argued case of total consistency” which uses eschatology “in the most interesting way” and develops “all major doctrines of the Christian faith in an indisputably intriguing and often convincing way”. Peters’ comment on the content of Pannenberg’s project also reflects the all-embracing scope of his thought and the importance of history and eschatology in relation to God:

   “Pannenberg projects on the screens of our imaginations a theological phantasmagoria that unites creation with eschatology, that places the history of the cosmos past and future within the trinitarian life of an eternal God”.

Gutenson notes that Pannenberg’s work is “brilliant but difficult” and that a commentator merely “getting it right” is praiseworthy. He also comments on the “serious loss of content” which can occur when Pannenberg’s work is summarised. This is a notable feature of Pannenberg scholarship. He presents themes so carefully

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40 Robert Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Christology and Doctrine of the Trinity.” TWP, 188.
41 Stanley J. Grenz, Renewing the Centre: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 205, notes this feature in Pannenberg’s thought.
42 Bradshaw, Pannenberg, 177-78.
44 Charles E. Gutenson, review of The Unity of Nature and History in Pannenberg’s Theology by C. Buller, ATJ 52 (Spring 1997): 70.
interwoven that a commentator is constantly called on to choose between reproducing all Pannenberg’s density or to risk oversimplifying.

This review of critical appraisals of Pannenberg’s work suggests questions that are important in understanding and assessing his thought. There is considerable discussion about whether Pannenberg’s thought is ‘rationalistic’, if his claims are too sweeping and universal, or if he is overly confident about what theology may achieve. By contrast, some commentators put more emphasis on Pannenberg’s view that all theological claims are provisional and so view him as less enamoured of modernity. Pannenberg makes it clear that systematic theology should aim to discover the truth: “Dogmatics inquires into the truth of dogma”. An interpretation of Pannenberg will need to establish how he holds truth is established and how this relates to the provisional status of theological claims. The answer to those queries will also bring into view the relation of faith and reason in his thought.

Pannenberg interacts with a wide range of fields as he pursues the inquiry into the truth of dogma. History and its critical study are important to him, as are the areas of religion, the sciences, and anthropology. His project cannot be understood unless it is clear why areas of human experience, and the corresponding fields of study, matter for Pannenberg and how he interacts with them. The discussion of the motif of anticipation particularly throws light onto his interaction with philosophy.

Several assessments of Pannenberg describe his method of theological reflection as hermeneutical. In noting this feature, they reflect the fact that Pannenberg seeks to understand and interpret biblical texts, theological concepts, historical events, and human experiences and to show the connections between these. Pannenberg’s discursive and synthetic writing style relates to this conviction. There are many extended discussions as he explores various aspects of a particular topic. As he examines each theme in Systematic Theology, he considers it in the light of historical theology, scriptural testimony and other relevant material (which may be religious history, anthropology, science, or history). He develops his own position through this discussion.

45 ST 1, 16.
Typically in *Systematic Theology*, a section will finish by pointing forward to the next section, and the whole work, for the full exposition of the theme at hand. For instance, the opening discussion of the truth of Christian doctrine concludes that the question will be a theme in all theology. Likewise, the discussion of the Trinity concludes that “only the process of expounding the divine economy of salvation will yield the degree of clarification that theological reflection awaits”.\(^{46}\) An understanding of Pannenberg’s work requires an awareness of why he adopts this method, since he does so on the basis of assumptions which are fundamental to his project.

Pannenberg has closely engaged with the theological heritage of the Church and note has already been made of his lengthy expositions of this in his work. Grenz notes, however, that he is “no mere confessionalist”.\(^{47}\) Pannenberg frequently offers reconfigurations of Christian doctrine. These are usually new ways of articulating what he takes to be the central truths of orthodox theology. It is not surprising, then, that opinion divides over how much he is an orthodox theologian and how much he is a revisionist. It is not possible to make a general assessment about this matter, since his approach varies according to the doctrine being considered. At several points, this thesis will deal with the question of how fully and how successfully Pannenberg has reconfigured traditional doctrines.

Numerous commentators on Pannenberg have noted that philosophy, particularly metaphysics, is an important elements in his thought. An assessment of the relation of philosophy and theology is a key question for interpreting and evaluating his project. It is usually recognised that he deals with questions of metaphysics in relation to eschatology and that the motif of anticipation is prominent in his account of metaphysics. Thus, many assessments have claimed that ‘prolepsis’ is a basic category of his thought. Bradshaw explains that Pannenberg “offers us a thoroughgoing eschatology realized provisionally now” and that this yields “the anticipatory structure of all reality and personhood, on its way to becoming what it really is”.\(^{48}\) This thesis will show that there are several reasons why Pannenberg adopts this approach and it will

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\(^{46}\) *ST* 1, 336.


\(^{48}\) Bradshaw, *Pannenberg*, 160.
examine how the metaphysical proposal and the related notion of anticipation function in his exposition of several doctrines.

Most of the commentators noted above recognise that the reality and nature of God are key themes in Pannenberg’s thought. Shults’ proposal that the Grundprinzip in Pannenberg’s thought is to view all things sub ratione Dei reflects the importance of the theme of God in his thought. Shults’ interpretation of Pannenberg, taken out of context, could suggest that Pannenberg proposes a self-evident, or at least easily established, idea of God, to which he relates all other reality. This is not Pannenberg’s approach, nor is it Shults’ understanding of Pannenberg. Shults’ claim that Pannenberg’s method is postfoundationalist highlights the reciprocity in Pannenberg’s approach. In his thought, there is a reciprocal relation between God and all other reality, such that all reality is what it is, in relation to God, and God’s divinity depends on his lordship of all that is. The way in which this dynamic is conceived and how it is related to the eschatological metaphysic is another important question for an assessment of Pannenberg. One final feature emerges from the survey of critical comments on Pannenberg’s work, that is the density of his presentation. Pannenberg’s work is closely argued, often dealing with several issues at the same time, and expressed with great precision. This means that an assessment of his work requires careful exposition of his thought, taking into account the thinkers and issues with which he interacts.

**Pannenberg’s project: key points and central themes**

The previous section reviewed assessments of Pannenberg’s project in order to identify the key issues in the interpretation and assessment of his thought. In this section, the discussion turns to a direct examination of Pannenberg’s work especially with reference to areas of theological method, the scope of his interests and the importance of God in his thought. The theme of metaphysics and the role of anticipation will come into the discussion at points, setting the direction for a far fuller discussion in the rest of the thesis.
a) God and truth

The best place to start plotting Pannenberg’s project is where he himself does as he explains the need for theology: “it all depends on the question of truth: If we suppose that the God of Israel and of Jesus is the one and only true God, then and only then, is there sufficient reason for believing in that God”.\(^49\) The question of the truth of God is an overriding and constant concern in Pannenberg’s work. This accords with Gutenson’s assessment that Pannenberg’s project has three major goals. The first two, which are inextricably connected, are “to show the interrelation of the various elements of Christian doctrine” and “to demonstrate the plausibility of the truth claims implied by those doctrines”. The third is “to support the church in its task of proclaiming the gospel”. As Gutenson notes, the second aim is the central burden of Pannenberg’s project, which is served by the first. Pannenberg holds that the theologian’s task, in support of the church, is to show the truth of Christian claims.\(^50\) If this quest is kept in mind, then the rationale for the project is clear, even if the task itself is long and complex.

b) God as the object of theology

Pannenberg argues that God is the object of theology. By this he means that while theology considers “various objects”, these are understood to exist in relation to God and so are examined sub ratione Dei. This central concern gives theology its unity. In his *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, he explains the focus.

In theology, the concept of God can never be simply one issue among others. It is the central issue, around which everything else is organised … The concept of God cannot be exchanged for other concepts. It needs interpretation, but it is not a metaphor for something else.\(^51\)

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\(^{49}\) *IST*, 4.

\(^{50}\) Gutenson, *Reconsidering the Doctrine of God*, 15-17.

\(^{51}\) *IST*, 21.
He identifies God as the “unifying point of reference for all the objects and themes of theology”. Pannenberg explains the importance of the doctrine of God in his project in the early pages of Systematic Theology.

Dogmatics as a presentation of Christian doctrine … has to be … a systematic doctrine of God and nothing else. As Christian doctrine is systematically presented by relating of all individual themes to the reality of God … the truth of Christian doctrine also becomes a theme. For all statements of Christian doctrine have their truth in God. They stand or fall with his reality.

He contrasts his approach with that of Schleiermacher, who held that theology is the science of “the leadership of the Christian Church”, and with views that theology is the study of Christianity as a cultural and historical phenomenon (held by E. Troeltsch, A. Ritschl and M. Kähler).

To assert that God is the object of theology assumes a claim that God can be known. Pannenberg, however, claims that for modern thought God must be the object of theology, but is so “as a problem”, since contemporary thought raises many questions about the truth of the idea of God. This circumstance demands that theology test and seek to confirm the truth of claims about God. The next chapter will consider how Pannenberg accounts for the knowledge of God.

Pannenberg’s characterisation of theology as taking God as its sole object does not narrow its scope, but clarifies its centre. On Pannenberg’s account, from this centre the traditional concerns of theology form a unified science. In turn, this centre demands that theology take an interest in all human knowledge, for the idea of God implies that there is a power on which all finite reality depends and by which it is determined. Such an idea of God further implies that “no finite reality can be understood in its depth without

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52 ST 1, 5, 59 and see TPS, 297-98, and see J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Theology and the Justification of Faith, trans. H. J. Snijders (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 85-89. Mostert, God and the Future, 2, explains that “not everybody thinks that theology is primarily about God. It can be easily argued that Christian theology is about the Christian religion or about Christian beliefs. It can also be construed as an explanation (or exploration) of Christian life and faith … But Pannenberg argues against such views, claiming that theology … must be about God”.

53 ST 1, 59.


55 TPS, 299.
Thus, if theology is to confirm the truth of such a God, it will have to show that the idea of God has a place in the successful interpretation of all other truth.\textsuperscript{57} This connection between God as the central object and the need to relate all reality to God is the prime theological reason for Pannenberg’s wide interdisciplinary interests.

c) \textit{All things sub ratione Dei}

In Pannenberg’s thought, theology must seek to view all things \textit{sub ratione Dei}. As noted above, this implies engagement with a wide range of disciplines. Pannenberg’s interaction with some of these disciplines is examined in later sections. The commitment to examine all things \textit{sub ratione Dei} has a more sweeping implication than the requirement to interact with these fields of study; it leads Pannenberg to examine how God relates to all things viewed as a totality. This section outlines schematically a line of argument that Pannenberg develops through much of his work. It is outlined here because it indicates important connections between prominent features of Pannenberg’s project.

Pannenberg views God as ‘the true Infinite’, a philosophical concept implied by biblical descriptions of God, especially God’s holiness. Pannenberg argues that the Infinite is not simply the opposite of the finite but embraces the finite without abolishing or negating it: “the Infinite is truly infinite only when it transcends its own antithesis to the finite”.\textsuperscript{58} However, it is not clear how the Infinite can be conceived in a way which meets this demand and Pannenberg claims that on its own terms philosophy cannot provide such a concept. He proposes that the biblical notion of the holiness of God explicates the notion of infinity since both speak of God’s immanent and transcendent relations to the world. However, the biblical concept of the holy God also provides an account of the Infinite which abstract reflection on infinity could not provide. The holiness of God, which “invades the world”, is presented in the Bible as mediated by Jesus and as the work of

\textsuperscript{56} IST, 8-9; cf. Pannenberg’s definition of God as “the power which defines and governs the whole world”; \textit{ST} 1, 158.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ST} 1, 48-61.
\textsuperscript{58} The following discussion summarises \textit{ST} 1, 397-400; a similar though fuller discussion is found in \textit{MIG}, 22-42.
the Holy Spirit. The life of the Spirit shows “the structure of the true Infinite”, in that the Spirit is identical to the divine essence, which stands over against the world, and is the source of the life of creation, and “sanctifies creatures by giving them a fellowship with the eternal God that transcends their transitory life”. Pannenberg comments that “the dynamic which marks the Spirit in the biblical sense far transcends the content of the abstract concept of the true Infinite”. This fellowship with the eternal God is the eschatological hope in which “the difference between God and creature will remain, but that between the holy and the profane will be totally abolished”. Thus the biblical understanding of the triune God takes up the impersonal concept of the true Infinite, deepens it, explains it, and develops it so that it does transcend and include the finite without abolishing the finite. However, the claim that the holy triune God is the true Infinite awaits the eschaton for verification. A late article gives full expression to Pannenberg’s thought on this matter.

In the doctrine on the Trinity, the unity of the one God is conceived in terms of a differentiated unity. This enables the Christian teaching to do justice to the unity of transcendence and immanence … God could not be conceived as truly infinite … if he were only transcendent … The Christian trinitarian doctrine can be considered as determining the question of how these forms of God’s presence in the world are related to His transcendent existence.\(^{59}\)

This argument has several features that are characteristic of Pannenberg’s approach to the idea of God and its relation to all other reality. His argument makes use of a reciprocity between a philosophical concept and a biblical-theological one. In this reciprocity, the biblical-theological concept includes and transcends the philosophical one. Further, while arguments can be given for the existence of the reciprocity, it cannot be verified until the eschaton. The claim that the triune holy God is the true Infinite is made in anticipation of that being established eschatologically. Finally, the theological understanding of God as the true Infinite is only possible in a trinitarian doctrine of God as that is shown in the history of God’s dealings with the world.

The argument traced above occupies the space of a few pages in *Systematic Theology*. However, almost every part of Pannenberg’s work contributes to it and it is an

overriding concern throughout. Shults sees the claim that the holy triune God is the true Infinite as “the single argument of the entire three-volumes” of Systematic Theology. Shults demonstrates that throughout Systematic Theology “the relation of the immanent and economic Trinity, their distinction and unity as a comprehensive explanation of the relation of all finite things to the infinite God is the key to Christian theology’s claim to truth”.

Thus Pannenberg’s exposition of theology with God as its object, his concern to demonstrate the truth of Christian claims about God, and his commitment to understand all things sub ratione Dei are each different aspects of the task which lies at the very centre of his project. It is also noteworthy that Pannenberg appeals to anticipation to argue for the identity of the true Infinite with the triune God. This offers a glimpse of the role of the motif in Pannenberg’s thought. Chapter 4 will offer a fuller exposition of Pannenberg’s argument that God is the true Infinite, his use of anticipation and the metaphysical proposal this involves.

**d) Theology as science**

Because theology is concerned with the question of the truth of God then it is, in Pannenberg’s view, a ‘science’ (Wissenschaft) that takes God as its object of study. An examination of the various forms in which the self-understanding of theology has been embodied … [leads] to the conclusion that theology, as it appears in the history of Christian theology, can be adequately understood only as a science of God.

As a science, theology must examine the truth of its own claims and must be united by its study of a unitary object. The previous sections have shown how Pannenberg understands that God is the object of study in theology. This section will detail how Pannenberg conceives of theology examining its own truth claims.

Pannenberg recognises that “Christian theology cannot be presuppositionless” for it is located in a particular history and has doctrines it receives from church tradition. However, he will not allow theology to presuppose the divine truth which “the Christian

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60 Shults, *Postfoundationalist*, 104-105; see his whole argument pp. 98-109. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 61, recognises that Pannenberg’s “theological work is driven by the desire to show that the hypothesis that God exists as the power determining all things offers the most cogent account of the nature of reality as a whole”.
61 *TPS*, 297.
doctrinal tradition claims” but holds that it must “present, test, and if possible confirm” those claims.  

He is sharply critical of Barth on this matter, since he believes that Barth does not allow theology to examine its own truth claims, but demands a positivistic approach to Christian truth. Pannenberg complains that “Barth’s apparently so lofty objectivity about God and God’s word turns out to rest on no more than the irrational subjectivity of a venture of faith with no justification outside itself”.  

Whether or not this is an entirely valid criticism of Barth, it demonstrates that Pannenberg is committed to showing that theology deals with objective and verifiable truth. Worthing comments that Pannenberg “commits himself to a defence of theology’s scientific status which focuses on the nature of theological propositions and on verification”.

Pannenberg’s commitment to relate theology to other disciplines has already been noted. He formulates this relation into a method for theology by calling for Christian theological propositions to prove their coherence with biblical tradition as well as human experience and thought, including philosophical and theological reflection. His position is that statements are not substantiated if:

1) they “cannot be shown to express implications of biblical traditions”;
2) “they have no connection with reality as a whole which is cashable in terms of present experience” as assessed by current philosophical enquiry;
3) “they are incapable of being integrated with the appropriate area of experience or no attempt is made to integrate them”;
4) “their explanatory force is inadequate to the stage reached in theological discussion”.

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62 ST 1, 50. For a discussion of Pannenberg’s scientific project see van Huyssteen, Theology and the Justification of Faith, 77-81; J. Wentzel van Huyssteen “Truth and Commitment in Theology and Science: An Appraisal of Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Perspective” in BWE, 360-77 and Nancey Murphy, “A Lakatosian reconstruction of Pannenberg’s Program: Responses to Sponheim, van Huyssteen, and Eaves” in BWE, 409-21.

63 TPS, 273.

64 Kevin Diller, “Does Contemporary Theology Require a Postfoundationalist Way of Knowing?”, SJT 60 no. 3 (2007): 289, contests Pannenberg’s and Shults’ readings of Barth and argues that they have “turned Barth 180 degrees from his actual position” because for Barth “faith is not a human act risked to affirm God’s Word” but “the gift of God in the act of the Word of God risked to affirm the human knower”.

65 Worthing, Foundation and Functions of Theology, 27.

66 TPS, 345. For further discussion, see Worthing, Foundation and Functions of Theology, 41 and van Huyssteen, Theology and the Justification of Faith, 89.
Through testing the claims of theology for coherence with these areas, Pannenberg seeks to present the claims as coherent with an understanding of the whole of reality. The provisionality of theological claims is reflected in the deliberately negative phrasing of the criteria of testing. Following Popper’s emphasis on falsifiability, Pannenberg presents conditions under which theological statements are not substantiated, rather than ways in which they are finally proven. As long as claims are not falsified, they validly remain part of theological discussion but are constantly subject to further testing and possible revision. Pannenberg defines hypotheses as “propositions which are not self-evident and which do not follow with logical necessity from self-evident propositions” and which require testing for their verification. Describing theological statements as ‘hypotheses’ does not imply particular doubt about their truth, but recognises that they are open to question and debate, and hence testing for truth, because hypotheses are provisional.67

Pannenberg’s account of the provisional nature of theological claims moves through four levels. In the first instance, he accepts the accounts of Kuhn that even the natural sciences, which deal with predictable and repeatable phenomena, test hypotheses by “their ability to draw together and make sense of the available material” or “the evidence at hand”. Since new evidence is always possible, and indeed the record of the natural sciences is that new evidence regularly demands new hypotheses, this knowledge is provisional. So Pannenberg claims that any statement is time-bound and depends for its truth on the anticipation of total truth: “every assertion has an anticipatory structure”.68

At a second level, Pannenberg recognises that historical interpretation, which deals with “the intimate connection of unique events with their context”, is more clearly provisional. Pannenberg rejects the claim that the historical sciences and the natural sciences have nothing in common. They have an analogous method and both exercise

67 Pannenberg’s position is that “if the statements of faith are treated as hypotheses on the level of reflection, this is not in contradiction with their character as assertions”; rather it “is to take their character as such seriously”, ST 1,58.
68 MIG, 94; cf. ST 1, 54.
critical examination. However, hypotheses in history are more difficult to establish and to test.\(^6^9\)

At a third level, the claims of philosophy and theology relate not only to history, but explicitly refer to reality as a whole, a reality that is still developing.

Theology [\textit{sic}] statements are hypotheses about the truth and/or untruth of constructions of religious awareness: that is they are about the relation of the implications about meaning contained in experience of reality in its most varied forms, which are also of relevance to religion, that is to the understanding of life as a whole.\(^7^0\)

Since an understanding of life must lie at the end of history any assertion about it now, such as those made in theology and philosophy, is unavoidably provisional.

Finally, in Christian theology, the provisional nature of truth claims is more pronounced since the claimed unity is explicitly eschatological.

The limits that are posed with the historicity of human experience apply especially to the experience of God because God is never an identifiable object in the world … all statements that we make about God, rest on anticipations of the totality of the world and therefore on the as yet non existent future of its uncompleted history … The knowledge of Christian theology is always partial in comparison to the definitive revelation of God in the future of his kingdom (1 Cor 13:12).\(^7^1\)

Theological and philosophical claims are needed, but decisions about their truth are provisional and they are continually tested by the four criteria outlined.\(^7^2\) So for Pannenberg, all statements have an anticipatory structure in that they claim something which must to some degree await verification, but theological statements display this feature to the highest degree, for they refer to the truth of God which still awaits demonstration in the eschaton.

Pannenberg’s criteria for the testing of theological statements indicate that coherence is the important test for the claims of theology. Pannenberg’s use of the terms ‘coherence’ and ‘correspondence’ introduces some confusion about how his epistemology relates to

\(^{6^9}\) TP\$\textit{S}, 66-68.

\(^{7^0}\) TP\$\textit{S}, 333.

\(^{7^1}\) ST 1, 55.

\(^{7^2}\) TP\$\textit{S}, 343.
the standard accounts of epistemology that use these terms. His account of truth is that “coherence in the things themselves, not in judgements about them, is constitutive for the truth of our judgements”. 73 Although he uses the term coherence in this account, he outlines what would normally be viewed as a correspondence view of truth, which holds that judgements should agree with the “things themselves”. 74 This is so, notwithstanding Pannenberg’s claim that the correspondence he describes is a special case of coherence. The standard terminology is that coherentist views hold that a statement is true if it is entailed by an agreed set of statements or judgements. 75 Although Pannenberg’s basic account of truth is one of correspondence, his theological method allows for the importance of coherence. In Pannenberg’s account theological claims cannot be directly verified against their object, since God is not available to us as an object whose reality we can test. Rather, they are tested “within a framework of theoretical networks”, and are verified with reference to their function in that network. 76 That is, we may arrive at a provisional judgement about the truth of a claim based on its coherence with other claims, even though the final test of truth is correspondence. Thus, Pannenberg can state that the systematic presentation and testing of theology “entails … a very specific understanding of truth, namely, truth as coherence”. 77 Pannenberg’s theological method is coherentist to the extent that the justification of claims involves testing their coherence. This version of coherentist epistemology is recognised as an alternative to a foundationalist account and this suggests that Shults is correct to portray Pannenberg’s view of the relation of knowledge and truth as postfoundationalist. 78 Shults describes Pannenberg as focussing on the intelligibility of claims as a test of the coherence of claims. 79

73 ST 1, 53.
74 Paul K. Moser, “Epistemology”, The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 274, gives the standard definition of the correspondence view of truth as being that a proposition is true in which there is “agreement, of some specified sort, between a proposition and an actual situation”.
75 Laurence BonJour, “Coherence Theory of Truth”, CDP, 153, defines coherentism as “the view that either the nature of truth or the sole criterion for determining truth is constituted by a relation of coherence between the belief (or judgment) being assessed and other beliefs (or judgments)”. Pannenberg considers the correspondence of a claim to a particular state of affairs to be a special case of correspondence because he emphasises “the coherence or unbroken unity of all that is true”, ST 1, 53.
76 TPS, 332.
77 ST 1, 21, (original emphasis).
79 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 125.
Such an account of theological claims may seem to set the ship of theology on an ever shifting sea of historical contingency in which it could never hope to find a sure compass setting. However, another element must be introduced into an account of Pannenberg’s view of theology as science. The assessment of theological claims set out above is only the formal account of Pannenberg’s theological method and has not yet dealt with the material claims. The key material claim, which gives Pannenberg’s theology a far more confident tone than may be expected from its formal description, is that Jesus has been raised. The resurrection confirmed Jesus’ claims and this is “the basis for Christian speech about the revelation of God in Jesus”. The resurrection is itself an anticipation of the self-revelation of God in the eschaton and so shares something of the provisional character of all religious claims. Based on Jesus’ resurrection, Pannenberg describes theological claims not as hypothetical but as doxological. This description does not contradict the description as hypothetical but clarifies that speech about God is rooted in adoration of him and is uttered in hope of its final confirmation. Pannenberg contrasts the description of language about God as “doxological” with the scholastic notion of “analogy”. He argues that understanding these assertions as doxological entails a more guarded claim of how closely they presently correspond to the reality of God. Indeed, he argues that “the concepts by which we praise God’s essence become equivocal in the act of the sacrifice of praise”. The description also holds a greater hope than that of the scholastic analogical account since “we utter them in the hope of a fulfilment which by far overcomes the distance fixed in the analogy”. Pannenberg holds that theological claims are made in anticipation of their confirmation and clarification in the eschaton.

e) Scripture and theological tradition

Although this chapter devotes considerable space to Pannenberg’s interdisciplinary interests, this should not conceal his primary commitment to an exposition of divine revelation in Christ, found in Christian Scripture and developed in theological tradition.

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81 Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology”, 238, see also “What Is a Dogmatic Statement?”, BQT 1, 209-10 and ST 1, 55-56.
Pannenberg’s insistence that theology that fails the test of Scripture and theological discussion fails to be scientific has already been noted.  

Pannenberg holds that Enlightenment criticism means that now neither Scripture nor church tradition can be treated “as authorities for divine revelation as medieval theology and older Protestant theology did”.  

As with all other theological claims, the truth of Scripture will have to be established and cannot be assumed. Pannenberg’s basic method of proceeding in systematic exposition is to examine the relevant biblical material on a particular topic as it has been understood in historical-critical interpretation and then to outline the church’s ongoing discussion of this area. The content of Systematic Theology is dominated by these expositions.  

Within these discussions, Pannenberg introduces inter-disciplinary discussions that he considers relevant. Pannenberg names Gehard von Rad, Günter Bornkamm and Hans von Campenhausen as important influences on his approach to understanding the Bible. He quotes von Campenhausen, who taught him that “you have to be critical with regard to the [biblical] tradition, but no less critical regarding the critics of the tradition”.  

The indices of Systematic Theology also indicate the extent to which he interacts with critical scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann, Oscar Cullmann, Joachim Jeremias, Walter Kasper, Martin Kähler, H. Merklein, Rudolf Pesch, Rolf Rendtorff, Odil Hannes Steck, and Ulrich Wilcken. The next chapter of the thesis will examine in detail Pannenberg’s view of revelation and Scripture.

f) Interdisciplinary discussion

As noted above, Pannenberg’s examination of all things sub ratione Dei brings an interdisciplinary commitment. He does not merely take results from various disciplines to use them as data for theological reflection, but attempts to enter into full engagement

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82 *TPS*, 345.
83 *ST* 1, 27.
84 “The historical sketches the author provides in the unfolding of his dogmatics are not superfluous … In his understanding, the conclusions he reaches regarding theological issues are the products of careful consideration of the historical materials”, Grenz, *Reason*, 14.
86 Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 122, 127, states that “Under Pannenberg’s construal of theological method theologians and their secular colleagues work at close quarters” and “Pannenberg’s theological method involves the quest for points of contact in all religions and all academic disciplines”. 

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with each discipline he considers, understanding it at depth and offering a theological critique, even as he considers the truth of theological statements in the light of these claims. This is demonstrated in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, in which he sets out to “lay theological claim to the human phenomena described in the anthropological disciplines”. However, this ‘laying claim’ is not an “attempt to base a Christian dogmatics on conceptions of human persons that arose in the course of a turning away from Christian dogma” (that is in modern, atheistic anthropology). He states that theologians “may not undiscriminately accept the data provided by a non-theological anthropology and make these the basis for their own work, but rather must appropriate them in a critical way”.

Within Pannenberg’s work, it is possible to identify five broad fields of non-theological inquiry to which he particularly relates. These are anthropology, history, the history of religions in particular, the natural sciences, and philosophy. The following survey will touch briefly on the first four of these. It will note some of Pannenberg’s important statements about his use of the various fields and the reasons why these are important for him. Pannenberg’s interaction with philosophy is so important to the interpretation and assessment of his project that it is left to a later section for a fuller treatment.

i. Anthropology

One of Pannenberg’s important theses is that since God determines all reality, his reality must enlighten all human experience. One implication of this is that theology must relate to anthropology. Pannenberg is critical of an approach to theology that is only grounded in human “subjectivity and self-understanding”, yet he affirms the need to deal

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87 *ATP*, 18-19; cf. “theological systematics must be concerned to integrate … the wealth of insight gained by the secular disciplines … It is only by way of such an integration … that the truth claims of the traditional doctrine can be restated. But such an integration … cannot consistently take place in the form of a selective transfer of some isolated results. It requires critical reflection upon the methodical framework of the research … The transposition of details into the framework of theology will consequently take the form of a critical transformation that is nevertheless accountable to the standards of those secular disciplines. It will not be possible to do this without creating new dispute and controversy”, *IST*, 18-19.

88 In a perceptive passage, Pannenberg reflects on this relationship between God and meaning in human experience, stating that “if the word [“God”] is like blank face to us, it reminds us by its very strangeness of the lack of meaning in modern life, in which the theme of life’s unity and totality is missing and the wholeness of human existence has become an unanswered question”, *ST* 1, 71.
with anthropological questions. He claims “anthropology has become not only in fact but also with objective necessity the terrain on which theologians must base their claim of universal validity for what they say”. Pannenberg notes that “the arguments of modern atheism since the time of Feuerbach have been entirely anthropological … [aiming to show] that no form of the idea of God is a necessary idea for enlightened exercise of human existence.” Pannenberg holds that theology must respond to these arguments.

If it cannot be shown that the issues with which religion is concerned, the elevation of man above the finite content of human experience to the idea of an infinite reality which sustains everything finite [are such]… that one is not really considering man if one ignores this dimension … then every other viewpoint with which one may concern oneself in this field is an empty intellectual game, and what is said about God loses every claim to intellectual veracity.

The path that Pannenberg commends is “to pay full and detailed attention to the various empirically based disciplines of anthropology, human biology, sociology and psychology”. Alongside these disciplines, Pannenberg calls theology to attend to the philosophical debates about freedom and subjectivity in relation to the religious dimension of human experience. Pannenberg’s aim is to show that the existence of God is a dimension without which human life, in its historical reality, is incomprehensible.

### ii. History

Pannenberg announced his concern for historical revelation with something of a trumpet blast in Revelation and History. Pannenberg’s early assumption was that “if all reality … is marked by historicality, then the divinity of God can only be thought of in relation to the whole reality understood as history, and in this sense in relation to universal

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89 TPS, 126.
90 ATP, 16. Worthing, Foundation and Functions of Theology, 172, recognises this aspect of Pannenberg’s thought when he observes that “from the beginning … Pannenberg has made anthropology a centre point of his theological enterprise”.
92 “Anthropology and the Question of God”, 89.
93 “Anthropology and the Question of God”, 91.
94 “Anthropology and the Question of God”, 93.
His initial claims were sometimes understood as reductionist and a commitment to do all theology ‘from below’. Further publications have shown that these criticisms are undeserved, but they have not been marked by a reduced interest in history as the realm of revelation.

Pannenberg’s understanding of the study of history is that it involves developing understanding by relating the parts to the whole. One reason that the scientific nature of theology has been denied is that theology, as one of the human sciences, takes a hermeneutical approach (seeking to understand unique events in their context) rather than a nomothetic one (seeking to explain events by abstract general and testable laws drawn from a range of particular instances). Pannenberg argues that the supposed distinction between ‘understanding’ and ‘explanation’ is overdrawn. He argues that the two are mutually dependent interpretive moves in both the natural sciences and the human sciences. Both groups of disciplines should be seen as seeking to understand parts in their place in a ‘whole’, and this whole remains an uncompleted process. Pannenberg resists the suggestion that the development of abstract ‘laws’ should be considered the best way of interpreting reality. Rather, the ‘whole context’ of any particular includes a unique historical location. Chapter 4 will consider the metaphysical implications Pannenberg develops from this claim. At this point, the important observation is that Pannenberg is committed to a historical understanding of reality.

Thiselton argues that, despite Pannenberg’s criticism of ‘hermeneutical theology’ and his concern for the demonstration of truth through coherence, “his work remains profoundly hermeneutical”. Thiselton relates this hermeneutical approach to Pannenberg’s commitment to view all things sub ratione Dei and his eschatological

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95 “A Response to the Discussion” TaH, 241-42.
96 In response to Stegmüller’s view that historical understanding can only be a heuristic device which allows scientific hypotheses to be developed, Pannenberg says “there is a difficulty which faces all views which regard understanding as a preliminary version of explanation, and this is the fact that explanation itself has understanding as its goal”, TPS, 138. He further argues that “there is no reason to postulate a fundamental distinction between historical and hermeneutical explanation and explanation in the natural sciences” for both have “a concept of explanation as the fitting of particulars into a whole”, TPS, 151.
97 TPS, 150.
98 Anthony C. Thiselton, The Hermeneutics of Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 162. Thiselton observes that although Pannenberg is critical of ‘hermeneutical theology’ he is using this term primarily to refer to existentialist approaches of Bultmann, Fuchs and Ebeling; see Thiselton, 158 and TPS, 177-79.
perspective. Thus, Pannenberg has a horizon of meaning for theological statements that continually expands to embrace more localised contexts and interests, and because the horizon is uncompleted, the possibilities of understanding are continually developing.99 This understanding of historical development means that statements about reality always look forward to the completion of the historical development in the eschaton and so are anticipatory.

iii. History of religions

Pannenberg’s interaction with the history of religions is an important point of contact between anthropology, history and philosophy. He claims that ‘the idea of God’, which implies the unity of all reality, has a complementary anthropological implication: “if the one God is to be Creator of the human race, then as self-conscious beings we must have some awareness, however inadequate, of this origin of ours”.100 Pannenberg holds that this ‘unthematised’ knowledge of God is found in religion, and God’s reality is first indicated by the fact that religion is a “constitutive part of human nature”. Historical religions claim that the all-determining reality of God makes itself known in them.101 Theology must examine and test this claim.

Pannenberg claims that Christian interaction with other religions must allow for plurality, because of the “provisional character of human beings in relation to the one divine truth”. This plurality of religions is not presented as “pluralism in principle”, for there is also a Christological exclusivism.

As long as Christians take their faith in the eschatological revelation of God in Jesus Christ seriously, they will also stick to the exclusivism in Jesus’ challenge to confessing him and to the sentence of Peter that salvation is accessible to human beings in no one else but Jesus Christ.102

Pannenberg also insists on an inclusivism based on the reality of God as the Creator of all and the identity of the Creator with the Redeemer. According to Pannenberg,

100 ST 1, 157.
101 ST 1, 155; cf. *ATP*, 225-42.
pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism must be held together in the Christian assessment of other religions. He argues that it is only possible to do so on the basis of a recognition of the provisional nature of present knowledge of God in the light of the final eschatological revelation. In Systematic Theology Pannenberg emphasises the importance of the historical process in which God’s self-revelation in Christ emerges from religious conflict and he moves quickly to biblical revelation and revelation in Christ as the truth which emerges from religion. He states that “theology examines the historical religions to determine how far the all-determining reality of God makes itself known in them as the unifying unity of all reality distinct from itself. Christian theology devotes itself to a similar examination of Christianity”.

**iv. Natural sciences**

The natural sciences have been a significant dialogue partner for Pannenberg. He recognises that a relation with the natural sciences has proved problematic for Christian theology, and often the two have moved apart. One significant cause of the weakening of the authority of churches and theology is “what has been called the ‘warfare’ of science and theology”. Theology must bear some responsibility for this, but science has operated with “a sort of overkill ... when scientific inquiry was declared independent of any association with religion”. His view is that theology cannot allow the disengagement to remain. If the God of the Bible is the Creator of the universe, then it is not possible to understand fully, or even appropriately, the processes of nature without any reference to God. If, on the contrary, nature can be adequately understood without reference to the God of the Bible, then that God cannot be the creator of the universe, and consequently he cannot be truly God.

Pannenberg’s interaction with scientific anthropology has already been noted. Another point at which he engages extensively with science is in his doctrine of creation.

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103 *TPS*, 358-71; *ATP*, 473-84; *ST* 1, 119-88.
104 *ST* 1, 127.
Pannenberg includes an evolutionary account in this area. He draws on cosmology, particle physics and evolutionary biology to present a vision of “the expansion of the universe as the Creator’s means to the bringing forth of independent forms of creaturely reality”. One of Pannenberg’s key questions to scientists concerns the principle of inertia, which he perceives “played a major role in depriving God of his function in the conservation of nature and in finally rendering him an unnecessary hypothesis”. Related to this is the question of the real contingency of nature and the reversibility of natural processes, which have implications for whether reality can be understood historically, or if scientific abstraction gives the truer picture. He asks about a notion in biology that could be the equivalent of the divine spirit, and about relating eternity to a spatio-temporal universe. Finally, “perhaps the most difficult question” is whether Christian eschatology can be reconciled with cosmological predictions of the future.

\[\text{g) Philosophy}\]

The earlier discussion has already shown how important philosophy is for Pannenberg’s project. Because of its importance, and because its role has been the subject of much debate, the place of philosophy will be examined in greater depth than has been the case with the other disciplines. One of Pannenberg’s criteria by which to test theological claims is that they should demonstrate a “connection with reality as a whole which is cashable in terms of present experience” as assessed by current philosophical inquiry. The interest that philosophy has in ‘reality as a whole’ makes it important in Pannenberg’s project. Pannenberg describes philosophy (more strictly metaphysics) as “concerned with reality in general” and therefore making assertions “about reality as a whole”.

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107 ST 2, 115-36, quote from p127.
109 TPS, 345.
110 A glance at the indices of ST shows the extent to which Pannenberg interacts with philosophy. He has multiple references to Aristotle, Descartes, Feuerbach, Hegel, Heidegger, Kant, Kierkegaard, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Plato, Plotinus, and Spinoza. In MIG, he interacts extensively with Dilthey and Heidegger. Mostert, God and the Future, 62-68 shows that Pannenberg’s concern for an “ontology of the whole” means that he “regards theology and philosophy as close partners”.
111 TPS, 68.
Some commentators have held that Pannenberg allows philosophical questions to dominate over theological concerns. Bridges reports one of the strongest attacks on Pannenberg along these lines when D. Müller “accuses Pannenberg of subjecting Christian revelation to an external criterion which controls its content and its truth, and thus, in effect, measures revelation by human beings”.¹¹² Hans Frei gives more moderate expression to the same view. Frei’s typology categorises theologians on the basis of his analysis of the relation of philosophy to theology in their thought.¹¹³ His categories run from Type 1, in which theology is a philosophical discipline and any distinctively Christian note is sub-ordinate to a philosophical description, through to Type 5, in which “there is not even a subordinated place for philosophy within theology”.¹¹⁴ He categorises Pannenberg as a Type 2 theology, in which philosophical and theological understandings are “merged” and a systematic foundational philosophical scheme justifies the result.¹¹⁵ Frei’s Type 2 allows a specific Christian self-description (which Type 1 does not) while insisting on a systematic relation between theological and philosophical understandings. It allows that a specific Christian understanding is valid as a ‘regional aspect’ of a wider philosophical understanding and insists that the meaningfulness of Jesus must be demonstrated in wider terms.¹¹⁶

How well does Pannenberg fit into Frei’s Type 2? Pannenberg does demand that Christian self-description must be correlated with wider philosophical questions. For example, he writes that “the connection between Christian faith and Hellenistic thought

¹¹² J. T. Bridges, Human Destiny and Resurrection in Pannenberg and Rahner (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 31 referring to D. Müller, Parole et histoire: dialogue avec W. Pannenberg (Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1983), 218-20. The following discussion, and the whole of this thesis, will demonstrate that this critique of Pannenberg is wrong. Grenz refers to “Pannenberg’s apparent thoroughgoing rationalism and hard-nosed rejection of any attempt to base theological conclusions on a faith decision that has not been through the fire of rational reflection”, but is, in fact, more appreciative of his method than this suggests, though he still feels Pannenberg “seemingly overstates his case” for a rational basis for theology, S. J. Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology: Sympathy and Caution”, CSR 20 no. 3 (1991): 285.
¹¹⁴ Frei, 28, 46. Frei’s work is often cited, but has received relatively little critical attention. Perhaps this is due to the work being a posthumous publication based on lectures. David F. Ford, “Introduction to Modern Christian Theology” in The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918, eds. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers, 3rd combined ed. (Oxford : Blackwell , 2005, 1989), 2-3, makes some brief and generally appreciative comments. Thiselton, The Hermeneutics of Doctrine, 105, is less appreciative.
¹¹⁵ Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 3.
¹¹⁶ Frei, Types of Christian Theology, 30-34, 82.
in general—and the connection between the God of the Bible and the god of the philosophers in particular—does not represent a foreign infiltration into the original Christian message, but rather belongs to its very foundations”.\textsuperscript{117} According to Pannenberg, accepting a divorce between theology and philosophy results in an intolerable dualism.\textsuperscript{118} He also rejects what he calls ‘rationalism’ in theology, which bases itself upon Enlightenment criticisms of authority, and relies on philosophical systems to provide it with its conceptions.\textsuperscript{119} Pannenberg sees a model of the proper relationship between theology and philosophy in the confidence of patristic theology, which, convinced of its own universal truth, competed with the philosophical schools to provide a ‘true philosophy’ that offered a definitive account of reality.\textsuperscript{120} Pannenberg views the two disciplines as properly undertaking separate tasks but since they study the one reality and offer alternative explanations of that reality, they will come into conflict.\textsuperscript{121} The conflict means that there is common ground which “should enable each [discipline] to recognise the arguments of the other side as of value for its own purpose”.\textsuperscript{122}

As Pannenberg relates his thought to philosophy, he offers critical discussions of a wide range of philosophers. He disavows the connection of his thought with any particular philosophical position: “I must warn against any tendency to link this presentation to any particular philosophical theology, even my own”.\textsuperscript{123} Pannenberg holds that, while philosophical reflection provides “criteria for presenting the understanding of God within a religious tradition”, it does not supplant the tradition, which reflects directly on

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{MIG}, 11-12; cf. \textit{ST} 1, 69 where Pannenberg comments that “the difficulties in making what Christianity says about God intelligible today are at least sharpened if … theology … too hastily follows the modern cultural consciousness in retreating from ‘metaphysics’.”

\textsuperscript{118} “Christian Theology and Philosophical Criticism”, \textit{BQT} 3, 119ff. He states that “in so far as there can only be one truth with regard to one and the same thing, a conviction of the truth of such theological assertions is possible only on the assumption that the theological assertions are reconcilable with the truth of non-theological statements”, (121).

\textsuperscript{119} “Faith and Reason”, \textit{BQT} 2, 50-57.

\textsuperscript{120} “Philosophical Criticism”, 127.

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{MIG}, 42 asserts that “when metaphysics begins to explicate the understanding of God within a particular tradition … it actually becomes theology”.

\textsuperscript{122} “Philosophical Criticism”, 129. Pannenberg explains that “Philosophical criticism can help theology to achieve an understanding of the conditions of a credible way of speaking of God … [and] help theology to study in a more impartial way the relevance of the life and ministry of Jesus … to mankind and to the whole of reality” (139).

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{ST} 1, xii.
religious experience, nor can it “claim the character of a definitive foundation”. Theology must demonstrate its truth in critical conversation with philosophy, yet it succeeds in doing this when it sublates the themes and concerns of philosophy in its own discussion and shows that they are only fully understood sub ratione Dei. Shults confirms this assessment of Pannenberg’s use of philosophy with his conclusion that Pannenberg maintains a reciprocal relation between fundamental and systematic theology. In this relation “the ‘from above’ (systematic) move has material primacy and ... asymmetric control over the ‘from below’ (fundamental) move”. In Pannenberg’s work, theological language, in a rather traditional form, is the fullest available description of reality. Thus, according to Pannenberg’s own account, his method lies somewhere between Frei’s Types 2 and 3.

This discussion has dealt with Pannenberg’s explicit claims about the place of philosophy in his thought. It is still possible to claim that Pannenberg fails to carry through his program so that at some points he allows philosophical concerns to dominate. At the end of the thesis, we will be in a position to ask if his practice of theology consistently reflects this ‘asymmetric’ relationship.

h) Faith and reason

A discussion of the relationship of ‘reason’ to ‘faith’ correlates with the examination of the connection of theology and philosophy. It is not identical, for philosophy is a particular field of discourse and inquiry, while reason is a tool that is used in a range of fields. Paul Helm differentiates between “the substantive sense of reason”, in which reason indicates “a set of truths which are held to be self-evidently true, or obviously true, or highly likely to be true, and on which all other truth-claims … must be based”, and “the procedural sense of reason” which indicates the application of reason “to

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124 MIG, 42 cf. ST 1, 95.
125 P. Molnar, “Some Problems with Pannenberg’s Solution to Barth’s ‘Faith Subjectivism’”, SJT 48/3 (1995), 324, offers a one-sided reading of Pannenberg when he claims that Pannenberg grounds truth in “the locus of those limits which can be established on the basis of human knowledge and experience”. He notes Pannenberg’s concern for correlation with philosophy (and all human knowledge) but fails to appreciate Pannenberg’s sublation of this into theology.
126 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 206-11.
discriminate the fact of logical connectedness, either inductive or deductive”. This section follows Pannenberg’s account of his procedural use of reason, though what he describes is an interpretive process rather than the syllogistic approach Helm discusses.

Pannenberg is aware of the danger of reason in theology. However, he contends that there is a form of reason to which faith can and must appeal. This ‘historical reason’ recognises that knowledge and thought are part of an ongoing historical process. Pannenberg’s description of ‘historical reason’ is set in relation to Kant’s view of rationality, Hegel’s dialectic, and the historicism of both Dilthey and Heidegger. His interaction with these four thinkers will be detailed in Chapter 3. He describes the process of ‘historical reason’ as

an open process of a reflective movement of thought in which thought continually circles back on itself, and by its own movement runs up against the difference it thereby recognises between itself and its object [it thus] … reaches ever new syntheses which, like all earlier ones, arise as an output of the productive imagination.

Pannenberg’s description of reason builds on his claim that truth develops through history and so a claim to truth at present is made in anticipation of a fuller confirmation. He explains that

a fore-conception of the future is constitutive for reason … because it is only an eschatological (because temporal) whole that yields the definitive meaning of everything individual, which we ascribe to things and events as a matter of course by saying what this is or that is.

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128 Pannenberg rejects “aprioristic” reason, which assumes *a priori* principles, represented by Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant and rejected by Luther. He also rejects “receiving reason” suggested by Hamann, Herder and Jacobi, which is Platonic and fails to grasp the historic and future aspects of truth before turning to ‘historical reason’, “Faith and Reason”, *BQT* 2, 55-64.
129 Pannenberg finishes his review of the convoluted history of faith and reason, and the distortions which rationalism has introduced to theology and asks, “Is not any attempt at a rational accounting of the Christian faith foredoomed to vain compromises?”; “Faith and Reason”, 54.
131 “Faith and Reason”, 62. This is the same structure of thought which was apparent in Pannenberg’s treatment of the hypothetical nature of theological statements.
All present claims rely on this final future whole and so are made in anticipation of it. Recognition of the anticipatory structure of knowledge allows Pannenberg to admit that knowledge as it actually occurs is provisional and open to change and yet not to “rule out the identity of the object to which various testimonies and interpretations relate and by which they must let themselves be measured”. He can affirm that the intention of the various interpretations is to offer the truth and yet recognise that they do not comprehend the truth.

Given his description of reason, Pannenberg describes faith and reason as distinct but complementary. Faith responds to God’s revelation and, in Pannenberg’s thought, revelation has the same anticipatory structure as he finds implicit in knowledge. Thus, both faith and reason recognise and respond to the historical nature of reality, and both are ‘anticipatory’. Pannenberg holds that faith and knowledge are related, but each has a distinct character. Knowledge is a necessary precondition for faith. Faith has no greater certainty than is available to knowledge and must recognise the provisional nature of its content. What makes faith distinct is that it “directs itself to the future, as trust”. Faith and knowledge are not identical because “mere historical knowledge is inadequate ... because it fails to grasp the deeper meaning of the history [of Christ].” This deeper meaning is salvation, and so faith involves the knower personally and calls for personal commitment. The believer moves beyond the provisional form of

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132 ST 3, 154-55.
133 D. Holwerda, “Faith, Reason and the Resurrection in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg” in A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff, eds., Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 291, states that “this view of reason is crucial for Pannenberg because reason, like faith, requires the horizon of eschatology”.
134 ST 1, 23-24, states that there are “two aspects … in the appropriation of tradition … the subjective assessment of the presupposed truth of traditional doctrine can grasp and advocate this truth as truth only so far as our knowledge of this truth extends. On the other side, intentionally critical interaction with the tradition cannot view its true meaning and content simply as the product of arbitrary critical construction but has to see the actual truth content which it is trying to find by criticism is antecedent to the reconstruction itself”. Similarly, ST 3, 159 explains that “this knowledge (notitia) of the facts of history in which God revealed himself and assent (assensus) to these are essential presuppositions of Christian trust (fiducia) … we have logical conditions for believing that faith’s trust in the God revealed in Jesus Christ has a good material basis”.
135 ST 3, 136-37, (original emphasis).
knowledge, not by reaching a new basis for certainty, but by becoming more aware of “the uniqueness of its own object” and so moving to “worship”.  

Pannenberg sees the exposure of faith to historical criticism, which is an exercise in ‘historical reason’, as an opportunity for “deeper reflection” on the status of faith, since “faith’s own sense of truth must leave room for the fact that our knowledge of its object is relative and provisional”. On the other hand, faith, as it recognises the truth, has a role in directing and shaping knowledge. Trust in God “can be the basis of a quiet confidence that no historical criticism can destroy God’s revelation but that this truth will constantly emerge even from the results of critical exegesis and reconstruction”. Some readers have found Pannenberg’s stance on faith and reason ambiguous. At points he seems to appeal to a “neutral” reason, at other points he is fully aware that “reason” is historically conditioned. In the following chapters, it will become evident that the key to understanding this tension is Pannenberg’s appeal to eschatological verification. Commentators who do not recognise or accept this resolution will inevitably be puzzled by his view.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has identified the major questions for understanding and assessing Pannenberg’s immense theological project. It has shown that Pannenberg’s wide-ranging corpus is a single project. There are developments within it, but Pannenberg strives for a coherence, particularly because he holds that all truth is a unity.

The observations of this chapter also draw attention to the danger of ‘oversimplifying’ Pannenberg. He interweaves multiple themes and often develops several together.

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136 ST 3, 160. Pannenberg claims that this relationship between faith and reason is the same as that of the Reformers, except that they could assume the truth of historical revelation, while post-Enlightenment thought cannot share this assumption but must argue for it. Pannenberg’s view is that theology can no longer appeal to authority to establish historical knowledge (ST 3, 145ff). Holwerda, “Faith, Reason and the Resurrection”, 266-79, sets Pannenberg’s concern for truth and history in the context of his reaction against both Barth and Bultmann and his fear of subjectivism.

137 ST 3, 153.

138 Van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith*, 92-100, argues that while Pannenberg adopts some of Kuhn’s insights into the indispensable role of paradigms and pre-theoretic commitments, he remains closer to Popper’s critical-rationalistic approach.
Criticisms of Pannenberg have often been delivered too early, when his work has only given a partial indication of his full project, or have been based on a limited familiarity with the range of his work.\textsuperscript{139} For instance, Systematic Theology\textsuperscript{140} must be read along with earlier works, which give more expansive treatments of some areas.\textsuperscript{141} Nicholas Adams offers a striking example of a critique of Pannenberg that does not deal with the wide range of his writing.\textsuperscript{141} He criticises Pannenberg’s use of Hegel based on “The significance of Christianity in the Philosophy of Hegel” even though he could have had access to Systematic Theology.\textsuperscript{142} His conclusion that Pannenberg’s method is “to adopt Hegel’s account of Trinity and history … and subsequently to make the transition to theological eschatology” is a demonstrably inaccurate description of Pannenberg’s method. By ignoring Metaphysic and the Idea of God and Systematic Theology, Adams’ critique offers no real insight into Pannenberg’s project.

The range of assessments of Pannenberg is a warning that he is not easily categorised. It is better to note some of his leading concerns and trace how these interact, rather than attempt to fit his thought into any strict typology. He himself states that one of the implications of theology being “the science of God” is that theology does not require a methodological or practical unity.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{139} Timothy Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology: A Comparative Study of the Theologies of Karl Barth and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988), 139, comments on Burhenn’s claims in “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of God” \textit{SJT} 28 no. 6 (1975): 535, about the “relative paucity of references to the doctrine of the Trinity” and comments that this “may have been true at the time but must be revised now” and that his comment that “the Trinity cannot function … as a structural principle of theology” “may prove to have been somewhat superficial”. With the publication of all of ST Burhenn’s comment is shown to be an inaccurate assessment of Pannenberg’s thought. R. Olson, “Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity” \textit{SJT} 43 (1990): 175-76 traces early misconceptions of Pannenberg’s Trinitarian theology. An example of assessing Pannenberg too early is W. Hamilton, “The Character of Pannenberg’s Theology” in Theology as History eds. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb Jr (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1967), 179, who claims that Pannenberg can not take secularism seriously. The opening chapters of ST 1 show that addressing modern secularism and its atheistic implications is one of Pannenberg’s major concerns.

\textsuperscript{140} Neil Ormerod, Introducing Contemporary Theologies. The What and the Who of Theology Today rev ed. (Alexandria, N.S.W.: Dwyer; 1997), bases his discussion of Pannenberg almost exclusively on IST. He dismisses Pannenberg’s anthropology on the basis of his description of a human as a “self-conscious discerning animal”, (100). Neither this comment, nor his bibliography, has any reference to ATP.

\textsuperscript{141} Nicholas Adams, “Eschatology Sacred and Profane: The Effects of Philosophy on Theology in Pannenberg, Rahner and Moltmann” \textit{LST} 2 no. 3 (Nov 2000): 286-92.

\textsuperscript{142} Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Significance of Christianity in the Philosophy of Hegel”, \textit{BQT} 3, 144-77.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{TPS}, 297.
Pannenberg’s extensive engagement with philosophy and the critical discussion this has generated show that the relationship between theology and philosophy is a key issue in interpreting and assessing his thought. He is misunderstood if a non-theological discipline is treated as a ‘foundation’ for his thought. So the interpreter must be aware of how Pannenberg draws on non-theological disciplines, but also note where he critiques these. At the same time, it is valid to ask if Pannenberg is consistent in applying his proposed method over the whole body of his work.

Pannenberg’s emphasis on truth and his desire to test the truth of theology in various fields, open up possible approaches of assessing Pannenberg. He is not only committed to showing his own claims to be internally coherent, but also to showing their coherence with other fields of study. This invites readers of Pannenberg to make their own assessment of his thought, comparing it to claims from these other fields. Later chapters will do this by testing Pannenberg’s use of anticipation and the results for his thought against various insights from historical theology and biblical studies.

Pannenberg describes theology as a science that inquires into the reality of God in the realm of all knowledge. Theology assists faith in understanding its ground and grasping the truth of God. If it is to do this, it must build on the revelation of God. This raises the question of how revelation can enter the situation in which its authority is no longer accepted. Some elements of Pannenberg’s answer to this question have been noted in the discussion of his view of the anticipatory structure of faith and reason. The next chapter, which considers Pannenberg’s theology of revelation, fills out the significance of anticipation in his thought in this area.
Chapter 2  Anticipation in Pannenberg’s Doctrine of Revelation

Introduction

Paul Avis claims that questions about revelation are “the most fundamental of all theological questions” and even suggests that revelation is “the only problem” for theology.¹ Avis’ claims are too sweeping, though he is correct to highlight the prominence of the questions about revelation in theology since the Enlightenment. Gunton sketches the way in which “since the Enlightenment the question of revelation has bulked large in Christian theology because … [the Enlightenment] brought to the centre the epistemological dimension of belief”.² Pannenberg’s emphasis on the doctrine of revelation is best understood against the background of post-Enlightenment thought. This introduction outlines developments in thought about divine revelation in post-Enlightenment Germany and highlights the key questions with which Pannenberg deals. The rest of the chapter presents Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation and shows the important role of anticipation. It concludes with a suggestion to strengthen Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation.

The Enlightenment may be characterised as the period stretching roughly from 1690 to 1830, which is marked by the rise of “critical, secular, sceptical, empirical, and practical” thought.³ Alongside this Rationalism, and partially based on it, was a cultural, philosophical, religious, and political program of the “enlightened philosophers” of the period. Its participants saw this program as characterised by independent thought, criticism, tolerance, and progress, which demanded freedom from censorship by government and church.⁴ The major thinkers of the Enlightenment, François-Marie Voltaire (1694–1778), David Hume (1711–1776), and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804),

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³ Gordon G. Brittan, “Enlightenment” in CDP, 266.
were sceptical of claims about divine revelation, especially in the Bible. The rise of biblical criticism further eroded the Christian concept of knowledge of God based on an authoritative written revelation. A result of the Enlightenment was that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the European intelligentsia no longer commonly accepted that humans could gain propositional knowledge of God from Scripture. Chapter 3 gives fuller consideration to some of the origins and development of the Enlightenment and Pannenberg’s response to its challenge to the idea of God.

Kant, the doyen of German Enlightenment philosophers, denied that the world as known in the mind allows access to the world as it actually is (the ‘thing-in-itself’). Thus Kant left a heritage of a dualism between the mind and the world. This view ruled out the possibility of revelation as it had traditionally been understood. Kant held that reason, and reason alone, established practical dictates which constituted the duties of genuine religion. Knowledge of such duties was true “inner revelation”. He denied that either speculative reason or scriptural revelation could offer genuine knowledge of God and insisted that these must always be judged by inner revelation. He recognised the importance of Scripture for ecclesiastical religion, but did not accept that such religion was of any great value; it certainly had no basis on which to claim that its dogma was true. Kant’s position set the stage for much thought about revelation which developed in the next century or so. Kant represented a version of Rationalism, which continued to be highly influential. Alongside it Romanticism and Idealism arose in the later period of the Enlightenment and were, to some extent, a reaction against the Enlightenment. Both offered Christian theology new ways of conceiving of revelation.

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7 The best way to describe the intellectual developments of the late 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries is a matter of dispute. Questions as to whether Idealism should be considered a part of the Enlightenment or a reaction to it need not occupy this discussion since the goal is simply to outline the background to Pannenberg’s thought. See Cornelia Richter, “The Productive Power of Reason: Voices on Rationality and Religion—A Sketch of the Development of the Enlightenment and its Aftermath” in *Faith in the Enlightenment? The Critique of the Enlightenment Revisited*, eds. L. Boeve, J. Schrijvers, W. Stoker, and Hendrik M. Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 23-38, for a discussion of the description of the Enlightenment.
Romanticism developed in Germany from the 1770s as “something of a countercultural rebellion against the Enlightenment”.\textsuperscript{8} It developed into a program interested in poetry, arts and religious experience. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) developed this interest into a basis for theology, giving feeling and intuition a fundamental place as the essence of religion.\textsuperscript{9} For Schleiermacher the feeling of absolute dependence was the basic religious experience and the source of theological reflection so that “Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections put forward in speech”.\textsuperscript{10} Thus the notion of revelation in its traditional form became almost superfluous in Schleiermacher’s thought.

Idealism responded to Kantian dualism by placing the whole emphasis on the mind, so that all reality is seen as the product of the Mind. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) asserts that the self posits itself, that is we come into existence as we come to consciousness and things come into existence as we posit them as external reflection of inner moral struggles. Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) was the great systematiser of Idealism. According to him, reality is in a dynamic, dialectic relationship in which the Absolute Mind or Spirit (\textit{Geist}) is expressed in dialectic process. Gunton identifies Hegel as making a “massive contribution” in response to the Enlightenment. Hegel presented Christianity as the revelation of the Absolute because in it there is “an immediate relation of God to the mind”. According to Gunton’s analysis, since Hegel “theology has been dominated by quests for different forms of immediacy”.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{8} Alan G. Padgett and Steve Wilkens, \textit{Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements}, Vol. 2. \textit{Faith and Reason in the Nineteenth Century} (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 23. This is not to claim a total break between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Frederick C. Beiser, \textit{The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism} (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), 56, states that “the early romantics broke with the Aufklärung in some respects but followed it in others”. He argues that the early romantics accepted the need for radical criticism of all thought by reason and shared similar aspirations for a social program as the Aufklärer. The romantics, however, rejected the final authority of reason (56-59).


\textsuperscript{11} Gunton, \textit{Brief Theology of Revelation}, 3.
Pannenberg’s theological context was shaped by Rationalism, Idealism and Romanticism since these three movements were the source of most views of revelation in 19th and early 20th century German thought. 12 Rationalism questioned the possibility of any revelation, Romanticism sought revelation in religious experience and Idealism found it in historical process. As will be seen, Pannenberg’s account of revelation is a response to each of these positions, and takes something from each. Before turning to that account, the discussions of revelation which are the immediate precursors to Pannenberg must be considered.

In German theology in the period before Pannenberg, particularly with the influence of Barth and Bultmann, the concept of revelation received considerable discussion. Each conceived of revelation and the task of theology quite differently, but for each revelation was a key concept. From Pannenberg’s point of view, both also tended to leave a problematic distance between revelation and the full range of human experience including history. 13 He describes Bultmann as giving “the purest and … classical expression of kerygma theology”. 14 This movement reacted against the historical method established by Troeltsch, but as a result tended “to lose sight of the historical basis of the biblical witnesses”. 15 Pannenberg’s complaint against Barth is not only the distance he puts between revelation and history but also his refusal to relate philosophy to theology.

It seemed to me that the truly sovereign God could not be regarded as absent or superfluous in ordinary human experience and philosophical reflection, but that every single reality should prove incomprehensible (at least in its depth) without recourse to God, if he actually was the Creator of the world as Barth thought him to be. Increasingly it seemed to me inconsistent with that assumption that Barth presented God’s revelation as if God had entered a foreign country instead of “his home,” as the Gospel of John tells us (1:11). Therefore, I felt that my philosophy and theology should not be permitted to separate, but that within their unity it should be possible to affirm the awe-inspiring otherness of God even more uncompromisingly

12 See also Paul Avis, “Divine Revelation in Modern Protestant Theology”, in Revelation, 46, though he collapses Romanticism and Idealism into a single movement.
14 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Kerygma and History” in BQT 1, 83.
15 “Kerygma and History”, 85.
than Barth had done, since he returned to reasoning by analogy.\textsuperscript{16} Gunton views Barth as continuing Hegel’s emphasis on the immediacy of revelation, but rejecting the conflation of divine and human. He then suggests that Pannenberg rejects Barth’s “subjectivism” and that “Pannenberg’s programme is an attempt to escape [this] … through his concept of indirect revelation”.\textsuperscript{17} Whether we should entirely accept Gunton’s portrayal of Pannenberg’s program is a question for later in this chapter. It is, however, reasonable to share Gunton’s conclusion that Pannenberg’s thought developed in a context in which revelation was the key theological question. The stark difference which Pannenberg notes between himself and Barth should not obscure their commonalities. Echoing Barth, Pannenberg insists that the majesty of God demands that “God can only be known if he gives himself to be known”.\textsuperscript{18} For Pannenberg, as for Barth, theology has a “constitutive correlation with revelation” and is founded on revelation, which has a christological focus.\textsuperscript{19}

This brief review of the development of German thought and theology from the Enlightenment highlights the reason why Pannenberg’s theology is so concerned with the question of revelation. He writes in a setting in which claims to revelation have been disputed. Even those theologians who have returned to an emphasis on revelation fall short of what he considers a proper view of revelation. Pannenberg is concerned to establish the importance of the doctrine of revelation, put it on a proper footing, relate it to history, Christ and Scripture, and show how it can stand in the face of secularism. This chapter traces how Pannenberg presents a view of revelation which he considers meets these demands and shows that anticipation plays an important role in his position.

\textit{Pannenberg’s Doctrine of Revelation}

\textit{a) Revelation as self-revelation}

According to Pannenberg, German Idealism established the idea that revelation is “self-
revelation” in which God is both the subject (i.e. the Reveal er) and the content (i.e. the revelation). He explains that this conception came about in reaction to the demise of the older doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture and the collapse of natural theology under Kant’s critique. German Protestant thought offered two lines of reaction to this demise, both of which held that revelation does not offer information from God, but God himself. One line of reaction was the Idealism of Fichte, Hegel, and Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854). For them, revelation occurs in the entire process of history as God is revealed to himself through human consciousness and so is revealed to human consciousness.20 The discussion of Pannenberg’s view of theology in Chapter 1 showed why the Hegelian view is appealing to him. If God is the true Infinite, who transcends and includes all other reality, then revelation must encompass all history.

Bradshaw identifies the motivation for Pannenberg’s view of revelation as self-revelation in the totality of history as “the … reversal of the influence of the Kantian divide between the phenomenal and the noumenal” and its replacement by the thought that “the totality of history … is the ‘reflex’ of the self-revelatory activity of God”.21 He also identifies Hegel as the source of the idea.22 Bradshaw is correct about Pannenberg’s motive: he wishes to treat history as a whole as God’s self-revelation. In Revelation and History Pannenberg agrees with an aspect of Hegel but does not acknowledge him as the source, while in Systematic Theology he argues that his position is independent of Hegel. He holds that the introduction of eschatology and anticipation marks a decisive correction to Hegel.23 How these mark him out from Hegel will become clear in the following sections.

The alternative view of revelation is provided by Romanticism, which put the emphasis

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20 ST 1, 223 and “Introduction”, RaH, 3-5.
21 Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology, 15.
22 “Dogmatic Theses”, 16.
23 ST 1, 228. Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Volume 7. Fichte to Nietzsche (London: Burns and Oates; 1963), 195, shows that Hegel, in Science of Logic, argues that the final goal of logic is that the concept (Begriffs) should reach the absolute Idea (Idee) which is “the concept or category of self-consciousness, personality, self-thinking Thought which knows itself in its object and its object as itself … the category of Spirit … the concept of God in and for himself, knowing himself as the totality”. “The Significance of Christianity”, BQT 2, 175, argues that Hegel’s logical concepts must be viewed as “anticipatory”, never actually grasping the absolute: “every concept remains no more than an anticipatory concept” and that this allows for genuine contingency and freedom, including the freedom of God.
on the miraculous events “which cannot be explained in the stricter context of natural occurrence” and so point to “a higher power which is at work in the world”. Pannenberg focuses on Richard Rothe (1799–1867) as the most impressive example of this approach. Rothe’s theology combined Hegelian speculative Idealism with strong supernaturalism. The supernaturalism interests Pannenberg since it represents an alternative to the Hegelian view of revelation. Rothe asserts that divine revelation is self-revelation and that its content is always and only God, though in a secondary way it sheds light on the rest of reality. He finds this revelation not in the totality of events but in particular, historical and notable miracles. He argues that miracles are so much a part of revelation that it “consists of miracles”. Miracles are not, for Rothe, affirmations of revelation and so he has relatively little interest in their apologetic value. Rather they “render God Himself evident to man”. They “proclaim His all-powerful presence in the midst of the world”. Rothe’s attention fixes on the miracle of the coming of Christ and the accompanying virgin birth. He sees the coming of Christ as an act of power in which God has given “a new commencement of humanity” and so has revealed himself. Rothe finds an inner work of inspiration which comes with the manifestation of God in miracles and “redoubles” the effect of the manifestations and gives those who see them “greater receptivity”. His view is that “manifestations without inspiration would be mute and useless prodigies; inspiration without manifestations would be only a fantastic and deceptive light”.

Both Revelation as History and Systematic Theology have extensive discussion of Rothe indicating that Pannenberg considers his contribution highly significant. The appeal for

24 ST 1, 224.
25 See Hans Schwarz, Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 41-43, on Rothe.
26 Otto Pfleiderer, The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant: and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825, trans. John Frederick Smith (London: Sonnenschein, 1890), 148-49, describes Rothe’s thought as “a Christian system of philosophy to which the supernaturalism of the Bible, the theosophy of Schelling and Oetinger, and the theology of Schleiermacher have been made to contribute”.
27 Frédéric Lichtenberger, History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century, trans. and ed. William Hastie (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889), 514.
28 Lichtenberger, History of German Theology, 516.
29 Lichtenberger, History of German Theology, 520.
30 Lichtenberger, History of German Theology, 512.
31 Lichtenberger, History of German Theology, 515.
Pannenberg is that Rothe focuses on Christ and connects revelation closely to God’s redemptive action in Christ and that he appeals to miracles which are “outward events” which “can be explained only by the idea of God” and which allow the human mind to “arrive, with evidence, at the idea, the true idea, of God”. 32 That is, Rothe points toward the possibility of revelation not as private but public, that is as “open to anyone who has eyes to see” (to quote Thesis 3), even if he fails to reach this conception himself. 33

Pannenberg argues that neither of these approaches is sustainable. The Hegelian seems to imply “a pantheistic equation of the cosmic process with God”. 34 Pannenberg offers two more precise criticisms: that treating the totality of history as revelation makes it hard to conceive of a specific event, even the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as revelation; and that history and revelation continue beyond Jesus. Hegel’s response to this second criticism is that later history is but the comprehension of the revelation which came in Jesus. Pannenberg replies that history contains novel developments, not simply the unfolding of what is already present; there is, he insists, “a development in the facts themselves”. Pannenberg shares Kierkegaard’s protest that Hegel’s approach cannot hold that Christ is the absolute revelation. 35 Pannenberg also holds that Rothe’s position is untenable. He argues that if a manifestation requires further supplementing with inspiration then it is “not yet a true revelation”. 36 He finds that Rothe fails to hold consistently to the public nature of revelation.

Karl Barth continues Hegel’s emphasis on revelation as self-revelation, but for Barth revelation is not in the totality of history but in the one unique event of Christ. So to some extent Barth holds together Rothe’s emphasis on the uniqueness of revelation in Christ with a view of revelation in which the Revealer and revelation are identical. Barth applies his definition of revelation very strictly so that nothing else could be

32 ST 1, 225.
33 See “Introduction”, RaH, 12, for Pannenberg’s hostility to a Gnostic view of revelation. Bradshaw, Pannenberg, 33, explains that in Pannenberg’s view “the modern personalistic idea of the Word as a ‘Thou’ directly engaging the hearer is more like the Gnostic than Israelite understanding of revelation in history”.
34 ST 1, 223.
36 “Introduction”, RaH, 19 and ST 1, 226.
considered revelation apart from Christ; anything else is a witness to revelation. Pannenberg has an extended discussion arguing that this is not consistent with the biblical concept of revelation.\(^{37}\) He allows the definition of revelation as self-revelation to stand; his real objection is to the dialectic in Barth’s thought, in which Barth holds that the revelation of God in Christ is also a veiling.\(^{38}\) Pannenberg argues that if revelation is also a veiling then it is not divine self-revelation. He concludes that “only if the form of revelation reveals God and – rightly understood – does not veil him, only then is Barth’s thesis of the unity of revelation tenable”.\(^{39}\) Pannenberg’s estimation in *Revelation as History* is that Barth’s suggestion of a veiled revelation that is not accessible to historical investigation risks being a Gnostic conception. Bultmann’s view of revelation is equally problematic for Pannenberg on this count.\(^{40}\) In *Systematic Theology* Pannenberg comments that the connection he had made of Barth and Bultmann with Gnosticism was “one-sided”.\(^{41}\) However, he still resists a conception of revelation in which the Word of God can be considered apart from a historical demonstration of the truth of God.\(^{42}\)

In criticising Hegel, Rothe, and Barth, Pannenberg does not deny their conception of revelation as self-revelation. Pannenberg agrees that Christian theology has always held that “in every revelation God’s prime disclosure is of himself”.\(^{43}\) At points Pannenberg’s stress on the multiplicity and indirectness of revelation may seem to imply that he rejects the basic conception of revelation as self-revelation. In fact, he holds that “revelation in the strict sense” requires that the means and act of revelation must “not be seen distinct from [God’s] own essence”.\(^{44}\) This criterion sets the standard for revelation extremely high, since it must be able to be identified with the divine essence. The

\(^{37}\) “Introduction”, *RaH*, 8-13; cf. *ST* 1, 198-214

\(^{38}\) *CD*, I/1, 169. The reference in *RaH* to *CD* I/1, 369 is incorrect.


\(^{40}\) “Dogmatic Theses”, 149-52.

\(^{41}\) *ST* 1, 248, n. 154.

\(^{42}\) *ST* 1, 249-56.

\(^{43}\) “Introduction”, *RaH*, 4.

criticisms that Pannenberg has of Hegel, Rothe, and Barth indicate that he requires an idea of revelation which can assert that revelation is divine self-disclosure and in which the content and form of revelation are identified with God’s essence. It must hold, with Rothe and Barth, that the particular events of Jesus’ life are revelation, while agreeing with Hegel that it encompasses the whole of history. At the same time it must hold that history continues beyond Jesus’ death and resurrection (contra Hegel), is clear in itself without any resort to a supplementary explanation (contra Rothe) and is not a veiling of God (contra Barth). What view of revelation can meet these criteria? Pannenberg turns to the idea of a full eschatological revelation of God which is anticipated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

b) Revelation is eschatological

Pannenberg takes the view that divine self-revelation is eschatological. According to the second thesis in Revelation and History “revelation is not comprehended in the beginning, but at the end of revealing history”. In Systematic Theology Pannenberg defends his early theses against criticisms and offers some clarifications and modifications, which will be dealt with below in the discussion of the place of words in revelation. The emphasis on eschatological revelation as the full form of revelation has not changed. He explains that his aim in the “Dogmatic Theses” was to return to the view of revelation found in Idealism, that all history is divine revelation, but also to correct this by stressing “the anticipation of the totality of history … in the teaching and work of Jesus”. He remains committed to the claim that revelation comes fully only with the eschaton.

Pannenberg’s argument that revelation is eschatological comes largely from the ‘apocalyptic’ strand of Old Testament literature, in which revelation is “the self-demonstration of the deity of the God of Israel to all peoples”. He appeals to passages such as Isaiah 40:5 which express an expectation of universal eschatological revelation: “the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together” (see also

45 “Dogmatic Theses”, 131.
46 ST 1, 229.
Hab. 2:14; Isa. 11:9; 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10, 21-23; Rev. 21:22-25; 22:5). He describes this expectation as the ‘apocalyptic’ view of revelation by which Israel in exile found an answer to rival claims for deity and questions about truth.47

Pannenberg is aware that there is much material in the Bible which does not fit well into the definition of revelation as self-revelation. He argues that the more representative idea of revelation in the Old Testament is the disclosure of information from God, though the New Testament more consistently presents an apocalyptic view of “a present disclosure and then a future universal disclosure” of God himself.48 The apocalyptic view of revelation provides the framework in which the New Testament understands Jesus, and so it becomes the controlling concept of revelation. In the apocalyptic view the more general Old Testament conception is made a “subordinate motif” and is understood as a provisional experience of God’s future self-demonstration.49 Pannenberg argues that the development of the view of revelation in the apocalyptic literature and the New Testament provides the precedent for his emphasis.50

Eschatological revelation meets the conditions which Pannenberg sets: that revelation be public, that it require no supplementary word of interpretation, that the form and act of revelation be identified with God’s essence, and that it be found in the whole of history. The biblical presentation of the eschaton is that the glory of God will be seen by all, that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14), and that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). It will not be open to dispute and will need no further interpretation. As a revelation of divine glory it will be a presentation of God’s essence. The relation between glory and God’s essence becomes clearer when Pannenberg argues that the eschaton is the entry of the eternity of God into history and so is the act of God in his essence.51 Further, Pannenberg’s understanding of eternity is the “simultaneous presence of life as a whole”, and so is

47 ST 1, 193-95.
48 ST 1, 199-212.
49 ST 1, 213.
50 See Grenz, Reason, 32.
51 ST 3, 603.
true the presence of history as a whole. What remains to be demonstrated is how this eschatological revelation is anticipated in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

The reasons that revelation as the eschatological self-demonstration of God is such an important concept for Pannenberg are found in the goals of his project which were dealt with in the previous chapter. For him, the truth of God is the key hypothesis of theology and this can only be demonstrated when God is shown to be the true God of all creation. Such a demonstration must relate to the human experience of the world and to the intimations of the unity of all reality expressed in the religions and in the historical conflict of religions. In the Old Testament the appeal to eschatological revelation is made in the context of such conflict, in which Israel must state that the God of Israel is the one true God. So, in his account of the revelation of God in history, Pannenberg can appeal to a notion of revelation which performs, in biblical history, the function he requires of it. His systematic theology, with its task of seeking to establish truth claims, has been provided with a concept of revelation drawn from Scripture, with which it can proceed.

Graham Watts suggests that in “Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation the central axiom is a holding together of historical events and their interpretations within given historical contexts” within a commitment to revelation as universal history. Watts does not include eschatological revelation in his summary of Pannenberg’s view when, in fact, it is this that grounds the features Watts does mention. For Pannenberg, all history is revelation only because in the eschaton will it be clear that all historical events demonstrate “the Lordship of God”. This eschatological element is the “decisive correction” which Pannenberg makes to the idealistic view of revelation. The context in which events have meaning is the whole of history, a context which can only be asserted in anticipation of the eschaton. Watts refers to the place of eschatology in Pannenberg’s view of revelation, but does not express the pivotal position it takes.

54 ST 1, 229.
Present revelation is indirect and provisional

Pannenberg designates the eschatological self-demonstration of God to be revelation in the full sense. This implies that other events which may be called revelation are so in an indirect and provisional way.\(^{56}\) They anticipate the eschatological revelation and will be taken up into unity with God in the eschaton and so will have their place in the eschatological totality.\(^{57}\) Other forms of revelation are indirect because they are not immediate revelations of deity, but already assume the reality of God and are a revelation from God about something else (that is, humanity and the world). This is expressed in the first Dogmatic Thesis: “the self-revelation of God in the biblical witnesses is not of a direct type in the sense of a theophany, but is indirect and brought about by means of the historical acts of God”.\(^{58}\) Pannenberg argues that even the forms of revelation which involve the apparent immediacy of God, presuppose knowledge of God and are “only a provisional self-disclosure of God”.\(^{59}\)

In Pannenberg’s thought, the distinction between provisional, indirect revelation and eschatological revelation has explanatory power. It allows for the reality that there are various forms of present revelation that are not yet obviously identical.\(^{60}\) It also explains why present revelation and the reality of God remain contestable. If Christianity were to claim to have a present form of revelation which indisputably closes off any questioning of the existence of God, it would have to be considered to be falsified, for it is plainly the case that the existence of God is questioned. Christian claims are strengthened when they allow for the contestability of God’s existence and promise a future answer to the contest; both features show that the claims have a “capacity for truth”.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{56}\) See “The Crisis in the Scripture Principle” in BQT 1, 3-6 and ST 1, 218-19 and Avery Dulles, “Pannenberg on Revelation and Faith” TWP, 171-76.

\(^{57}\) ST 1, 229.

\(^{58}\) “Dogmatic Theses”, 125.

\(^{59}\) ST 1, 206-207, and see “Introduction”, RaH, 8-16 and ST 1, 203-206.

\(^{60}\) ST 1, 243-44.

\(^{61}\) See ST 1, 214 for comments on “the debatability of the reality of God”.

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d) Revelation and history

For Pannenberg revelation must occur in history. He contrasts history as the locus of revelation with ‘myth’, which understands reality from a primordial time. In mythic worldviews the primordial era establishes all that is, and there is no prospect of new developments in history: “the present and the future are one-sidedly dominated by what was done in primal time”. This way of thinking conceives of the Infinite as actually finite because the gods are limited by the primal era and are controlled by the associated religious cult. Pannenberg argues that the historical event of election led to a different view in Israel, a view in which “the God of Israel is the one who acts historically in the events of contemporary experience” in national and international events. In the exile, the view of God as active in history developed into an eschatological view that the God of Israel would act decisively at the end of history. Pannenberg states that “normative significance could finally be ascribed to the future rule of God”\(^{62}\). Thus the biblical worldview, in contrast to the mythical view, affirms the openness of the future and the infinity of God.

Pannenberg’s conception of history does not divorce human history from cosmic history. For Pannenberg human history happens within cosmic and biological processes, and all find their fulfilment in the eschaton. This is evident in Pannenberg’s discussion of the unity and distinction of the act of creation and the eschaton, in which the eschaton brings the fulfilment to which all of creation is open from its origin. Humanity has a special role in this, but human freedom arises from a biological process, and humanity brings all creation to its goal.\(^{63}\) Chapter 1 noted the correspondence Pannenberg finds between the natural sciences and the human sciences. For him, both are part of the one total reality and can be understood in analogous ways since both find their end in the eschaton.

Pannenberg is concerned with universal history and with the particular history of Israel and that of Jesus. The universal and the particular are connected by the claim that in

\(^{62}\) ST 1, 185-86.

\(^{63}\) See ST 2, 115-46 for Pannenberg’s discussion of the place of humanity in the sequence of forms and the connections between creation and eschatology.
Israel, and more fully in the resurrection of Jesus, there is an anticipatory revelation of the totality of history, which will be apparent at the end of history. A further connection between the particulars of biblical history and universal history lies in the history of the conflict of religions, a topic to which Pannenberg pays considerable attention in *Systematic Theology*. His discussion begins with anthropology. He argues that religion and religious awareness are “a constitutive part of human nature”, as is shown by its universal occurrence. Religious awareness is, asserts Pannenberg, a necessary condition for the truth of religious claims about divine reality, especially monotheistic claims, since “if the one God is to be the Creator of the human race, then as self-conscious beings we must have some awareness, however inadequate, of this origin of ours”. This is a theme in Pannenberg’s thought which he holds in common with the Romanticism of Schleiermacher. However, in contrast to Schleiermacher, he raises the question of how religious experiences can confirm the truth of any particular religious claims. Such claims cannot be confirmed on the basis of subjective interpretations of religious experiences. How then can they be tested?

The gods of the religions must show in our experience of the world that they are the powers they claim to be. They must confirm themselves by the implications of meaning in this experience so that its content can be understood as an expression of the power of God and not his weakness.

This principle implies that religions are, in the first place, tested by their own adherents, and if the deity cannot confirm the claims made for it eventually worshippers will change their beliefs. This process often takes place “under the competitive pressure of the truth claims of other deities”. When religions become historical, rather than mythical (and Pannenberg sees this as almost inevitable with the development of historical awareness), the confirmation of the religion shifts to the question of eschatology: “there … arises the question of a future definitive self-demonstration of the deity of God”. As noted above, the eschatology of Israel’s exilic prophets and biblical apocalyptic literature answers this question. This shift to eschatology then sets the stage for the

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64 ST 1, 155. The discussion which leads to this conclusion runs from p.136.
65 ST 1, 157.
66 ST 1, 167, agrees with Hegel that Schleiermacher’s approach did not consider how religious perceptions give rise to statements which can and should be tested for their truth by asking “whether they properly fulfil their function of bringing to light the infinite in the finite”.
67 ST 1, 167.
68 ST 1, 169.
anticipatory revelation of the eschaton in the resurrection of Jesus, and the final, definitive revelation of God in the eschaton. So Pannenberg argues that the very nature of religion itself leads to an expectation of a final revelation, an expectation to which Jesus’ resurrection answers in anticipation.

The public nature of history, on which Pannenberg insists, provides the opportunity for the rational investigation into claims for revelation. As long as the claims are for a provisional revelation, the results of the investigation are provisional. However, there is the opportunity for a genuine investigation which could falsify claims for revelation. Pannenberg’s appeal to history would be empty apart from history finding a unity in the eschaton. All claims about revelation in history are made in anticipation of its fulfilment. Once again eschatology and anticipation of the eschaton are prominent in Pannenberg’s thought.

e) Christological focus

Pannenberg’s view of revelation is christological. This may seem at odds with his stress on all reality and universal history as the field of revelation. Pannenberg, however, integrates a view of revelation in universal history and a christological focus. He asserts that in Christ there is a unique anticipatory revelation of God. The survey in this chapter has already shown some of the reasons for Pannenberg’s christological focus. The following discussion demonstrates these reasons more fully.

Pannenberg’s criticisms of Jüngel helps to clarify the terminology and the issues that Pannenberg perceives are at stake in asserting that Jesus Christ is God’s self-revelation. Jüngel argues that ‘revelation’, ‘the Word of God’ and ‘self-revelation’ are equivalent and are immediately christological: “for responsible Christian usage of the word ‘God’,

\[69\] Bradshaw, *Trinity and Ontology*, 290, comments that although Pannenberg holds that every aspect of reality is related to God’s reality and so “shot through with God”, he also holds that “noetically the only access to this fact is via Jesus’ life”. This confirms the following analysis of Pannenberg’s Christological focus in revelation. \[ST 1, 257,\] concludes the chapter on revelation, claiming that all theology is “to be seen and developed as an explication of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”; see also Watts, *Revelation and the Spirit*, 84-88.

\[70\] See Bradshaw, *Trinity and Ontology*, 152-56 on the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus in Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation.
the Crucified One is virtually the real definition of what is meant with the word ‘God’. These equivalences are not so obvious to Pannenberg. He raises several objections to a “simple and naive understanding of God’s self-revelation as the Word of God”. He questions whether word is an obvious term if communication is not to be understood anthropomorphically as a verbal utterance. He also claims that the idea of “a powerful Word of God” originates in mythological and magical views, which are not favoured in modern thought. He views appeals to the Word of God, both in classic Protestant theology and in the Barthian stream, as unacceptably authoritarian. We have already noted that he finds a wide variety of ‘forms’ in biblical revelation, only some of which are verbal, and that he finds biblical revelation to be indirect rather than direct. He insists that the relationship between revelation and Christ must be developed with far greater “precision”. The precise account of revelation for which Pannenberg aims relies on his christology, building on his conclusions in Jesus: God and Man and anticipating the conclusions of Chapter 10 of Systematic Theology. The following discussion will refer to some of Pannenberg’s christological claims; later chapters will consider his christology in fuller detail.

In the first instance, Pannenberg holds that there is a revelation of God in Christ, not because Christ is the Word of God but because there is an anticipatory revelation of God in the history of Jesus’ person and work. He holds that with Jesus there is more than a disclosure of the future such as is found in prophetic and visionary revelation, for in him the kingdom is present as “a power that shapes the future” so that it “is already an event ... without ceasing to be future”. He explains this further in the discussion of christology, where he shows that in Jesus’ ministry “believers … participate already in eschatological salvation”. This anticipatory revelation is indirect. Pannenberg argues that Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom had ambivalent and controversial implications for his own identity which led to his crucifixion. Only in the resurrection are Jesus’

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71 Eberhard Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 13.
72 ST 1, 255-56.
73 ST 1, 247.
74 ST 1, 331 and see the whole discussion, (329-34).
75 ST 1, 326, 334. Pannenberg considers Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom as “indirect” and “preliminary” revelation, as he portrays all biblical revelation, ST 1, 244ff.
claims clarified.\textsuperscript{76} For Pannenberg the resurrection is not merely a revelation of what was always true of Jesus: “the Easter event determines what the meaning was of the pre-Easter history of Jesus and who he was in his relation to God”.\textsuperscript{77} He argues that the pre-Easter ministry and identity of Jesus share, in anticipation, what Jesus became in the resurrection.\textsuperscript{78} The pattern of anticipation is repeated when he argues that the resurrection has significance as it anticipates the eschaton. Jesus’ resurrection is an anticipatory revelation of God’s eschatological kingdom, the full revelation of God’s own essence. Pannenberg concludes that “if Jesus ... is ascended to God and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus”.\textsuperscript{79} Pannenberg’s claim that revelation has a christological focus depends on the anticipatory relation between Jesus’ ministry, the resurrection and the eschaton.

The realism of eschatological expectation of the future is the basis of the primitive Christian understanding of revelation as it was also the presupposition of Jesus’ proclamation of the coming of God’s kingdom and the frame of reference for the apostolic message about Christ.\textsuperscript{80}

Pannenberg notes that the New Testament texts often appealed to as the basis of the claim that revelation comes in Christ do not deal with revelation in the sense of a divine self-revelation. Rather, passages such as John 1:1-4, Heb. 1:1-2, 1 Tim. 3:16 and Rom. 3:21; 16:25-26 speak of the revelation of salvation.\textsuperscript{81} Pannenberg stresses the connection between salvation and the manifestation of God's glory (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:7-9). As salvation dawns in Christ so too does the revelation of the deity of God, and that salvation will ultimately involve the full revelation of God’s glory. With this argument, Pannenberg shows that a position such as that of Jüngel can be justified and that New Testament revelation schema allow “an express statement about God’s eschatological self-revelation in Jesus Christ”.\textsuperscript{82} Pannenberg’s position develops to the point where he does

\textsuperscript{76} ST 2, 342-43, “the Easter event means directly that God himself justified the condemned and executed Jesus ... by the Spirit”.
\textsuperscript{77} ST 2, 345.
\textsuperscript{78} Chapter 4 examines this claim in far more detail. See Boutwell, “Eschatology of Wolfhart Pannenberg”, 25-26, for a concise summary of the place of eschatology and anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought.
\textsuperscript{79} JGM, 66.
\textsuperscript{80} ST 1, 248.
\textsuperscript{81} ST 1, 212-13.
\textsuperscript{82} ST 1, 212-14, 246-47 quote from p. 247. Pannenberg also allows that “materially this thought is present already in what John says about the incarnation”.

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agree substantially with Jüngel that Christ is the revelation of God, however, he insists that this position must be developed, it cannot be asserted as if it were simply apparent, and such a view can only be developed on the basis that present revelation is an anticipation of eschatological revelation.

f) Revelation and word

This section considers the place of God’s word in Pannenberg’s view of revelation. This topic requires exploration for two reasons. It clarifies Pannenberg’s view of revelation in relation to other views held in German Protestantism. Also, his view has implications for his use of Scripture in theology and this is relevant in later discussions of anticipation. Pannenberg deals with three ways of viewing ‘God’s word’ as revelation: the term can refer to the eternal Logos who reveals God, to the preaching of the apostles, and to the words of Scripture. This section will deal with the first two, while the following section will consider Pannenberg’s account of Scripture.

In the “Dogmatic Theses” Pannenberg resists the total identification of revelation and word which was common in German theology: “the word of the kerygma is not its own revelatory event in any isolated fashion, but is an aspect of the event of revelation in that it reports the eschatological event”. This thesis was directed against conceptions which ascribe revelatory significance to the formal character of kerygma as “challenge or call”, independent of the content of that preaching. In Systematic Theology Pannenberg clarifies this view. He objects to a simple equation of preaching with revelation since this lacks an exegetical basis (in this he is critical of Barth and Jüngel). He argues that Revelation and History is not ‘theological Hegelianism’, but a response to Rothe’s view that revelation must have both manifestation and inspiration, which supplies the interpretation of the events. According to Pannenberg, in Rothe’s view “revelation by word ... determines the character of the historical acts as revelation” and this “results in a loss of both an objective starting point for the concept and also of its inner

83 “Dogmatic Theses”, 155.
84 ST 1, 224ff and 249, referring to R. Rothe, Offenbarung, 1, TSK 31 (1858) 3-49. See Grenz, Reason, 34-35, for a discussion of Pannenberg’s assessment of Rothe.
coherence". Pannenberg, by contrast, treats revelation as history and argues that within this framework the place of revelation as word can be properly considered. He asserts that where revelation is present proleptically and is debatable, words are essential. Taking another perspective, he also argues that the apostolic testimony does not supplement an event which is “dumb”, but “simply spreads abroad the radiance that shines from Christ’s own glory”. The resurrection is consummated by the Spirit, and so the message of the resurrection “is Spirit-filled in virtue of its content and can impart the Spirit”. He insists that the truth of the word and its function as revelation always rest on the truth of its content. So he argues that the apostolic kerygma is essential because of the provisional nature of revelation and that its character is entirely dependent on historical revelation. He recognises that this preaching has a subjective element and a call for response, but holds that it is revelation not because of its form, but because of its content. Thus, Pannenberg ascribes to the apostolic gospel the task of giving the knowledge which is the basis of faith.

In articulating the role of words in his account of revelation, Pannenberg accepts Ebeling’s claim that words have an ability to “make what is hidden present ... especially what is past and future”. Ebeling’s claim, in the first instance, is about all words, though he and Pannenberg both make the claim on a theological basis and apply it particularly to words of divine revelation. That is, language brings “an anticipation of the totality of truth”, something that only language can do. Pannenberg adds that talk about God has the totality of the world as a theme alongside God’s existence. So Pannenberg moves from a discussion of words to consider the apostolic kerygma as the

85 ST 1, 250.
86 ST 1, 250, n.158, claims that this is not a different view from that of RaH, but that there it was dealt with “too cursorily” which allowed misunderstanding, and it needs a “stronger profile”.
87 ST 1, 249-50.
88 “Dogmatic Theses”, 153-55.
89 ST 1, 251-52 including n.163. “Dogmatic Theses”, 154-55, discussing Thesis 7, says, “the kerygma is not by itself a revelatory speech by virtue of its formal characteristic, that is, as a challenge or call. The kerygma is to be understood solely on the basis of its content”, contra Bultmann for whom the Word of God is “address without legitimation”.
90 ST 1, 252 quoting Ebeling, Gott und Wort (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1966); 50-58.
“Word of God”, which “makes the past and the future present” by relating them to “the totality of human life and the world”. He concludes as follows.

We can thus see why mediation by word and speech was an essential element in the anticipation of future of God in the coming of Jesus, and why the revelatory meaning of his person and work needed the Word as the medium of its articulation.  

From this line of thought Pannenberg appeals to the Logos concept. He draws the Logos tradition and the kerygma tradition together to conclude: “the world order that is manifest in Jesus Christ is thus a historical order, the order of the divine plan for redemption of the world which is revealed in him”. For Pannenberg, the event of revelation is itself the content of the “comprehensive idea of Word of God”. This alone, “can be called the Word of God in the full sense”. He concludes that

Jesus Christ, then, is the Word of God as the quintessence of the divine plan for creation and history and of its end time but already proleptic revelation. We may thus speak of the self-revelation of God by this Word ... so long as the Word is the same as the deity of God.

Although the accounts of revelation in Revelation and History and Systematic Theology have much in common, the positive inclusion of ‘word’ in the theology of revelation is a significant modification. It means that not only does Pannenberg’s view of history have a christological centre but this centre, and the understanding of all history which it offers, are only accessible through the apostolic kerygma.

g) Revelation and Scripture

Pannenberg holds that the Reformation Scripture principle is untenable after the rise of Enlightenment historical criticism, since it is clear that the various perspectives of the

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92 ST 1, 253-54. The gospel report “makes the history of Jesus Christ a present event to those who hear it, since it has as its content the manifestation of future of God”.
93 ST 1, 255. Pannenberg argues that in the Bible God’s Word is “subject to divine freedom” and is related to historical salvation, not prehistorical order (which would be mythical). God’s Word in the Bible is also wisdom which “views the order of the world ... in terms of the regularity of occurrence”. Wisdom and history converge in the Bible “so that in place of the mythical word which is the basis of the world we now have the thought of the revelation of the divine plan for history, the divine ‘mystery’” (254-55).
94 ST 1, 257.
New Testament cannot offer “contradictionless doctrinal unity”. A doctrine of Scripture must now be a goal, not a foundation. He proposes an approach to Scripture that aims “to discover this unity of Scripture in the Christ-event attested by its different witnesses”. He hopes to achieve this in a historical study in which the Christ-event, as it “bears its own meaning in itself”, is examined and becomes the standard by which New Testament witnesses are judged. He expects that this study will show that the New Testament witnesses are held together by “the unfolding unity of the inherent meaning of the Christ-event”. His claim is that the Bible’s narratives have a realism which is best honoured by a critical historical examination, rather than treating them as “simply as literature in which the facticity of what is recorded is a subsidiary matter.”

Pannenberg looks to the gospel as that which unites the New Testament witness. It is this, he says, which “unfolds” and “brings home” the significance of the Spirit-filled eschatological revelation in Christ and “lays hold of hearers” so that “Jesus Christ himself ... speaks and acts through the word of the gospel.” The gospel is the source of the church and “represents the authority of Jesus Christ”. This is the basis of the authority of the Bible: “insofar as they bear witness to this content [the gospel] … the words ... of Scripture have authority in the church”. The gospel is present in the statements of Scripture, but the two are not identical and they can be differentiated

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95 “What is a Dogmatic Statement?”, *BQT* 1, 193.
96 *JGM*, 67-73; cf. the comment in *ST* 1, 224, “The unity of the content of Scripture (res scripturae) which, for Luther, was intimately related to the clarity of Scripture, is hardly visible any longer among the differentiation of the witnesses”; Pannenberg’s acceptance of the Enlightenment account of rationality, though qualified, means that in his view critical assessments of the Bible will largely be accepted. *ST* 3, 146-47 states, “the Enlightenment replaced the need to rely on the authority of traditions for knowledge of the past with the new historical scholarship and its principle of critical reconstruction” with the result that “if... Christian theology clings to the authoritative form of establishing its teaching ... then in a way that was not true in earlier centuries it comes into basic conflict with reason”. See also “The Crisis in the Scripture Principle”, 1-14.
97 *ST* 2, 463-64. Wolfhart Pannenberg “On the Inspiration of Scripture”, *IT* 54 no. 2 (1997): 215 gives a more recent statement, “The sequence of argument has to proceed ... starting from the apostolic gospel ... [so] the doctrine of scriptural inspiration does not yield a formal guarantee of the truth of each and every single biblical sentence before one has concerned oneself with any of the contents of Scripture”.
98 “What is a Dogmatic Statement?”*, BQT* 1, 195-97.
99 *ST* 1, 231.
100 Pannenberg develops his doctrine of revelation in *ST* 1 without assuming biblical authority and that volume does not establish a positive doctrine of Scripture. He returns to the question of Scripture in *ST* 2. For comments about the position of the doctrine of Scripture in between soteriology and ecclesiology see “Inspiration”, 214; cf. “The Crisis in the Scripture Principle”, 11.
101 *ST* 2, 459.
sufficiently that “scriptural statements” may be measured “by the content of the
gospel”.\textsuperscript{102}

Pannenberg makes material revelation the ground on which to establish any formal
claim to revelation, and the criterion by which to judge claims to revelation.
Pannenberg’s view means that “the authority of the Bible ... does not guarantee ... the
truth of individual statements in biblical books” and the inspiration of Scripture is a
conviction arrived at on the basis of its witness to Christ. He claims that this leaves room
for “individual judgement regarding the content and truth of the scriptural witness” and
the “free recognition of the truth” in which the reconciliation of God with the world
reaches its goal.\textsuperscript{103} A further implication is that the question of the canon is a subordinate
one, in which each writing is tested for its witness to Christ.\textsuperscript{104}

In a lecture given in 1965, Pannenberg was already able to outline this view of Scripture
and the implications for hermeneutics. He argues particularly against Bultmann that
“every dualism between theological and historical hermeneutic is excluded”, because
revelation lies in the historical events and the New Testament texts must be examined as
“sources” for the history of Jesus, even when they are considered for the light they cast
on human existence.\textsuperscript{105} Pannenberg argues that the possibility of a distinct theological
hermeneutic arises only “if the New Testament writings were understood as
authoritative guides to the interpretation of the historical Jesus” and provided “a
supplementary interpretive principle, alien to the history of Jesus, which claimed to be
binding upon its interpretation”. Rather, he suggests “these texts allow themselves to be
questioned and, if occasion arises, judged critically insofar as the interpretation they
offer falls short of or in some other way deviates from the anticipation of meaning that

\textsuperscript{102} ST 2, 464.
\textsuperscript{103} ST 2, 463. TPS, 379, sets biblical studies the task of “historical procedure … set within a theologically
oriented history of religions which would be theology of religions”. In this setting “the phenomena of the
history of Judaeo-Christian religion themselves and their own context in that history [of religions] …
requires them to be interpreted as the self-manifestation of the divine power over everything”. In this
process the questions arise of "whether and how far the religious conceptions documented in these texts
were adequate to the experience of the reality of their period, how far therefore they were able to describe
the divine activity they claimed to have taken place as a manifestation of the all-determining reality”.
\textsuperscript{104} TPS, 375, treats questions of canon as truly secondary and views historical theology and biblical
exegesis as part of the same discipline; ST 2 places greater stress on the significance of canon.
\textsuperscript{105} “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic”, BQT 1, 151.
the history of Jesus allows to be advanced for itself”. Pannenberg’s explicit understanding of the relation of the New Testament to theology has not changed from this position, though, as we have seen, he has come to give a fuller account of the place of words in God’s provisional revelation.

A Theology of Revelation

Having reviewed Pannenberg’s approach to revelation we can see that his whole project is based on eschatological revelation: it is oriented around the action of God to reveal himself to his creatures as the true Infinite. This theology of revelation provides the architectonics of his thought. Grenz describes the chapter on revelation in Systematic Theology 1 as “pivotal to the whole”, claiming that “the doctrinal delineation that follows is but the unfolding of what lies undeveloped in revelation”.

The place and nature of revelation in Pannenberg’s thought is confirmed when he deals with his doctrine of God. He will not allow any speculative approach to knowledge of God, but stresses the revelational basis. He does not follow classical Protestant dogmatics and develop a doctrine of God directly from the positive statements of Scripture. Rather he works from the material revelation of God in Christ: “a systematic grounding and development of the doctrine of the Trinity must begin with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ”. This approach is evidence that anticipation is key to Pannenberg’s thought. On his view, theology can only speak of God with any confidence if it has valid access to revelation, yet revelation in its full sense is not yet present. For theology to have any validity, it must show that the anticipatory revelation with which it deals is adequate for the claims it makes.

106 “Historical and Theological Hermeneutic”, 155.
107 This is recognised in various ways by commentators on Pannenberg. Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology, 137, claims that “Pannenberg wishes to uphold Barth’s revelational insight, but to unite revelation with history and faith with general reason and cognition”; D. G. Dawe, Review of Metaphysics and the Idea of God, Int XLVI no. 2 (April 1992): 210, similarly states that “Pannenberg … is committed to a theology of revelation”; Christiaan Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity: Pannenberg’s Doctrine of God”, Pacifica 10 (February 1997), 71-72, explains that the idea of revelation retains its foundational place … but Pannenberg saw a need to take this doctrine in a new direction”.
109 ST 1, 300. For Pannenberg’s approach to the doctrine of God see ST 1, 300ff.
**Developing Pannenberg’s view of Scripture**

At the end of the discussion of the doctrine of reconciliation, Pannenberg presents a doctrine of Scripture which affirms its inspiration and authority, but offers little adumbration. His brief comments do not provide a clear theological foundation for biblical interpretation. A consideration of two aspects of Pannenberg’s approach to Scripture shows the effect of his thin doctrine of Scripture on his interpretive practice. As noted above, in Pannenberg’s description, the primary locus of revelation lies ‘behind’ the biblical text in the events to which the text witnesses. Consistent with this view, his theological method rests on historical investigation of the events. The other aspect of Pannenberg’s approach to Scripture is that he seeks to examine the texts themselves; he writes that “the accounts themselves must also figure in any presentation of the history of Israel and primitive Christianity”.\(^{110}\) His work makes extensive reference to the biblical writings. Grenz notes that Pannenberg has been criticised for “minimizing the Bible as divine revelation”. Grenz defends him arguing that Pannenberg emphasises the importance of showing the historical truth of biblical texts and that he “includes lengthy and illuminating discussions of biblical materials throughout the dogmatics”.\(^{111}\) Despite Grenz’s defences, later chapters of this thesis argue that Pannenberg does not pay sufficient attention to the texts themselves, their literary features and thought forms. One reason for this is that his theological account of Scripture is thin and lacks a positive account of the literary features of the Biblical text, or any of its features beyond its witness to the events of revelation. Pannenberg does not provide a theology of Scripture which is sufficient to accommodate the “literary turn” in biblical studies and so his practice fails to include fully this approach.\(^{112}\)

Grenz and Gutenson suggest that Pannenberg’s position can provide the basis for a more robust doctrine of Scripture than he articulates. Grenz observes that Pannenberg offers a doctrine of redemption which is pneumatological and includes an ecclesiology grounded

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110 ST 1, 231-32, n.104, indicates Pannenberg’s rejection of a “mere history of political and economic facts”.


in apostolic preaching. He suggests that, since the apostolic preaching is recorded in Scripture, Pannenberg’s doctrine of redemption “raises again the question of biblical inspiration” and that “Pannenberg may be providing … a new foundation for such a doctrine”. 113

A more comprehensive doctrine of Scripture could be developed in a way consistent with Pannenberg’s theological method, on the basis of Jesus’ view of the Tanakh. That is, Pannenberg seeks to ground his theology in the historical revelation found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the Tanakh plays an indispensible role in this history. Jesus’ life and his relation to God are formed in the context of listening to and meditating on Tanakh. Jesus shared the common view of first century Judaism that the Tanakh was divinely inspired and the instrument through which the covenant of God worked. He himself appealed to, and lived by, the Tanakh. Ben Meyer shows that Jesus’ awareness of his mission includes “the conviction that in this last, climactic mission to Israel, and therefore in the bearer of this last, climactic mission, the Scriptures … had, of divine or prophetic necessity, to come to fulfilment”. 114 Jesus also gave his disciples a practice of reading Tanakh which paid close attention to its wording and accepted its teaching as authoritative. In doing so he gave Christianity a scripture principle and directed Christian theology to allow the texts of the Tanakh to shape an understanding of God. From this historical basis a fuller doctrine of Scripture could be developed which would support a practice of reading Scripture with greater attention to the texts and their literary features.

Pannenberg is wary of a claim of authority for Scripture which is separate from the

113 Grenz, Reason, 182; cf. comments on pp. 47-49. Gutenson, Reconsidering the Doctrine of God, 47-50, comments that a a fuller doctrine of Scripture could be developed on the basis of a “possible argument that might be presented in a manner consistent with Pannenberg’s broader set of concerns, one that Pannenberg should find acceptable”.

114 Ben F. Meyer, “Appointed Deed, Appointed Doer: Jesus and the Scriptures”, in Authenticating the Activities of Jesus, eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Boston: Brill, 2002), 170. See also Marcus J. Borg, Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus rev. ed. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press; 1998), 85, 721; N. T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (London: SPCK, 1992), 216-43, shows that the scriptures were the central symbol in the worldview of second temple Judaism and the “anchor” for the worldview, identifying the other symbols, describing the praxis, and telling the stories which together made up the worldview; N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (London: SPCK, 1996), 198-442 shows how Jesus understood himself and his ministry from within that worldview and constantly interacted with Tanakh.
truthfulness of its content. There is, however, no need to assert the authority of Scripture independent of its content and the truthfulness of that content. Scripture conveys the provisional revelation in the history of Israel and in Christ, and as they share in the anticipation of truth, so they share anticipatorily in the freeing authority of God’s final revelation. This claim does not bar historical-critical investigation of Scripture, nor does it rule out the questioning of elements of Scripture.\footnote{115} It does not attempt to foreclose investigation of “the difference between the biblical texts and the events to which they point”, which Pannenberg identifies as “the central problem of historical study”.\footnote{116} It would, on the other hand, direct theology more immediately toward Scripture as the foundational source of theology. Such a proposal is directly relevant to this thesis. At several points, it will be argued that Pannenberg’s position fails to pay sufficient attention to the way in which biblical texts present their accounts.

**Conclusion**

Although Pannenberg is concerned to make theology universal, he stands self-consciously in the post-Enlightenment position in which claims to authority are inadmissible, and historical awareness renders absolute claims untenable. This raises the question of how Christian theology can make anything like its traditional claims to the universal and absolute truth of a particular revelation. Pannenberg’s answer builds on the motif of anticipation. He draws attention to the fact that divine self-revelation is eschatological, so that present revelation, and reflection on it, can only claim to be proleptic of the eschaton. As such they can be expected to be multiform and open to contention. That is, revelation is provisional. The positive claim in Pannenberg’s position is that revelation is anticipatory. That is, present revelation genuinely, if only partially, grasps God’s future and is truly characterised as ‘revelation’.\footnote{117}

\footnote{115} Gutenson, *Reconsidering the Doctrine of God*, 49, comments at the conclusion of his presentation of an alternative view of Scripture developed from Pannenberg’s thought, “we need not argue that one can set aside the hypothetical nature of theology or the need to inquire systematically into the truth of the doctrinal claims of the Christian faith”. He also summarises Pannenberg’s questioning of Scripture and doctrine (22).

\footnote{116} “Hermeneutic and Universal History”, *BQT* 1, 96.

\footnote{117} S. Lösel, “Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Response to the Challenge of Religious Pluralism: The Anticipation of Divine Absoluteness?”, *JES* 34:4 (Fall 1997): 508-509, shows that Pannenberg uses the notion of ‘anticipation’ to mediate between his view of “the open-ended character of divine self-revelation in the
David Scaer fails to appreciate this point when he suggests that Pannenberg makes absolute claims about Christ based on “the probabilities of historical investigation” so that “there seems to be an inherent self-contradiction in his entire system of thought”. Pannenberg is only too aware of this tension, and mediates it via anticipation. This cannot be dismissed as self-contradictory until his whole notion of anticipation has been considered. Similarly, Molnar criticises Pannenberg for failing to appeal “directly to God acting ad extra in his Word and Spirit” and for holding instead “that meaning should be seen ‘in the light of the temporality of reality and experience of reality, as an anticipation of the totality of truth which will be complete only in the future’ ”. Molnar seems not to grasp the importance of Pannenberg’s acknowledgement of the plurality and provisional status of present knowledge which means that a direct appeal to God’s action in Word and Spirit is not open. Nor does he seem to appreciate the controlling role of Pannenberg’s appeal to the Bible’s eschatological orientation.

Anticipation is not the Grundprinzip of Pannenberg’s thought but is indispensible to his project. If Pannenberg cannot sustain his exposition of Christian revelation as anticipatory, or if he cannot show how Christian claims corresponds to human knowledge in general, or if he cannot show how the truth of the eternal triune God can be presented in a provisional way, then he cannot sustain his project. The next step in our exploration of Pannenberg’s motif of anticipation is to examine his philosophical context. Following that it will be possible to outline Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal more fully and then to examine the full significance of anticipation in his thought.

history of religions” and “the Christian conviction that God is revealed in a definite and unsurpassable way in Jesus”. Lösel’s conclusion supports the argument of this chapter about the function of ‘anticipation’.


Molnar, “Some Problems with Pannenberg’s Solution”, 333-37, quoting from ST 1, 253-54.
Chapter 3  Pannenberg’s Philosophical Milieu

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the importance of anticipation in Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation. His use of anticipation allows Pannenberg to affirm that Christian claims are presently contestable, and yet to appeal to a final indisputable revelation. For Pannenberg, anticipation is also a metaphysical concept that he develops in response to his philosophical milieu. His philosophical milieu includes the philosophical discussion of the past with which he interacts, as well as the contemporary thinkers, issues, concerns, and ideas that influence him. There are some elements of this milieu that he accepts and elements he critiques. This context is the focus of this chapter. For Pannenberg the rejection of the classical metaphysic and the rise of atheism together create the major intellectual crisis for Christianity. Watts describes Pannenberg as a young man as “seeking a response to atheism” and “questioning the viability of traditional claims”, and comments that this set “the direction of his theological method”.¹ This description identifies both defensive and revisionist concerns in Pannenberg’s thought. This chapter focuses primarily on the defensive concerns, in which Pannenberg faces atheism. It also notes the contributions of four thinkers from whom Pannenberg takes ideas that are important in developing his revision of traditional metaphysics, these are G. W. F. Hegel, W. Dilthey, M. Heidegger, and E. Bloch. Chapter 4 addresses his constructive metaphysical proposal.

Much of Pannenberg’s early training was in philosophy and philosophical theology, and he is aware of a long heritage of philosophical thought. He has written several accounts of the historical development of philosophy and modern atheism and its relation to theology, which show his assessment of various thinkers and streams of thought.² This

¹ Watts, Revelation, 77.
chapter offers an outline of the developments in philosophy that set the context for Pannenberg’s project. It traces the rise of sceptical atheism through modern Western thought and deals with the thought of philosophers who are significant for Pannenberg noting his specific comments on their thought. In order to highlight the significance for Pannenberg’s thought of various intellectual developments, this chapter does not present a strictly chronological narrative of philosophical history. The first section, which examines the rise of atheism is, largely, chronological. The second section then turns to four thinkers who are constant dialogue partners for Pannenberg: three are representatives of the atheistic position to whom Pannenberg has given extensive treatment, the other is Hegel, who may be cautiously identified as Pannenberg’s major philosophical source. Pannenberg’s philosophical milieu is then summarised as being after ‘the relation turn’. The discussion shows that Pannenberg’s main response to his philosophical background is to develop an alternative metaphysical proposal that makes use of anticipation.

**The End of Metaphysics**

Pannenberg faces the fact that “the age of metaphysics has ended”. The terms “metaphysics” or “ontology” are difficult to define. Understood in its broadest sense as “the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality”, metaphysics involves any view about what exists. On that definition there can be a wide range of metaphysics proposed by various philosophers. ‘Metaphysics’ means, for Pannenberg, “the metaphysics of the Absolute” which seeks “God” in a conceptual “ascent above everyday experience”. That is, metaphysics, for Pannenberg, involves the

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3 MIG, 3.
4 Joseph S. O’Leary, *Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 6-7, comments that metaphysics is “a slippery term, commonly used in a vast variety of senses, and people who talk of ‘overcoming metaphysics’ are likely to find that the phrase assumes different connotations from context to context, connotations which have a way of changing places quickly and unnoticed unless subject to vigilant reflexive control”.
5 Panayot Butchvarov, “Metaphysics”, in CDP, 563. Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933*, trans. E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1984) 195, comments that “every science … implies … an ontology”. He offers a typology of German philosophy after Kant and Hegel in terms of ‘ontology’. He views all the positions as holding the “non-reducibility of being to thought” and another element which varies between positions (197-201). The ‘other’ element may be the material (Marx), the sensuous (neo-Kantianism), the irrational (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, life-philosophy) or the existential (Schelling, Kierkegaard, Jaspers).
claim that there is an Absolute transcendent reality.\textsuperscript{6} As “metaphysics” is a term with a variety of applications, so also the “end of metaphysics” is not a phenomenon that is easy to describe. John Sallis comments that to give the title “the end of metaphysics” to a feature of modern thought “is simply misleading, indicating almost nothing of the immense complexity of that phenomenon that it pretends to name, most notably the complex of senses, the multiplicity of determinations, of the end of metaphysics”.\textsuperscript{7} Pannenberg’s reference to the ‘end of metaphysics’ is defensible because his definition of metaphysics is so precise. Pannenberg is naming the trend in Western intellectual life and in the wider culture to deny the existence of God, and along with that to deny the existence of the soul or human nature, and essences as unchanging, underlying realities.

Pannenberg insists that theology must re-establish the validity of metaphysics because its truth claims involve metaphysical assumptions. He argues that “talk of God is dependent on a concept of the world, which can be established only through metaphysical reflection” and insists that if theology does not develop a metaphysic it falls “into either a kerygmatic subjectivism or a thoroughgoing demythologization—and frequently both at the same time!”\textsuperscript{8} He contends that the use of Greek metaphysics in early Christian thought was not a “foreign intrusion” but “belongs to [the Christian message’s] very foundations” and provides the transcendent metaphysic needed for a coherent exposition of the biblical traditions.\textsuperscript{9} Pannenberg insists that more than anything else, theological discourse about God requires a relationship to metaphysical reflection if its claim to truth is to be valid. For talk of God is dependent on a concept of the world, which can be established only through metaphysical reflection.

He argues, “a renewed concern with metaphysics is unlikely to take place unless one challenges the arguments upon which the thesis of the ‘end of metaphysics’ is based”.\textsuperscript{10} Pannenberg insists that theology must fully engage with philosophical critiques of metaphysics. He states, “we will have to provide a detailed assessment of the arguments

\textsuperscript{6} MIG, 20.
\textsuperscript{8} MIG, 6.
\textsuperscript{9} MIG, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{10} MIG, 6.
of postulated atheism”. The rest of this section traces the intellectual developments which led to the ‘end of metaphysics’ and Pannenberg’s response to them.

a) Scepticism

While there were no public atheists in Europe at the commencement of the early modern period, there was a resurgence of the ancient tradition of Scepticism, most powerfully represented by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). He advocated “suspending judgement on all theories that go beyond experience [and] accepting experience undogmatically”. It seemed to Montaigne and fellow Sceptics that reason could provide no certain conclusions. The only place where Montaigne expected to find reliable truths was in concrete phenomena and primarily in his own self. General concepts were ventured with caution, and deserved no confidence. Montaigne is representative of “the atmosphere of profound epistemological renunciation” which “permeated the educated intellect of Europe” in the late sixteenth century.

This doubt about metaphysical assertions has been a consistent theme in Western thought through the modern era. Pannenberg’s recognition that the existence of God is “debatable” reflects the effects of Scepticism. He does not accept sceptical conclusions that nothing can be said about God, but he is aware that the existence of God must be considered as a “problem”, rather than as a dogmatic starting point. Pannenberg’s epistemological and metaphysical proposals accept the claims of Scepticism that metaphysical claims are open to doubt, without accepting its conclusions.

11 MIG, 17.
13 Richard H. Popkin, “Montaigne, Michel de” in CDP, 581. James Thrower, Western Atheism: a Short History (New York, Prometheus Books; 2000), 63-69 and 75, recounts how Scepticism had a renewed influence in Western thought from the 14th century and the influence this had on Montaigne.
14 Buckley, Origins of Modern Atheism, 69.
15 ST 1, 58-59.
b) René Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes recognised that there was an inevitable link between Scepticism and atheism and sought to counter the scepticism of Montaigne.\textsuperscript{16} He turned Scepticism into a methodological principle, which enabled a search for those truths that, in his view, could not be doubted. These truths would be “clear and distinct” ideas and from them all other knowledge could be derived. The trail of doubt led Descartes to what he considered an indubitable claim: “I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind”.\textsuperscript{17} Doubt also reveals to Descartes that the thinking subject is limited and he argues that limitation implies the existence of the Infinite, for “the idea of the all-perfect is the condition for the possibility of the idea of the imperfect … in its clarity and distinctness, the perfect or infinite possesses a priority to the imperfect and finite which is revealed in doubt”.\textsuperscript{18} From this claim, Descartes presents a series of \textit{a priori arguments} for the existence of God.\textsuperscript{19}

The other foundational claim for which Descartes contends is the existence of the external world. He argues for this on the basis that God would not deceive, and that, though sensory misperception is unavoidable, mathematics clearly and distinctly grasps extension in space.\textsuperscript{20} Michael Buckley points out that in taking this step Descartes reversed the direction of traditional natural theology and began its destruction. Rather than the observable world providing evidence for the existence of God, Descartes held that the existence of the world is guaranteed by God’s existence.\textsuperscript{21} The effect of this reversal was that the only aspect of the external world which could be known was material extension. The perception of final causes in the world, which had been seen as the work of God, was excluded. Buckley’s conclusion is that “the revolution in theism which Descartes … instigated lies precisely here: the world has become godless … the

\textsuperscript{16} Buckley, \textit{Origins of Modern Atheism}, 69-76.
\textsuperscript{17} René Descartes, \textit{Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies} ed. and trans. John Cottingham, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1996), 17.
\textsuperscript{18} Buckley, \textit{Origins of Modern Atheism}, 86-87, 94.
\textsuperscript{19} Buckley, \textit{Origins of Modern Atheism}, 86-94.
\textsuperscript{21} Philip Clayton, \textit{The Problem of God in Modern Thought} (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), 61-65, shows the importance of the concept of God as unlimited perfection in Descartes’ thought.
world does not assert or witness to the existence of God”.  

Descartes had aimed to save belief in God from Scepticism; in the process, he developed lines of thought that later provided a basis for atheism.  

Pannenberg is critical of Descartes’ method for establishing metaphysical claims in the face of sceptical criticism, and rejects the possibility of moving directly from the fact of human self-consciousness to establish the existence of God. Pannenberg also asserts that Descartes is “much too rash” in identifying the concept of the Infinite with the idea of God. He argues that the idea of God is far more specific than that of the Infinite, even if the concept of the Infinite is specified more fully as “the notion of highest perfection”. That is, Pannenberg holds that Descartes has not successfully responded to the challenge of Scepticism.  

Rather than arguing for the existence of the Infinite from self-consciousness, Pannenberg argues that the Infinite is initially intuited, rather than being perceived as a “clear and distinct idea”. He agrees with Descartes that, as the mind perceives the finite, the idea of the Infinite is also given. However he holds that an (unthematised) awareness of the Infinite must be primary. Pannenberg argues that, in fact, Descartes acknowledges the priority of the Infinite when he claims that “my notion of the Infinite is somehow prior to that of the finite … the notion of God is prior to that of myself”, and Pannenberg makes use of this statement when he argues for his own metaphysical proposal. He admits that his claim that Descartes views the knowledge of God as mediating knowledge of self is not a standard reading. For Pannenberg, human thought begins with an unthematised awareness of the Infinite but the concept of the Infinite is, according to Pannenberg, developed only in the light of the “general notion

22 Buckley, Origins of Modern Atheism, 97-98. The work of Jean Meslier (1664-1729) a priest and secret atheist is the historical evidence of this. His posthumously circulated Mémoire des pensées et sentiments de Jean Meslier was the first literary expression of modern atheism. He accepted Descartes argument for the existence of the Infinite, but held this could only be a material infinity.
23 See Thrower, Western Atheism, 85.
24 MIG, 28.
25 MIG, 27, asserts that “Descartes has not adequately realized that the intuition of the Infinite … is not present as an explicit thought but only in an unthematized fashion”.
27 MIG, 26, claims that “Descartes thus proceeded in a less subjective manner than one fashionable construal of the history of philosophy would have us believe”.

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of the finite”. For Pannenberg, the defence of the idea of God requires an argument that shows that the intuition of the Infinite can be identified with God. Such an argument is one of the elements of his own metaphysical proposal.

c) The French Enlightenment

Philosophical atheism first began to assert itself as an intellectual force in mid-eighteenth century France. According to Pannenberg “the presupposition of contemporary Western atheism lies in the development of modern natural science and its mechanistic picture of the world, especially in eighteenth century France”. The French Enlightenment was not a generally atheistic movement. Some thinkers of the period did express atheism or a metaphysical materialism, arguing that science offered all the explanation that was required to make sense of the world. French atheism developed more fully with Auguste Comte (1798-1857). His six volume *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42) propounded Positivism, which claimed that observation was the only basis for knowledge. In his view, metaphysics was a passing stage in human development. Pannenberg notes that “the mechanistic world picture of classical physics, perfected in the eighteenth century, which no longer needed the hypothesis of a creator, is the presupposition of modern atheism”. It was in the French Enlightenment that Newtonian physics was first directly used as a criticism of theism.

Pannenberg addresses the issues raised by the French Enlightenment when he deals with the implications of natural sciences. He is particularly concerned about the implications of the principle of inertia: “when the assumption that movement is intrinsic to the bodies themselves was combined with the principle of inertia, the need for the cooperation of God as first cause became superfluous in the explanation of natural

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28 MIG, 27.
30 Buckley, *Origins of Modern Atheism*, 259, comments that “the issues of belief and nonbelief, of theism, deism, atheism, and agnosticism, ranked high as subjects of debate … but the perennial conventional story that a dogmatic atheism united this group … will not wash. The only dogma that they held in common was the value of discussion.”
32 Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 185.
33 Thrower, *Western Atheism*, 105.
processes”. Pannenberg identifies the challenge that this raised for a traditional view of providence as one of the reasons why early modern physics was one cause of the rise of deism. The implication was drawn that the universe could not be viewed as upheld and determined moment to moment by God, but was the necessary result of certain initial conditions. In response to the apparently deistic implication of the principle of inertia, Pannenberg offers a compressed presentation of his metaphysical proposal arguing that more recent developments in physics count against a deistic understanding. He appeals to the contingency that contemporary physics recognises in physical events, to show that “the scientific affirmations of law cannot be considered as complete and exhaustive descriptions”. Moreover, he views the shift in modern physics from focussing on bodies and forces to “field theory” as recognising the priority of the whole over the parts and offering a way “to make the effective presence of God in every single phenomenon intelligible”. Pannenberg develops his case by noting that, although fields are conceived as occurring in space, modern physics proposes a close connection between space and time: “the totality of space, time, and energy or force are all properties of a cosmic field”. Drawing on philosophical discussions of the nature of time, which accord a priority to eternity and the future, Pannenberg suggests that “space is to be described as the form of simultaneity of phenomena” and so as “an extrapolation of all limited participation in the eternal presence of God”. Although he does not refer explicitly to anticipation, he appeals to “the priority of eternity in the conception of time and of the consequent priority of the future”.

d) David Hume (1711-1776)

David Hume contributed significantly to the critique of theistic belief, though he was

34 Pannenberg, “The Doctrine of Creation and Modern Science”, TTN, 31. It should be noted that “the assumption that movement is intrinsic to the bodies themselves” is usually seen as part of the principle of inertia, and indeed is mentioned by Pannenberg on the previous page as part of Descartes’ view of inertia. Why Pannenberg differentiates this from the ‘principle of inertia’ is not clear.
35 Thrower, Western Atheism, 105, notes that D’Alembert sought to show that Newton’s principle of inertia could be explained naturalistically.
36 “The Doctrine of Creation”, 35.
37 “The Doctrine of Creation”, 36.
38 “The Doctrine of Creation”, 39.
39 “The Doctrine of Creation”, 42.
40 “The Doctrine of Creation”, 43-44.
probably not an atheist.\textsuperscript{41} He limits knowledge to that which can be observed, recommending “the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding”.\textsuperscript{42} One of the implications of such scepticism is that concepts such as cause and effect are products not of sensation or reason but imagination.\textsuperscript{43} On the same basis Hume denies knowledge of the ‘self’ as a metaphysical entity. His critique of arguments from miracles and the argument from design were major challenges to the natural theology that was held to support theistic belief. Brown summarises Hume’s position as follows.

> Hume’s various arguments and observations on religion combine to form a strategic defence against certainty and dogmatism in religion. They do not rule out the feasibility of belief, but raise a series of questions about the status and logic of belief and commitment. \textsuperscript{44}

Pannenberg comments on Hume’s psychology and its critique of the concept of soul or self.\textsuperscript{45} He identifies Hume’s challenge to the tradition in Western thought, which has assumed that self-consciousness is the prior unifying ground of all experience, that is that self-consciousness is a metaphysical entity which exists prior to any interaction with the world and makes understanding the world possible.\textsuperscript{46}

Pannenberg views Hume as part of a line of development within philosophical thought and responds to the issues raised by the whole tradition, rather than giving a direct response to Hume. He seeks to overcome the dichotomy between the traditional view of the self and Hume’s scepticism, arguing that the human self develops in a process

\textsuperscript{41} J. C. A. Gaskin, “Hume on Religion” in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Hume}, ed. David F. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 320-21, explains that “neither Hume nor any other writer in eighteenth century Britain … was free to express atheistical or anti-religious views … we would expect Hume to cover his apparently sceptical views with protests of orthodoxy … [yet] there remains an impression, both from the careful complexity of his arguments, from his scepticism about metaphysical arguments, and from letters and anecdotal evidence, that Hume really was unwilling to deny the existence of God”.


\textsuperscript{43} David F. Norton, “Hume, David” in \textit{CDP}, 401.

\textsuperscript{44} Colin Brown, \textit{Christianity and Western Thought : A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements Volume 1 From the Ancient World to the Age of Enlightenment} (Leicester : Apollos, 1990), 255.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{ATP}, 216-7; \textit{MIG} 41-43.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{ATP}, 216.
mediated in a social context. Pannenberg offers a theological interpretation of views that identity is defined by the future of the individual. In his view, “the whole of the individual’s life ‘appears’ in the present”, so that the self is not simply a metaphysical figment. At each moment “we are still becoming ourselves because we are still on the way to ourselves in the wholeness of our existence”. Yet “we are also somehow ourselves at the present moment”. Pannenberg develops his response through detailed interaction with nineteenth and twentieth century psychology, but his position is explicitly grounded in theology. The “wholeness of self” is referred to God as the one who transcends social reality as the proper object of “basic trust”, enabling the self to develop in relation to others. God also provides the grounds for the assertion of a wholeness of self “beyond the present life”. Pannenberg makes the theological basis explicit in his conclusion.

The openness of persons to their divine destiny, beyond the limits of any finite fulfilment, is the ultimate basis for the inviolability of the person … the person is the ego as a ‘face’ through which the mystery of the still unfinished history of individuals on the way to themselves manifests itself.

The treatment of ‘the self’ shows Pannenberg’s capacity to accept the questions pressed by Scepticism, and yet develop a view that affirms important features of more classical views. His response relies on an appeal to a temporal understanding of reality, which gives a priority to the future and makes use of the notion of anticipation. For it is only via this notion that he can claim that “we are still becoming ourselves” and that “we are also somehow ourselves at the present moment”.

47 *ATP*, 222, explains the development of self awareness and ego as follows: “even in the little child there is a quite understandable but still unthematic egocentrism … The development of self-consciousness evidently begins on the side of the self (the “me”) and is only secondarily expanded through the supervision of the ego, which as the speaker of the moment and the one who is experiencing at the moment knows itself to be the one ‘abiding’ self and yet also is distinct from self”. He also claims that “the determination of the individual by society affects both the self and the ego” (223).
49 *ATP*, 240.
50 *ATP*, 241.
51 *ATP*, 214.
52 *ATP*, 240.
Before turning to the rise of atheism in nineteenth century Germany, it is important to note the influence of the great philosopher of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant. Kant had no desire to further atheism. Rather, awakened from his ‘dogmatic slumbers’ by Hume’s critique, he sought to establish theistic belief on a firmer foundation than traditional thought seemed to provide.\footnote{See Thrower, *Western Atheism*, 113.} Kant had a dual concern. On the one hand, he sought to establish that the categories of pure reason (causality and other categories of natural science) were valid, in contrast to Hume’s questioning of causality. He also aimed to show that the categories of practical reason (involving the moral life) were valid independent of the apparently deterministic spatio-temporal world.\footnote{Karl Ameriks, “Kant, Immanuel” in *CDP*, 461.} To achieve these two goals, he argues that both sets of categories are \textit{a priori} synthetic, that is they are derived by reason alone, not from any empirical data, and are also necessary and universal. So Kant does not consider \textit{Dinge an sich}, rather he begins with perception, which supplies the categories in which phenomena are perceived.\footnote{Copleston, *History*, 6:212, summaries Kant’s view as follows: “he disagreed with Locke’s theory that all our concepts are ultimately derived from experience. He did not … accept the opposite theory of innate ideas … he believed that there are concepts and principles which reason derives from within itself on the occasion of experience”.} This approach ruled out the possibility of knowing \textit{noumena} (or \textit{Dinge an sich}) in their absolute reality, and established that all \textit{phenomena} would be perceived in terms of the categories. Karl Americks explains that Kant offers “a metaphysical thesis that enriches empirical explanations with an \textit{a priori} framework, but begs off any explanation for that framework itself other than the statement that it lies in the ‘constitution’ of human sensibilities as such”.\footnote{Americks, “Kant”, 463.} Thus Kant rules out metaphysics: “metaphysics as a science, if we mean by this a scientific knowledge of supersensible beings, has never, according to Kant, been a reality. For all the alleged demonstrations hitherto produced can be shown to be invalid”.\footnote{Copleston, *History*, 6:216.}

According to Kant, it was not possible to offer a consistent account of metaphysics. He demonstrated this by revealing the antimonies generated in an attempt to discuss

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)}
\end{itemize}
noumena. Kant’s discussion of the antimony of quantity is particularly relevant for Pannenberg’s project. He argues that there are equally good arguments for the assumption that the spatio-temporal world is finite and that it is infinite, and so the question of whether it is one or the other cannot be answered. Kant claims that “any attempt to use the Ideas as the basis for metaphysics as a science is foredoomed to failure” but that transcendental Ideas have an important regulative function. For instance, the problematic concept of “the physical world as a whole” is an important spur to scientific study. Similarly, the idea of God remains a postulate of practical reason but it cannot be approached along the lines of a claim that there is an infinite being that can be grasped by the mind. Kant further illustrates the impossibility of producing a metaphysical science by showing the failure of traditional arguments for the existence of God. Clayton comments that in Kant’s thought it is questionable “whether … we could really ascribe existence to a God who is conceived only as a fundamental postulate of moral action”.

Kant’s critique of metaphysics marked a major turning point in Western thought about God. Pannenberg summarises the result.

Kant undoubtedly destroyed the arguments of speculative reason for the existence of a supreme being … he also maintained the necessity of the rational ideal of such a being on which all empirical reality bases its supreme and necessary unity and which we can think of only after the analogy of a real substance that by the laws of reason is the cause of all things.

Ameriks argues convincingly that Kant’s rejection of metaphysics in *Critique of Pure Reason* is not consistently maintained in later lectures. However, this does not negate

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60 *ATP*, 295-301.
62 *ST* 1, 90, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 359-413. According to Copleston, *History*, 6:306, Kant “insisted on the abiding importance of the fundamental problems of metaphysics, and … tried to show the rational legitimacy of practical faith in freedom, immortality and God” and also held that “if the categories are applied to God, they are not only unable to give knowledge of God but are also of such indeterminate and vague content that they are simply symbols of the unknown”. Clayton, *Problem*, 267, assesses Kant as confronting “language about God with the greatest single challenge in history”.
Pannenberg’s point about Kant’s legacy. Pannenberg notes that Kant’s thought is “the significant turning point for modern man”, since he creates an intellectual climate in which the case for the existence of God must be anthropological, that is related to human self-understanding. After Kant the traditional arguments, which led from knowledge of nature to God, were no longer accepted, and “the whole burden of proof of the truth of faith in God falls upon the understanding of man”. 64 Pannenberg takes up the challenge to seek an anthropological demonstration of God’s existence, though he recognises that this would never “prove God’s existence in the strict sense”. 65 At the same time he does not entirely abandon the cosmological argument, for he claims that it shows that human reason seeks to make the contingent world intelligible, and this in turn makes talk about God intelligible. 66

Pannenberg responds to Kant when he treats “the problem of the Absolute”. 67 He notes that the theme of Infinity was an important one for Kant, though it could only ever function as a regulative concept. Pannenberg argues that, given the priority of the whole over the parts, the idea of God (at least as unthematised) should be seen “as the condition of all finite knowledge”. Chapter 4 will offer an exposition of Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal which shows how, in his view, the priority of the Infinite can be asserted.

f) Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)

Kant’s critique of transcendental Ideas led to a huge range of metaphysical proposals among the German idealist of the next generation. Copleston explains this as “the Kantian theory of knowledge … inflated into a metaphysics of reality”. 68 Fichte, Schelling and Hegel each developed views that sought to present reality as the expression of an absolute mind. Idealism has an important role in Pannenberg’s philosophical background, and the last section of this chapter will examine it. The other

64 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Anthropology and the Question of God”, BQT, 3:82.
65 ST 1, 93.
66 ST 1, 94.
67 MIG, 22f, 28-34.
68 Copleston, History, 7:7.
response to Kant was that his rejection of the claims of traditional metaphysics was continued by the critics of Idealism.\footnote{Jakob Fries (1773-1843) and Johann Herbart (1776-1841) did not strictly follow Kant, but developed some of their thought from him and maintained a critique of metaphysics; Copleston, \textit{History}, 6:248-55.} This response can be seen in Feuerbach, the first public German intellectual atheist.\footnote{Marx W. Wartofsky, \textit{Feuerbach} (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 197, sets Feuerbach in the context of rationalism, scepticism and the French enlightenment. Jere Paul Surber, “Feuerbach, Ludwig Andreas” \textit{CDP}, 307, describes Feuerbach as reviving Kant’s philosophical critique of metaphysics, but no longer allowing room for ‘faith’. Alister E. McGrath, \textit{The Twilight of Atheism: the Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World} (London: Rider, 2004), 55-58, emphasises the radical political implications of Feuerbach’s thought, in continuity with pre-revolutionary French atheism.} In \textit{Das Wesen des Christentums} (1841), Feuerbach argued that religion is an expression of human consciousness, so that the idea of God is not given to human thought, but produced by it. He reversed the statement that “the individual is a function of the Absolute” and claimed that “the Absolute is a function of the individual”. That is, God is a projection of human nature.\footnote{Ludwig Feuerbach, \textit{The Essence of Christianity} trans. Marian Evans (New York: Colin Blanchard, 1855).}

Pannenberg identifies Feuerbach as taking a second step in the development of atheism. Positivism had sought to show that the world could be understood without reference to God. Feuerbach explained how religions and theistic belief arose.\footnote{Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 185-86.} He claimed that religion was “the disuniting of man from himself”.\footnote{Feuerbach, \textit{Essence of Christianity}, 56.} This arose, according to Feuerbach, because human essence (understood as a corporate species) is infinite. However humanity, rather than accepting this, comes to identify the Infinite as a divine other, and human nature as finite. In his view, this makes religion antihuman and alienating: “to enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing”.\footnote{Feuerbach, \textit{Essence of Christianity}, 48, 340-45; and see P. Avis, \textit{Faith in the Fires of Criticism} (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), 20-22.} Pannenberg argues that Feuerbach’s view of the idea of God shows the outcome of the Kantian approach, which seeks to establish the existence of God based on anthropology.

The anthropological interpretation of the proofs of God, or of the concept of God in general can … become the basis of an atheistic argument that presents the thought of God as the expression of purely subjective needs or as the product of projection of earthly human ideas into thought of the Infinite.\footnote{\textit{ST} 1, 92, cf. \textit{Systematische Theologie} B1, 104. Bromiley translates \textit{konnte} in this sentence as “might”,}
Wartofsky’s analysis confirms Pannenberg’s view that Feuerbach is a key figure in the development of atheism. According to Wartofsky, Feuerbach is not simply saying that “man makes God in his own image”. Rather Feuerbach’s critique of theology “becomes the basis for a critique of metaphysics, and of the whole history of modern philosophy as ‘abstract’ theology.”76 Feuerbach dismisses the philosophical concept of God as “the projected or mystified form in which abstraction is posited as an object of thought.” This is not only a critique of traditional metaphysical theology but also of Hegel.77

For Barth, Feuerbach was the outcome of the turn of theology to anthropology and was to be countered by a return to “a very real faith in the resurrection corresponding to a real faith in God”.78 Pannenberg holds that the resurrection and the reality of God must be established, not simply asserted, and that theology has to answer Feuerbach in his own terms.79 To do so he deploys an anthropological argument, drawn in part from Hegel, regarding the part and the whole, saying that self-transcendent human subjectivity presupposes “an infinity transcending itself which is to be described not as mere psychological datum … but as an ontological structure of man’s being”.80 These comments from Pannenberg are a sketch of an argument that he presents in detail in *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*. There the relation of the individual to the whole is a key part of Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal.

g) *Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)*

Nietzsche has been called “the most lethal adversary of the Christian faith in modern times”.81 He continued the atheism of Schopenhauer and Feuerbach in a vigorous attack

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76 Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, 198.
77 Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, 356.
79 Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 190, states that “the struggle over the concept of God has to be conducted indeed in the fields of philosophy, the sciences of religion, and anthropology. If Feuerbach should prove right in these fields, then the proof of atheism for which he strove would in fact be accomplished”. See also “Speaking about God”, 100-102.
80 “Types of Atheism”, 191.
on all idealism and metaphysics, famously declaring that “God is dead”. 82 Nietzsche was convinced that the “God-hypothesis” and all religious and metaphysical interpretations of the world and humanity were the untenable. 83 Nietzsche played an important role in Pannenberg’s own development. The first philosophical book Pannenberg read at the age of 16 was Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik and he read all of Nietzsche in the following year. 84 He agrees with Heidegger that Nietzsche expresses “the necessary consequence of … the modern metaphysics of subjectivity”. 85 In Pannenberg’s view, German theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Ritschl, Hermann, Kähler, Barth, and Bultmann, stood on Kantian ground, yet this was ground which Nietzsche had razed. 86 Thus, Nietzsche must be answered before theology can proceed to talk about God.

Brian Ingraffia shows that Nietzsche denounced Christianity as “propagating values that are harmful to life because these values are falsely believed to come from a God in an imaginary realm located beyond this world”. 87 Nietzsche adds to the Enlightenment critique of Christianity the notion that the origin of these beliefs lies in human fear of the world. 88 His rejection extends beyond metaphysics and theistic belief to include morality and reason. 89 He holds Plato responsible for purveying a “moral-optical

82 Copleston, History, 7:390-91; Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 192-93. According to Sallis, Delimitations, 18, “it is Nietzsche who most forcefully proclaims that metaphysics is at its end”.
83 Richard Schacht, “Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm”, CDP, 615, explains that “for Nietzsche there is no ‘truth’ in the sense of correspondence of anything we might think or say to ‘being’, and indeed no ‘true world of being’ to which it may correspond; no ‘knowledge’ conceived in terms of any such truth and reality; and further, no knowledge at all … that is absolute, non-perspectival, and certain. But that is not the end of the matter … there are ways of thinking that may be more or less well warranted in relation to differing sorts of interest and practice … Nietzsche’s reflections on the reconceptualization of truth and knowledge thus point in the direction of a naturalistic epistemology that he would have replace the conceptions of truth and knowledge of his predecessors.”
84 “Intellectual Pilgrimage”, 184. ST 1, 152-55; ST 2, 232-36 refer to Nietzsche.
85 “Types of Atheism”, 193.
86 “Types of Atheism”, 194-95.
88 Ingraffia, Postmodern Theory, 35.
89 “The place of origin of the notion of ‘another world’: the philosopher, who invents a world of reason, where reason and the logical functions are adequate: this is the origin of the ‘true’ world; the religious man, who invents a ‘divine world’: this is the origin of the ‘denaturalized, antinatural’ world; the moral man, who invents a ‘free world’: this is the origin of the ‘good, perfect, just, holy’ world”. Friedrich Nietzsche, The will to power. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale; ed. Walter Kaufmann, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 322. See Ingraffia, Postmodern Theory, 53.
“illusion” that the true world is suprasensible.\textsuperscript{90} Christianity is even more culpable and despicable, for it upholds this illusion for the belief of poor, weak, fearful sinners.\textsuperscript{91} For Nietzsche even positivism is still caught in the illusion of truth and therefore is a metaphysical faith.\textsuperscript{92} In his view, the world is no “created order” but “is to all eternity chaos; not by the absence of necessity, but in the sense of the absence of order, structure, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever else our aesthetic humanities are called”.\textsuperscript{93} All he can recommend is to accept and affirm this world as ‘perfect’ and live in it exercising the “will to power”.\textsuperscript{94}

Pannenberg claims that the forms of theology that rely on Kantian thought by grounding theism on an anthropological necessity cannot overcome Nietzsche’s criticism. He explains that Nietzsche has the same structure of thought as these theologies—a metaphysic of the will. So, the nihilistic criticism of theism will continue to press Feuerbach’s point that human freedom comes from the rejection of God. Pannenberg calls theology to return to a “more radical inquiry into being, and to seek to show that the being of God is for man “the actual ground of the possibility of his freedom in relation to the world”.\textsuperscript{95} Avis is critical of Pannenberg for offering a ‘genetic’ assessment of Nietzsche (that is, attempting to blunt his attack by claiming that his thought arises from his own struggle with faith or his voluntarism).\textsuperscript{96} Although Pannenberg does make these ‘genetic’ comments, it is not accurate to interpret his case as simply choosing a different starting point. Pannenberg develops a metaphysical

\textsuperscript{91} Ingraffia, \textit{Postmodern Theory}, 37.
\textsuperscript{92} Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{Joyful Wisdom}, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Ungar, 1960), 279, “it is always a metaphysical belief on which our belief in science rests … even we knowing ones of to-day, the godless and anti-metaphysical, still take our fire from the conflagration kindled by a belief a millennium old, the Christian belief, which is also the belief of Plato, that God is truth, that the truth is divine”.
\textsuperscript{93} Nietzsche, \textit{Joyful Wisdom}, 152.
\textsuperscript{94} Richard Tarnas, \textit{The Passion of the Western Mind} (London: Pimlico, 1996), 370, summarises Nietzsche’s account of the \textit{Übermensch}: “The highest truth, Nietzsche prophesied, was being born within man through the self-creating power of the will. All of man’s striving for knowledge and power would fulfill itself in a new being who would incarnate the living meaning of the universe. But to achieve this birth, man would have to grow beyond himself so fundamentally that his present self would be destroyed … the birth of this new being was not a life-impoverishing otherworldly fantasy … but was a vivid, tangible reality to be created, here and now, through the heroic self-overcoming of the great individual. Such an individual had to transform life into a work of art, within which he could forge his character, embrace his fate, and recreate himself as heroic protagonist of the world epic”.
\textsuperscript{95} Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 196.
\textsuperscript{96} Avis, \textit{Faith}, 60, see Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 193-94.
response that seeks to overcome Nietzsche’s critique by including much of it.  

h) **Logical Positivism**

Ernst Mach (1838-1916) and other German Positivists, were concerned with science rather than metaphysics. They held that the theories of science (such as atomic theory) were at best helpful ways of predicting results, and that metaphysics was to be rigorously excluded. Positivism was further developed by the Vienna Circle into Logical Positivism, which, as Pannenberg explains, left behind questions of how impressions lead to knowledge and instead offered an assessment of which statements could be meaningfully made. Logical Positivism offered criteria for the assessment of meaningful statements, seeking to ensure that statements were dependent upon observations. The implication was that assertions of traditional religious belief, ethics and metaphysics were held to be not merely false but meaningless.

Pannenberg rejects Logical Positivism, calling for “a critique of the empiricist criterion of meaning”, and states that such a response will be based on the thought of Karl Popper (1902–1994). Popper’s influence is evident in Pannenberg’s view that theology offers hypotheses, as noted in Chapter 1. Popper argues that science does not positively establish its claims but only attempts to falsify them. He asserts, though, that once a hypothesis gives accurate predictions it can begin to be regarded as established. Pannenberg argues that Popper’s approach gives “no clear criterion for rejecting metaphysical propositions”, since they too can be put forward as hypotheses to be tested (though Popper considers that they are never empirically established).

Pannenberg goes further and argues that Popper’s view not only allows a place for

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97 Pannenberg, “Types of Atheism”, 195.
98 H. Feigl, “Positivism” in *Britannica 2002 Standard Edition*, CD-ROM Encyclopædia Britannica, explains that “concern with first causes or final reasons was to be excluded from the scientific endeavour as fruitless, or hopeless (if not meaningless). Even the notion of explanation became suspect and was at best taken (as already in Comte) to be no more than an ordering and connecting of observable facts and events by empirically ascertainable laws”. See also E. McMullin “Mach, Ernst”, *CDP*, 525-26.
99 *TPS*, 30.
102 *TPS*, 35.
metaphysics but actually demands a metaphysic. He points to Popper’s affirmation of
the idea of truth as a regulative principle, which is like a mountain peak wrapped in
clouds so that climbers aspire to reach it but never know if they succeed. According
to Pannenberg, Popper locates the idea of truth at the imaginary end of an infinite
process, and this implies that a present assertion of truth is an anticipation of the end of
the process. Pannenberg argues that knowledge “should at least potentially correspond
to its object”. That is, a claim to knowledge involves a claim that its objects have an
essence, which will ultimately be proved, and the view that each object has a true
essence is a metaphysical claim. Pannenberg’s response to Logical Positivism is to
use Popper’s thought to outline an anticipatory metaphysic as a correlate of an
epistemology that depends on anticipation.

**Dialogue partners**

Dilthey and Heidegger are the two thinkers who express an anti-metaphysical position
with whom Pannenberg particularly engages. Each of these is so significant in
Pannenberg’s thought that we can identify them as dialogue partners. It is not
accurate to call these two thinkers Pannenberg’s opponents, because he seeks to
develop their thought as much as he seeks to oppose it. On the other hand, they are not
his allies, for there are important elements of their approach that Pannenberg seeks to
overcome. Pannenberg holds that atheism must be met on its own ground with “a more
radical inquiry into being”. When he comes to do this thoroughly in *Metaphysics and
the Idea of God* he draws on themes in Dilthey and Heidegger, which he uses to
develop a new metaphysical proposal. The next chapter will examine this proposal; here
the focus is on the thought of Dilthey and Heidegger.

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105 TPS, 40-44.
106 See “Types of Atheism”, 192ff; MIG, 8ff.
108 “Types of Atheism”, 195.
a) Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

Dilthey was a key thinker in the development of Historicism, the view that “knowledge of human affairs has an irreducibly historical character and that there can be no ahistorical perspective of an understanding of human nature and society”.\(^\text{109}\) Gutenson records that in his last lectures before retirement Pannenberg attributed to Dilthey the greatest influence on his historical view of truth.\(^\text{110}\) The importance of Dilthey was presumably conveyed to Pannenberg by Karl Löwith, who taught him the history of philosophy at Heidelberg.\(^\text{111}\)

Dilthey was concerned to “establish the conditions of historical knowledge”.\(^\text{112}\) He was opposed to the tendency to treat the ‘human sciences’ (Geisteswissenschaften) as if they were analogues of the ‘natural sciences’ (Naturwissenschaften). In particular, he objected to attempts to understand human life and expression using the categories that Kant identified for ‘critical reason’ (quantity, quality, relation and modality). He understood that life was concerned with ‘meaning’, which Kantian categories could not grasp.\(^\text{113}\) Not only did Dilthey seek to give human sciences their own basis, he also sought to re-prioritise the two fields. His view was that the realities of life as lived and experienced in its historical context lead to “basic categories whereby we reflect on life [which] provide the background for the epistemological categories of the sciences”.\(^\text{114}\)

According to Dilthey the human sciences deal far more with the realities of life than do the abstract formulations of the natural sciences. Thus, the human sciences should seek an understanding (Verstehen), which spells out the structure of lived experience. For Dilthey, lived experience is irreducibly historical, and can never be properly understood in formulations which seek to abstract life from its context. Yet Dilthey strove to

\(^{109}\) Kai Nielsen, “Historicism”, CDP, 386.
\(^{110}\) Gutenson, Reconsidering the Doctrine of God, 30.
\(^{114}\) Makkreel, “Dilthey”, CDP, 235.
develop a systematic account of human thinking. Palmer’s summary is apt: “we sense in Dilthey some of the fundamental conflicts in nineteenth-century thinking: the romantic desire for immediacy and totality even while seeking data that would be ‘objectively valid’”.

Dilthey’s view was that human life always involved questioning in order to understand, and that this led to the development of metaphysical systems. According to Dilthey, these systems are historically conditioned and none gives a true description of “reality”—this is an inevitable failure for metaphysics. He was “convinced that the ensuing conflict of [proposed metaphysical] systems would eventually lead to scepticism”. Indeed, he insists that there is no access to metaphysical ideas which, by definition, transcend empirical existence: “behind life we cannot go”. Rather than developing a metaphysic, Dilthey proposes a descriptive science which would study how people view the world and show how the human mind makes sense of the world in varying contexts: “it is the task of the theory of worldviews by analysing the historical course of religiosity, poetry, and metaphysics in opposition to relativity, systematically to present the relationship of the human mind to the riddle of the world and life”. For Dilthey, worldviews contain metaphysical views and are an important part of the human quest for understanding, but must be considered as historically situated expressions, rather than as abstract descriptions of how reality is (as if they were like the explanations of natural science).

Dilthey places metaphysics, along with all philosophy, into Geisteswissenschaften and accuses metaphysicians of failing to recognise that forms of thought are always historically conditioned, so that there is no ‘universally valid science’.

The different activities linked together in the structure of the mind are coming to know reality in terms of causal relations, experiencing value,

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meaning and significance, and willing… the subject responds to objects in these various forms of activity and we cannot go further and find a reason behind this fact … This is the first reason why metaphysics is impossible; if it is to succeed it must either make an internal connection between [these categories] by fallacious arguments or truncate what we actually do in life. A further limitation of conceptual thought appears within each of these activities. Thought cannot add a final unconditional cause to the conditioned sequence of events … We can never overcome the subjective and relative character of valuations that originate from feeling: an unconditional value is a postulate but not a concept which can be made fully meaningful.\textsuperscript{120}

Dilthey proposes a psychological and historical understanding of life and praises the ‘life-philosophers’ whose

eyes remain focussed on the riddle of life, but … despair of solving it by a universally valid metaphysics … Life is to be interpreted in terms of itself – that is the great thought which connects these philosophers of life with our experience of the world and poetry.\textsuperscript{121}

Another aspect of Dilthey’s thought which is important for Pannenberg is his emphasis on the developing historical context that gives meaning to life. Dilthey is concerned to relate understanding of any particular to its wider context.

The whole must be understood in terms of its individual parts; individual parts in terms of the whole. To understand the whole of a work we must refer to the author and to related literature … Understanding of the whole and of the individual parts are interdependent.\textsuperscript{122}

This awareness of the need to grasp a whole context is given a greater complexity by Dilthey’s strong sense of historical development, at both the level of individual and wider culture.\textsuperscript{123} By this Dilthey means that human self-understanding is not direct but only comes as we understand ourselves as the result of an historical development.

Human nature cannot be regarded as ‘finished’; humanity is in the process of becoming something through history. Palmer explains the importance of ‘historicality’ for


\textsuperscript{121} Dilthey, \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, 5:370-71, quoted in Makkreel, \textit{Philosopher}, 355. Makkreel, “Dilthey”, 236, points out that Dilthey was not a relativist but held that “metaphysical formulations of worldviews are relative only because they attempt an impossible synthesis of all truth”.


\textsuperscript{123} Palmer, \textit{Hermeneutics}, 116, observes, “Dilthey repeatedly asserted that man is ‘an historical being’”.
Dilthey.

The term came to refer … to man’s dependence on history for his self-understanding and self-interpretation, and to his creative finitude in determining his own essence historically and the intrinsic temporality of all understanding.

Palmer notes that in this Dilthey became “the father of modern conceptions of historicality”. 124

Dilthey conceived of history as progress.

We have the freedom to choose alternatives, and accordingly the wonderful feeling of being able to progress and realize new possibilities of our own existence (Dasein). Such a relation in the course of life, determined from within … I call development. 125

This development means that a human life is understood in its total context which includes its full development. Dilthey explains this historical unfolding as something like a musical piece in which there is no necessity but there should be a sense of completeness. Makkreel comments that this “evaluative response” of “some value” being “realized” is “most evident in the impression or sense of life connected with autobiographical reflection” which involves “a feeling of rightness or appropriateness about the overall development of … life”. 126 Dilthey admits that a final evaluation of an individual or history can only be made at the end.

One would have to wait for the end of a life and, in the hour of death, survey the whole and ascertain the relation of the whole to its parts. One would have to wait for the end of history to have all the material necessary to determine its meaning. 127

Pannenberg grants to Dilthey that metaphysics is always historically relativised. However, he argues that this does not invalidate metaphysical thought. Pannenberg makes this case as he takes up Dilthey’s discussion of the relationship of the “part and whole”. Pannenberg affirms the insight that the individual human could only be understood in the context of the whole of humanity, and the ‘whole of humanity’ is

124 Palmer, Hermenutics, 117.
125 Dilthey, Gesammelte Schriften, 5:244-5 quoted in Makkreel, Philosopher, 392.
126 Makkreel, Philosopher, 392-3.
never present at one time but exists through history. So, “in the process of history the meaning of the individual elements of life … is constantly changing”. He finds that Dilthey leaves two important questions unanswered. One is the question of how identity, if it is uncompleted, can be genuinely present. Pannenberg appeals to anticipation to answer this question in his own work. The other is whether it is possible to recognise an authentic ‘identity in difference’ in the relation of the part and the whole, so that the individuals are both dependent upon and independent of the whole. Pannenberg argues that Dilthey’s position requires metaphysical assumptions about the unity of life, but points out that Dilthey rules out such assumptions. What Dilthey lacks, in his view, is “a common final goal” which gives unity to human life. Though for Pannenberg this future perspective is drawn from Christian eschatology he indicates that Dilthey could have arrived at a similar insight from an anthropological basis. Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal includes these anthropological insights in its basis.

b) Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

Heidegger’s thought could not be ignored by a 20th century German philosophical theologian. Pannenberg’s own teacher, Löwith, had been a student of Heidegger.

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128 ATP, 512-2, and “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic” BQT 1, 162-4, discuss the place of “the whole of life” and “all humanity” in Dilthey’s thought.
129 TPS, 78.
130 Wilhelm Dilthey, Meaning in History: W. Dilthey’s Thoughts on History and Society, ed. H.P. Rickman (London, Allen and Unwin, 1961), 106, quoted in Pannenberg, “Hermeneutic”, 164, suggests that the whole may be “only there when it becomes comprehensible through the parts”. Pannenberg points out that this seems to “leave the nexus of meaning suspended from merely partial truths” since there is no access to the whole till the end of the process.
131 TPS, 78, explains that Dilthy failed to answer two questions: “how the still uncompleted whole of life … could be present at each particular moment” and “how the different modes of the presence of the whole at the various levels of historical life then interrelate so as to make intelligible not only the dependence of individuals on the group and society but also their independence from them”.
132 TPS, 108. In this respect Pannenberg finds Troeltsch’s position to be preferable to Dilthey’s.
133 TPS, 108, argues that “if Dilthey had included in his consideration the future-orientated tendencies introduced into historical processes as a result of the concern with purposes and values present in individual behaviour, his postulate of the unity of psychic life in all individuals would have led him, like Troeltsch, to the problematic concept of a final goal which is historically accessible only in the competing purposes of individuals and social groups”.
As with Dilthey, Pannenberg confronts Heidegger’s rejection of metaphysics in order to sustain Christian claims. According to Sallis, Heidegger proclaimed the end of metaphysics in a more extended sense than did Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, metaphysics casts its shadow and this must be resisted. Heidegger sees metaphysics as terminated because it has reached completion in “its most extreme possibility”. Heidegger’s thought and his attitude to Christianity and theology went through several phases. The following review of Heidegger’s thought is primarily based on *Being and Time*, his first and most influential major work and the one from which Pannenberg quotes most frequently.

Heidegger is critical of the “metaphysics of substance” which is derived from Aristotle. According to Heidegger, the world is made up of irreducibly different substances and this appears to leave the notion of ‘Being’ empty. At the same time, he is critical of the ease with which his contemporaries dismiss any need for further inquiry into ‘Being’ and continue to use the term and to assume that metaphysics is a discipline worth considering. He opens *Being and Time* with a sardonic comment to this effect.

> It is said that ‘Being’ is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition … that which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden has taken on a clarity and self-evidence.

Heidegger accepts that metaphysics has come to an end, but calls for a new approach to understanding Being. He followed the approach of Edmund Husserl (1859 -1938) of

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137 Pannenberg quotes from *Sein und Zeit* (1927) in “On Historical and Theological Hermenutics”, *BQT* 1, 165-69; *TPS* 136, 162-80, 199; *ATP* 41, 103, 113, 210, 213, 238, 245, 255, 301f, 491, 502, 525; *MIG* 74-5, 84-5; *ST* 1, 407; *ST* 2, 273; *ST* 3, 536, 557, 599f. He also quotes from *Phänomenologie und Theologie* (1927) in *MIG*, 10, *TPS*, 263-64; *Was ist Metaphysik?* (1929) in *ATP*, 255; from one work from the Nazi period *Nietzsche I* (1936-1939) in *ATP*, 155; and from several later works *Holzwege* (1949) in “Types of Atheism” 197-98; *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954) in *ATP*, 314; *Identität und Differenz* (1955-1957) in *MIG*, 8-10, 12-13, “Question of God”, 202-203; *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1959) in *ATP*, 341.
trying to rediscover “the meaning of being” through phenomenological analysis.\textsuperscript{140} However, he could not share Husserl’s confidence in the ultimately transparent intuition, which can be analysed to reveal both the structure of consciousness and of the world.\textsuperscript{141} He insisted on a “systematic suspicion” of the notion of self, which could be understood as \textit{Dasein}.

The assertion that it is I who in each case \textit{Dasein} is, is ontically obvious; but this must not mislead us into supposing that the route for an ontological interpretation of what is ‘given’ in this way has thus been unmistakably prescribed … the word “I” is to be understood only in the sense of a non-committal \textit{formal indicator} … the positive interpretation of \textit{Dasein} … forbids us to start with the formal givenness of the “I”, if our purpose is to answer the question of the ‘who’ in a way which is phenomenologically adequate.\textsuperscript{142}

Heidegger insists that \textit{Dasein} must be considered as “being-in-the-world” which is not clouded by any ontological claims about \textit{Dasein}.\textsuperscript{143} According to Heidegger, what gives unity to our conception of reality is our own “care” (\textit{Sorge}) that “allows us to treat everything as part of our \textit{project} in the largest sense of the word”.\textsuperscript{144} This project or design (\textit{Entwurf}) is inevitably oriented to the future. So \textit{Dasein} is always “ecstatic”, by which Heidegger means that it is extended temporally, living in anticipation of the future. So, temporality, with future orientation, is fundamental to the “meaning of being”.

Not only is \textit{Dasein} oriented to the future, Heidegger also asserts that \textit{Dasein} must be grasped as a whole “from beginning to end”. As long as \textit{Dasein} exists it does so with potentiality-for-Being and with more ahead of it. It is only with death that \textit{Dasein} reaches its end, so death “limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for \textit{Dasein}”.\textsuperscript{145} Heidegger, building on Dilthey’s analysis that the historical meaning of a life can only be disclosed at death, turns to the reality of death as the moment in which \textit{Dasein} completes its existence and realises its own finitude. He

\textsuperscript{140} Heidegger had studied Husserl’s \textit{Logische Untersuchungen} in 1912-1915 and then worked as his assistant from 1919 to 1923.
\textsuperscript{141} Frede, “The Question of Being”, 53.
\textsuperscript{142} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 150-52 and see Frede, “question”, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{143} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 78-86 and see Frede, “question”, 56.
\textsuperscript{144} Frede, “The Question of Being”, 63, see Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 193.
claims that the fore-conception of death is the source of Dasein becoming whole, thus granting ontological and epistemic primacy to the future.\textsuperscript{146} For Heidegger, Dasein is not the general idea of human nature and identity but the actual reality of the each human subject, so it is only with death that anyone can reach the point of knowing who they have become. That raises the possibility that meaning is never reached, though this is a possibility which Heidegger claims may be avoided.\textsuperscript{147} The prospect of death has the effect of making Dasein ‘care’ about life, and is the spur of anxiety that leads Dasein to anticipate meaning.

Heidegger and Dilthey articulate many of the challenges, which Pannenberg’s theology confronts. The connection between the critiques of Dilthey and Heidegger lies in their stress on the real life-world, rather than an abstract, non-historical realm. Dilthey argues that metaphysics is itself always involved in an historical context, which has the effect of relativising its absolute claims. Heidegger insists that inquiry into ‘being’ must start from the existentiell reality that we are in a concrete, specific, local setting: “an analytic of Dasein must remain our first requirement in the question of Being… [Dasein must be allowed] to show itself in itself and from itself … as it is proximally and for the most part in its average everydayness.”\textsuperscript{148} Pannenberg developed his metaphysical proposal to include themes from both Dilthey and Heidegger but argues that understanding is only possible with a metaphysic.

c) \textit{Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)}

As noted in chapter 1, Pannenberg has often been ‘accused’ of being “Hegelian”.\textsuperscript{149} In contrast, Clayton notes Pannenberg’s rejection of elements of Hegel and quotes

\begin{footnotes}
\item[147] Heidegger \textit{Being and Time}, 280, holds out the prospect that Dasein may be authentic Being-towards-death, not suppressing fear but living in anxiety in the anticipation of death. “Anticipation utterly individualises Dasein, and allows it, in this individualisation of itself, to become certain of the totality of its potentiality-for-Being … anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerulus solicitune, but of being itself, rather in an impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious” (311). See Hoffman, “Death, Time, History”, 200-205.
\item[149] For example Adams, “Eschatology”, 286-92.
\end{footnotes}
Westphal that “Pannenberg may well be the most articulate anti-Hegelian since Kierkegaard”! Pannenberg acknowledges the significance of Hegel in his thought. He reports that he came to view Hegel’s thought as “representing the top level of sophistication in modern philosophy and also as unsurpassed in its philosophical theology” and as coming closer to the Christian idea of philosophy than any other modern thinker. However, he claims that he never “became a Hegelian”, because he had “deep reservations with regard to the fundamental assumptions in Hegel’s thought”.  

Hegel’s place in the story of atheism is as a counter voice. Sallis observes that Hegel offered an “end to metaphysics” because he brought it to its proper goal in which it was actualised. Hegel’s thought was always theological, though not aiming to be an orthodox theological presentation. He was interested in the Absolute, which is “the Totality, reality as a whole, the universe” which is always in process of self-development. His notion of the Absolute is not simply that of a substance but also that of a subject. In order for the Absolute to embrace the whole and at the same time be a thinking subject, the Absolute must be Geist and the universal “self-thinking thought”. For Hegel, nature is the realm of the expression of Geist but it is only in human consciousness that Geist “returns to itself” and in philosophical reflection it comes to self-knowledge. This identity of Subject and Object is not “a blank undifferentiated identity” but “an identity-in-difference”. Copleston points out that, whereas Aristotle considered God as transcendent self-actualised thought thinking itself, Hegel conceives of an immanent movement to a goal of full self knowledge and actualisation. In tracing Pannenberg’s use of Hegel, it is important to notice in Hegel’s thought the inter-relationship of the Infinite Geist and finite human history.

Hegel’s logical dialectic provided his description of how speculative philosophy may grasp the expression of Geist in a process in which apparent conceptual oppositions are

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overcome and a higher unity is achieved. Hegel constantly asserts that one idea passes over into its apparent opposite, so that the two are no longer distinct. For example he argues that the concept of the finite must imply the Infinite, and the Infinite takes up and includes within itself the concept of the finite.  

Scruton observes that “it often seems that the whole of Hegelian metaphysics points towards a logical and historical interpretation at once”. Pannenberg develops this aspect of Hegel’s thought. He is concerned to show that the “Idea of God” is indispensable, but can only be understood historically. He follows Hegel, uniting the logical, metaphysical and historical. Pannenberg asserts that truth is universal, what he calls “constant and united”. Yet he is aware of the “historicity [sic] of truth”, with its apparent variation through history and across cultures. He claims that in the modern era the “unity of truth can now only be thought of as the history of truth, meaning in effect that truth itself has a history and that its essence is the process of this history”. Not surprisingly, at this point Pannenberg praises Hegel’s thought, with its historical dialectic, “as the most significant attempt at a solution to this problem”.  

Pannenberg’s objection to Hegel at this point is not that his view is pantheistic; in Pannenberg’s opinion this is not the case. Rather, his concern is that “the horizon of the future is lost in Hegel’s thought”. Pannenberg argues that without an eschatology, Hegel’s dialectic is not able to include all truth and fails to take into account the genuine contingency of events. He claims that Hegel fails to do full justice to divine or human freedom. From this point, Pannenberg appeals to the “proleptic revelation of God in Jesus Christ” as the way in which the true unity of historical truth can come to light. This claim, sketched out in “What is Truth?”, is developed fully in *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, and in that anticipation plays a crucial role.

158 “What is Truth?” 20.
159 “What is Truth?”, 20-21.
160 “The Significance of Christianity”, 160-74, defends Hegel against the charge of pantheism.
d) **Ernst Bloch (1885 –1977)**

One further thinker deserves note as a possible influence on Pannenberg. Ernst Bloch, the German Marxist philosopher, stands firmly in the atheistic tradition rejecting the idea of a “God-hypostasis”. Yet he takes an Aristotelian view of the material world, holding that it is being-in-possibility and that it and human history have an eschatology, “a promise of ultimate redemption”.⁶⁴ Bloch expresses this in his typically aphoristic style: “the world-process itself is a utopian function, with the matter of the objectively possible as its substance.”⁶⁵ Human consciousness expresses this eschatology through its orientation toward hope, and this hope drives human involvement in the historical process.

Pannenberg praises Bloch’s recognition of the importance of the future and comments that he “has taught us about the overwhelming power of the still-open future and of the hope that reaches out to it in anticipation for not only the life and thought of man but in addition for the ontological uniqueness of everything in reality”.⁶⁶ Yet he insists that Bloch’s emphasis on futurity requires a theological grounding. Pannenberg argues that Bloch’s atheism may be accepted to the extent that he is rejecting a transcendent God who is conceived as a thing-at-hand, but proposes a different view of God based on the biblical presentation.

He exists only in the way in which the future is powerful over the present, because the future decides what will emerge out of what exists in the present. As the power of the future, God is no thing, no object presently at hand, which man could detach himself from and pass over.⁶⁷

Pannenberg claims that in this conception of God, divine omnipotence does not destroy human freedom. He also comments that Bloch rejects the idea of a creator-God because it rests on a mythological view of creation rather than being oriented to the future.

Pannenberg claims that theology can rethink its view of God so that it is eschatological,

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⁶⁶ Pannenberg, “The God of Hope”, in *BQT* 2, 238.
not mythological. He also notes that such a view would not rule out thinking of God as eternal or as present to the world.\(^{168}\) Pannenberg’s response to Bloch is replete with themes that are developed in depth in his metaphysical proposal and in the doctrine of God in his *Systematic Theology*.

To what extent Bloch was an influence on Pannenberg is a matter of dispute among commentators. Polk suggests that Bloch provides Pannenberg with the idea of the primacy of the future, however Pannenberg himself says that Bloch has not been a major influence.\(^{169}\) The suggestion, which seems most likely is that Pannenberg was already developing his proposal for an eschatological approach to history, metaphysics and God, when he found a “provocative confluence” in Bloch’s thought which assisted him to articulate his position.\(^{170}\) Whatever may be the situation regarding Bloch’s influence, Pannenberg’s response to him illustrates the consistent finding of this chapter: Pannenberg responds to philosophical atheism by accepting much of the historicist account but arguing that such an account, once analysed, proves to be open to, and to require, a theological understanding in which the future is determinative for reality. On this basis, Pannenberg argues, the truth of the idea of God can be provisionally affirmed. The critique of metaphysics is affirmed and transcended in a reconfigured Christian theology. Central to this approach is his metaphysical proposal that involves an appeal to anticipation.

### The relational turn

Shults identifies the ‘relational turn’ in philosophy as providing Pannenberg’s philosophical setting.\(^{171}\) This summarises an important aspect of the material surveyed

\(^{168}\) “The God of Hope”, 243-44.  
in this chapter. Shults traces “a slow but revolutionary shift in the understanding and use of [the Aristotelian] categories” which began in the early modern science of the Renaissance and led eventually to the demise of substantialist metaphysics. Hegel is the most significant thinker in the ‘turn’. Dilthey and Heidegger share the view that relations, rather than substance, determine being (though the term identity is a better one in their case). In order to clarify some of the assumptions which shape Pannenberg’s approach, this section presents the ‘relational turn’ analytically, rather than historically.

Diagram A illustrates the two views. In the classic view (1. and 2.), two substances (A and B) standing in a relation are, in most cases, understood to have accidental relations, one attributed to each substance (AB is an accident of A and BA is an accident of B). Wagner explains that classical philosophy focussed on a limited number of relations as internal relations (i.e. as essential to an object) “one says that a bears an internal relation, R, to b provided a’s standing in R to b is an essential property to a; otherwise a bears an external relation to b”. A parent’s relation to a child is an example of an internal relation; for without that relation the parent would not be a parent. Philosophy recognised the ontological importance of a limited number of relations as ‘one-place’ properties, but held that most relations were external. In the diagram AB and BA are external relations. When they are interrupted in 2. A and B retain their essence.

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172 Shults, Reforming Theological Anthropology, 16-22.  
173 Shults, Reforming Theological Anthropology, 22-25.
In modern thought “relations are indispensable to modern logic and semantics [and] their inferiority to one-place properties can no longer be seriously entertained”. In the modern view there is one relation (AB/BA) and the two objects are defined in their relation to each other. In this view the identity of a parent can only be analysed in the
light of all their relations, not simply one ‘essential’ relation to a child.\textsuperscript{174} This means that identities, whether of objects, persons, or anything else, are constantly changing and developing since external relations inevitably change. If the relation is interrupted then A. and B. will have a different identity (C. and D.). After the relational turn there can no longer be an account of reality that appeals to unchanging essence; rather, it must refer to changing identity, the result is that reality is viewed as fragmented and shifting.

Pannenberg recognises the relational turn and explains that “instead of being the accident of a substance, ordered to the substance, the concept of relation is now above that of substance”.\textsuperscript{175} This turn presents a challenge to theology that has largely drawn on classic ontology and has understood God in terms of unchanging internal relations in terms of ‘aseity’ and ‘simplicity’.\textsuperscript{176} Pannenberg claims that theology can and must revise its idea of God in response to this new view, without abandoning divine transcendence.\textsuperscript{177}

\textit{Conclusion}

\quad a) \textit{The end of metaphysics}

Pannenberg confronts the “end of metaphysics”—the rise of intellectual atheism and the accompanying demise of metaphysics. Dilthey and Heidegger are, for Pannenberg, the most significant advocates of the end of metaphysics. The end of metaphysics has become so pervasive in Western philosophy that it can be described as a postmetaphysical consensus. Wrathall reports, “Most contemporary thinkers agree with

\textsuperscript{174} Steven J. Wagner, “Relation”, \textit{CDP}, 789.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{ST} 1, 365-66. \textit{ST} 1, 367, traces the antecedents of this view to Descartes and classic physics with its geometric description of nature. It was expressed clearly by Kant for whom the relation of ‘substance and accident’ is a subspecies of the category of ‘relation’, and developed by Hegel for whom essence was constituted in ‘self-relation’ to the other.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{ST} 1, 367, states that “the divine essence can no longer be thought of as an unrelated identity outside the world”. Grenz, “Pannenberg and Evangelical Theology”, 284, states that “Pannenberg ... attempts to bring the idea of relation into the concept of God”.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{ST} 1, 367, explains that theology has no choice but to take this path: “It cannot escape this challenge if it is to remain in intellectual dialogue with modern criticism of the traditional doctrine of God and with atheism, and if it is not to fall back upon loose symbolical language in its statements about God”.

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[Nietzsche] that the metaphysical understanding of God is no longer believable”.[178] The postmetaphysical consensus is not an ephemeral intellectual trend. The roots of the rejection of metaphysics are deep in the Western tradition. This highlights the magnitude of the challenge Pannenberg faces.

Wrathall claims that the end of metaphysics provides new possibilities for religious understanding. Pannenberg partially agrees with this point of view, conceding that there are ways in which the end of metaphysics has been a valid philosophical criticism of Christian belief. Yet Pannenberg’s perspective on the end of metaphysics is quite different to that of recent postmetaphysical theology. Postmetaphysical theology accepts the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology and articulates a theology that acknowledges “the sense in which our ignorance of God … could well signal God's most overwhelming presence”. [179] Pannenberg’s response to the emptiness of the idea of God in the modern world is that “if the word ['God'] is like blank face to us, it reminds us by its very strangeness of the lack of meaning in modern life, in which the theme of life’s unity and totality is missing and the wholeness of human existence has become an unanswered question”. [180] For Pannenberg, if the idea of God is empty, then this must be met with an attempt to understand it in anticipation of God’s eschatological revelation. Similarly, Pannenberg has no place for a view of self-revelation of God in which his love “is exercised primordially through the paternal distance wherein separation alone allows for filial relation”. [181] Chapter 2 has shown that this is not Pannenberg’s account of revelation. Chapter 8, which deals with Pannenberg’s doctrine of God, will show the extent of this difference.

Pannenberg seeks to re-establish a metaphysical account that would stand with

[180] ST 1, 71.
Christian belief. In order to undertake his theological project, he must provide a metaphysical proposal that deals with Cartesian scepticism and the Kantian critique, as well as answering the criticisms of Feuerbach and Nietzsche and incorporating the historicism of Dilthey and Heidegger and the findings of contemporary natural sciences. This chapter has noted some of the ways in which Pannenberg offers a preliminary response to these challenges. The following chapter will lay out Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal as a whole.

b) RELATIONAL METAPHYSICS

Pannenberg seeks to re-establish metaphysics, and hence the idea of God, by engaging with philosophy after the relational turn, rather than seeking to return to substantialist metaphysics. He seeks a way of approaching metaphysics that starts with history, not a supra-historical realm.\(^{182}\) According to Shults, “Pannenberg has thematized this relationality in a more radical way than most theologians and embraced it as the basic principle of his method, so that it is folded into and illuminates all aspects of his theological presentation”.\(^{183}\)

Pannenberg accepts the historicist critique of theology and metaphysics, and then argues that the very concept under examination implies not only metaphysics, but also the reality of God. Anticipation emerges as the key to Pannenberg’s response to the ‘end of metaphysics’. It is a relational concept, because it refers to the way in which identities change due to the unfolding of history. Pannenberg uses the motif of anticipation to claim that, although true identity comes about in the end, it is present proleptically during the process. Chapter 4 will examine how Pannenberg develops a constructive metaphysical proposal that serves theology after the relational turn in philosophy.

182 Mostert, God and the Future, 3, explains that “in the wake of the breakdown of classical metaphysical assumptions, speaking plausibly about God is far from simple. In Pannenberg’s view, nothing less than a new understanding of reality—a new metaphysics—is required for this task”. Mostert shows that ‘temporality’ is the major challenge to Pannenberg’s desire to present an “ontology of the whole” (69-75).
183 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 96-97.
c) **Pannenberg and Postmodernity**

Modernity may be viewed as the triumph of Kantian epistemology, which seemed to deliver natural science a sure basis on which to proceed. Postmodernity is the breakdown of the Kantian hegemony. Kantian claims, which lodge the unity of the cosmos in human subjectivity, are dismissed in postmodernism, because the criteria Kant takes as axioms are themselves historically relative. For postmodernism reality is constantly open to reinterpretation.

Pannenberg interacts very little with fully developed postmodernism but he engages with its historical roots. He develops his thought in dialogue with thinkers who led the assault on Kantian confidence, especially Dilthey and Heidegger. Both held that reality is constituted by history and rejected any transcendent metaphysic. Pannenberg takes the demand for historicity with full seriousness, while insisting that abandoning metaphysics *in toto* would mean that Christian truth claims (and all truth claims) become meaningless. In addressing the roots of postmodernity, and offering a response which seeks to take into account some of its critique of modernity, Pannenberg suggests a path for Christian theology in its response to postmodernism. Pannenberg’s approach may be fruitfully compared with that of Radical Orthodoxy.

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184 Thomas E. Wartenberg, “Reason and the Practice of Science” in *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, 228, argues that the common perception of Kant’s thought “as an attempt to provide the metaphysical foundations for Newtonian science” needs to be adjusted since Kant “advocates a more empirically minded philosophy of science than could be anticipated from his views on Newtonian physics”. This does not negate the general point that Kant provided a significant basis for the science which came to characterise modernity.

185 Bernd Magnus, “Postmodern”, *CDP*, 725, offers a description: “Postmodern philosophy is therefore usefully regarded as a complex cluster concept that includes … : an anti (or post-) epistemological standpoint, anti-essentialism; anti-realism; anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendent arguments and transcendentental standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation; rejection of truth as correspondence to reality; rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions; rejection of final vocabularies i.e. rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions that are thought to be unconditionally binding for all times, persons and places; and a suspicion of grand narratives, meta-narratives of the sort perhaps best illustrated by dialectical materialism”.

Orthodoxy the view that postmetaphysical Christian theology is not viable; theology requires a metaphysic. He also agrees that the demise of a metaphysic which will sustain Christian theology may be traced back to the beginning of modernity (though Pannenberg tends to identify this with Descartes rather than with Scotus). However he takes a different direction to Radical Orthodoxy about the proper response. Radical Orthodoxy proposes a return to a Platonic or Neoplatonic metaphysic. Pannenberg draws on the Platonic heritage, as the next chapter will show, but proposes a new metaphysic, one decisively shaped by the relational turn. The conclusion of this thesis will examine how his project suggests directions for a response to postmodernity.

Chapter 4  Anticipation and Pannenberg’s Metaphysical Proposal

Introduction

Pannenberg’s project requires him to explain how it is possible to affirm the truth of a transcendent God, who is the reality which determines all other reality, when philosophical reflection has come to view reality as fragmented and shifting. Pannenberg seeks to show the coherence of Christian claims by appealing to eschatological revelation as the point at which reality finds its unity. His claim is that such an appeal is possible because there are, in the present, anticipations of the final revelation. Chapter 3 has shown that, for Pannenberg, anticipation is also an element of his metaphysical proposal in response to the “end of metaphysics”.

This chapter presents Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal. It begins by identifying the criteria that Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal has to meet. It then traces his presentation of the proposal. The discussion of the metaphysical proposal also brings to the fore Pannenberg’s view of the relationship of time and eternity. The examination of Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal makes it possible to give a full definition of anticipation. The chapter concludes with a review of some criticisms which have been made of Pannenberg’s use of anticipation and a discussion of how Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal may be assessed.

The criteria for Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal

Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal must meet several criteria which can be identified in his discussion of the end of metaphysics. He does not gather these into a list, but each is either identified explicitly by Pannenberg or is a clear implication of his thinking. None of these criteria is independent of the others and indeed each could be viewed as the implication of others in the list, yet each is sufficiently distinct that it deserves separate treatment.
a) Anthropologically valid

One criteria Pannenberg has for metaphysics is that any proposal will have to be validated by anthropology. He often refers to modern subjectivist epistemologies that conceive of the human mind as that which determines truth.\(^1\) Although critical of such views, he accepts that they make an important point: that an idea of God must illuminate human experience. The relation between metaphysics and anthropology is so close that the question of atheism can be framed as an anthropological one: “the first and fundamental choice between theology and atheism in fact lies in the understanding of man”.\(^2\) Any metaphysical proposal must be consonant with and make intelligible human experience.

Pannenberg rejects deterministic views and holds that any metaphysic must give a proper account of human freedom.\(^3\) He argues that Christian theology has never successfully dealt with the conflict between “the contingency of historical experience, and particularly of human freedom … and the idea of divine providence and predestination” because traditional accounts of God’s omnipotence and omniscience have deterministic implications.\(^4\) Freedom is established by historical contingency, so a metaphysic which deals with contingency will offer a better account of human freedom. Pannenberg does not, however, hold that freedom consists of simply acting in a contingent history, for his full account of freedom involves humanity reaching the destiny of fellowship with God.\(^5\) He therefore seeks a presentation of God in which he is “the origin of freedom” in being the goal of human life.\(^6\)

b) Asserting universality

Pannenberg holds that a convincing metaphysical proposal must be universal; it must

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\(^1\) e.g. “What is Truth?” BQT 2, 12-16.
\(^2\) “Speaking about God”, 106. The phrase “the understanding of man” is an objective genitive.
\(^3\) See ST 3, 444-45, for his critical discussion of “Augustinian determinism” which makes God seem “unjust and cruel” and is “a repulsive distortion of the biblical concept of the righteousness of God”.
\(^4\) “Speaking about God”, 108-10. See also ATP, 506 and Grenz, Reason, 140-41.
\(^5\) ST 2, 218-31 and see the discussion of “formal freedom” in (258-60) and Grenz, Reason, 133-34.

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show how God is related to all reality: “the final tenability of any idea of God which is put forward depends … upon the understanding of the world, that is, upon how far the God who is asserted is comprehensible as the reality which determines everything”.

Mostert discusses Pannenberg’s commitment to an “ontology of the whole”, stressing that this stems from both Pannenberg’s theological and philosophical convictions. Mostert observes that for Pannenberg philosophy cannot consistently avoid considering the totality of reality, since it is presupposed by any particular experience; and theology cannot avoid the same idea as the correlate of understanding God as the ‘all-determining reality’.

In one sense, to insist that a metaphysic be universal is a truism, for an account “of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality” must be universal. The point Pannenberg is making is that, though the possibility of such an account has been denied, if theology is going to speak of a God who determines all reality then it must have an account of the existence of the whole.

c) Allowing for historicity

Pannenberg’s anthropological concerns mean that any metaphysic must take historicity as a basic category. Pannenberg makes this point emphatically in the concluding chapter of *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*.

Human life, whether it is the life span of the individual or the larger story of peoples and states, takes concrete form in history … History is the *principium individuationis* (“principle of individuation”) in the life both of individuals and of peoples and cultures … of all the disciplines that have the human being as their subject, the science of history and historiography come closest to grasping human reality as it is experienced.

Pannenberg insists that philosophical reflection must take account of the unfolding of a life, and the complex of lives which are interrelated, as this takes place across history. He finds a weakness on just this point in the atheistic tradition. It stresses the historicity of human life, yet it cannot adequately answer the question of whether humans are

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7 “Speaking about God”, 107.
10 *ATP*, 485.
“constituted prior to history” and create history, or if the historical process creates them. He claims that only a theological perspective can answer this question by providing an understanding of God who is the goal of history and who co-operates with his human creatures.  

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\[d)\] **Meaning in reality**

Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal must offer both a view of reality which includes both universality and a historicity. This dual stress reflects the view of meaning Pannenberg draws from Dilthey, which is that meaning comes from the relationship which a part has to its corresponding whole. So a search for meaning is equally interested in the particular and the universal. In contrast, explanation offered by a nomothetic approach takes the particular as an instance of a general law.  

\[13\] Pannenberg treats understanding and explanation as complementary moves in which each assumes the other. However, he concludes, “understanding does not always presuppose an explanation”. This is because “understanding” transcends an “explicit frame of reference” (such as a particular physical theory). In understanding, the interpreter reaches a point in which he or she perceives how a particular fits into the whole, and in this case “the semantic horizon of this basic understanding fades into the indefinite distance”.  

\[14\] The particular is no longer referred to a general law but is understood in the light of “all reality”, even though this cannot be fully articulated.

In assuming that reality may be understood in this way, Pannenberg is standing apart from Kant and with Hegel. Kant recognises the need for human reason to discover a unity in the experience of diversity, but holds that this could not be reached from empirical experience. In contrast, Pannenberg seeks to show that the universe is

\[13\] *TPS*, 137, explains that “understanding takes place by establishing a system, and that system is an individual, ‘open’ and autonomous one, but not a universal under which the particular is to be subsumed”. Shults, *Postfoundationalist*, 70, describes the distinction as follows: “explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations”.

\[14\] *TPS*, 153-34. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 331, summarises Pannenberg’s claims that it is possible to have a “unitary theory of knowledge in which hermeneutical understanding and scientific explanation belong together”.

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meaningful and that this meaning is not grounded on human perception but in the world as it is in itself. Hegel argues that Kant’s view would mean that reason was a source of delusion.\textsuperscript{15} Hegel’s response is that the cosmos could be understood as a whole through the use of concepts in the dynamic logic of understanding found in history. He holds that “logic is true to the world” and “is the essential structure, now made self-conscious, of all the world actually does”.\textsuperscript{16} Pannenberg agrees, though he holds that the claim can only be made in anticipation.

e) Allowing for incompleteness

Related to the historicity of human experience is its incompleteness. As Mostert observes in his account of Pannenberg’s ontology, “the major problem with the idea of ‘reality as a whole’ lies in its implied completeness and closedness”.\textsuperscript{17} Pannenberg argues that traditional metaphysics does not deal with this aspect satisfactorily. This is a feature which both Dilthey and Heidegger identify and one to which Pannenberg often refers. For example, he writes: “the formative process that is history remains incomplete in every historical present”.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast to traditional metaphysics, Pannenberg states that “since reality is still in process, still open, our experience of reality is always at any given moment necessarily incomplete”.\textsuperscript{19} He rejects the atomism of a Process philosophy account of incompleteness and offers his own proposal as one that allows for incompleteness without abandoning the view of the whole required for a rational understanding of the universe. This criterion provides one reason why Pannenberg cannot accept Hegel’s metaphysic, since Hegel’s thought had no eschatological horizon.

\textit{Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal}

Pannenberg offers the fullest exposition of his reworked metaphysic in the first five

\textsuperscript{15} See \textit{MIG}, 22.
\textsuperscript{17} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 69.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{ATP}, 515.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{TPS}, 68.
chapters of *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, which were originally a lecture series.\(^{20}\) After presenting the problem of the end of metaphysics, the chapters give an extended argument for, and exposition of, Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal. Each chapter deals with a major question suggested by the criteria listed above. In the conclusion of each step of the argument Pannenberg appeals to Christian theology. He does so, not because his philosophical reflections have proved the theological claims, but because the claims meet the demands laid out by philosophical criticism.

\textit{a) The Absolute}

The postmetaphysical consensus excludes knowledge of any metaphysical Absolute or, to use Pannenberg’s parallel term, the Infinite. It focuses entirely on the finite, empirical world and insists on methodological atheism.\(^{21}\) He argues that a systematic exclusion of any transcendent perspective precludes viewing reality as a unified whole, but that a proper consideration of finite existence leads to the development of a transcendent perspective. At the conclusion of the discussion of the Absolute, Pannenberg states that

\begin{quote}

it is for the sake of … the task of achieving a comprehensive interpretation of the finite world that metaphysics attempts to rise above the multiplicity of the finite toward the idea of the One, a One that grounds the unity of the world and provides the unifying context for the multitude of things within the world.\(^{22}\)
\end{quote}

Kant recognises that human reason posits a unity, but holds that such unity cannot be demonstrated. Kant’s objection that human knowledge can never demonstrate the unity which it posits provides the major challenge for Pannenberg’s affirmation of the Absolute.\(^{23}\) Pannenberg’s argument, adapted from Hegel, is that the concept of all finite objects in general must imply the Infinite, at least by connotation, and that conversely the notion of ‘all reality’ is the condition for the grasping of individual objects. Pannenberg's argument is that the thought of a finite object implies other finite objects because ontologically the finite is limited in space and time, and in perception it is

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\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{20}\) MIG, vii.
\item \(^{21}\) MIG, 22.
\item \(^{22}\) MIG, 42.
\item \(^{23}\) MIG, 22.
\end{itemize}
differentiated from other objects. Thus if one can conceptualise a finite object, then there must be other objects by which this object is limited and from which it is differentiated. In turn, the concept of all finite objects together implies the Infinite, for if a group of objects is to be grasped as finite then the group must be seen against other objects which limit it. However when the group of objects consists of all finite objects, then only the Infinite can stand over against it. In making his point, Pannenberg appeals to Hegel’s claim that “whenever we think of a border, we have always thought at the same time of a something that lies beyond the border, however vaguely”. 24

Pannenberg does not contend that this argument provides a clear conception of the Infinite, but rather states that the idea is intuited and is unthematised. In this he appeals to Schleiermacher, for whom religious consciousness is the awareness of the implied Infinite. 25 Surprisingly, he also appeals to Descartes, who at points in his Meditations allows that not only is knowledge of God an implication of self-knowledge, but that “the conception of the individual ego already presupposes that of the Infinite”. 26 Descartes’ primary argument for the existence of God is on the basis of self-awareness. However, he also acknowledged that his own self-awareness already implied a notion of the infinite God. Pannenberg recognises that Descartes does not give the unthematised awareness of the Infinite the place that Pannenberg himself does, but he can at least find a resemblance to his approach in Cartesian thought. For Pannenberg, Kant’s claim that it is not possible to give a coherent account of the Infinite or to understand God as the Infinite “casts the entire position of transcendental subjectivism into a rather dubious light”. 27 By this Pannenberg means that Kant’s project of grounding all knowledge in the thinking subject does not render the cosmos intelligible and so fails to meet the criteria of rationality. Pannenberg’s conclusion is that the inadequacy of Kant’s approach justifies a return to “the pre-Kantian discussion”, a return that re-examines Descartes’ treatment and from that finds new ways to develop a metaphysic. 28

24 MIG, 24-25.
25 MIG, 25.
27 MIG, 33.
28 MIG, 28-33.
Pannenberg asserts that the Infinite is not a mathematical infinite, but the “concept of an actual Infinite”, as found in Christian thought. He acknowledges that Fitche’s objection to the idea of a God who is personal and infinite is a challenge to relating the Christian idea to the philosophical.\(^\text{29}\) So he must establish both that the idea of the Infinite is not mathematical and that the idea of an infinite personal God is coherent. He returns to the Hegelian argument that the Infinite is the basis of the perception of the finite, and not simply the unfinished mathematical aggregation of the finite. As such, the Infinite must, in turn, be that which relies on nothing else. So Pannenberg identifies the Infinite with the Absolute as “all-sufficient”\(^\text{30}\). He adopts a further conclusion from Hegel, which enriches the concept of the ‘actual infinite’ as that on which all other reality relies. He argues that if the Infinite is to be genuinely unlimited, then it cannot be simply opposed to the finite; rather it must also include the finite within it. It must be both “transcendent” and “immanent”, producing and embracing all finite reality. So a further criterion for a valid concept of the Infinite can be established.

Pannenberg has, at this point in the argument, established that the idea of the Infinite is necessary for the conception of the world of finite existence and that this approaches the Christian idea of God quite closely. Yet, with Hegel, Pannenberg admits that the arguments do not bridge the gap between “the idea of the infinite” and “the idea of an existing being”\(^\text{31}\). He critiques Hegel’s use of Geist to give content to the idea of the Infinite, arguing that it is open to Feuerbach’s suspicion as a “hypostatisation of human self-consciousness”. He claims that Hegel’s doctrine of the Trinity, understood as “the self-differentiating acts of a single divine subject”, was fundamentally Unitarian and hence unable to fully integrate the concept of the Absolute and its unity with all else. Pannenberg argues that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity which recognises the reciprocity of intra-Trinitarian relations meets the requirement of speaking of a reality which is all-sufficient and both “transcendent” and “immanent”\(^\text{32}\). He argues that Feuerbach’s criticism does not negate this doctrine because it is not based in human

\(^{29}\) MIG, 34.  
\(^{30}\) MIG, 35-36.  
\(^{31}\) MIG, 37. Pannenberg considers that the cosmological argument for the existence of God cannot bridge the gap either.  
\(^{32}\) MIG, 39-41.
psychology but in the historical events of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. His appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity is an example of philosophical reflection performing the critical function Pannenberg ascribes to it: showing what a proper conception of God must include but also revealing its own need for “religion” to provide the material with which it will work.

What has Pannenberg achieved at the conclusion of this stage of his metaphysical proposal? He has shown that if the world is to be understood, it requires the idea of a true Infinite which is the basis and origin of all reality and is, in turn, not dependent on anything else but is both transcendent and immanent. He has argued that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity meets these criteria. So he has begun to provide a new way of conceiving of the Infinite as the triune God. However, he has not yet addressed those criteria that particularly relate to human experience.

b) Self-consciousness

When Pannenberg turns to anthropological themes he faces the question of the existence of ‘the soul’, the existence of which has been widely denied in Western thought since Hume. Kant, by contrast, gives the human soul, as self-consciousness, a constitutive role in a unified reality when he argues that the unity of the world is realised in human perception, and that therefore the “unity of the ego” is the condition for the synthesis of many intuitions into a unity. Pannenberg argues that it proves impossible to develop “the idea of God” on the basis of such a view, since it does not allow God to precede the subject of consciousness and so does not conceptualise God as Absolute. According to Pannenberg, this conclusion leads to Feuerbach’s criticism of theism and to later atheistic thought. So Pannenberg must show how the idea of the soul is sustainable, without making it constitutive for reality. He must also show, against Feuerbach, that “the Spirit of which Hegel spoke is more than self-consciousness”, and to do this “we must presuppose that the content of our awareness

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33 MIG, 43-46. Pannenberg traces this view in the thinking of Fichte and Hegel after Kant.
34 MIG, 46, concludes, on the basis of the assessment of the line of development of thought which bases the perception of unity in human subjectivity, that “the step from Hegel to Feuerbach would appear to be the inevitable result of thinking the Idealist position through to its end in a consistent matter”.

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of objects is not reducible to the self-consciousness that represents itself in them".\(^{35}\)

In order to show that human self-consciousness is not self-positing, Pannenberg first seeks to establish that “the consciousness of objects is, in principle, independent from self-consciousness”. His argument is empirical, drawing on a wide range of thinkers. He takes up the ideas of thinkers such as Hume, Locke, James, Mead, Freud, Erikson and Bergson, all of whom are sceptical about the notion of a metaphysical soul. He uses their arguments to build the case that perception of the world (as a unified world) is not grounded in the consciousness of the self, but rather “the ego’s unity is mediated through the experience of the world”.\(^ {36}\) Pannenberg finds two stages in the development of human self-consciousness: awareness of self arises in the framework of experience of the world, then this awareness of self allows the memory to grasp the “I” as a constant which continues through time. Appealing to observations about human development, Pannenberg also argues that the experience of the world is mediated by a cultural context which does not rest on individual subjectivity. Having established that self-consciousness cannot be treated as the basis for knowledge of the world, he explains the aspect of Kant’s approach which he considers valid: that the capacity to integrate and refine knowledge depends upon self-knowledge.\(^ {37}\) So he denies Kant’s claim that the unity of reality is based in human self-consciousness but grants the claim that modern empirical-scientific knowledge with its discursive method relies on self-consciousness.

Having both critiqued and affirmed the Kantian axiom, Pannenberg describes what he takes to be the “boundaries” of Kant’s view. Each of these relates to the fact that self-consciousness is not a prior given but develops through experience of the world, and thus identity, which is mediated by self-consciousness, also develops through time, both in an individual life and in a wider cultural history. Pannenberg then takes a cultural-historical view of the development of human subjectivity and finds that it cannot be explained simply in terms of social interaction. Rather, a full explanation must “ascend

\(^{35}\) MIG, 46.

\(^{36}\) MIG, 47-53, quote from p. 53. The details of this developmental argument are presented more fully in ATP, 179-224.

\(^{37}\) MIG, 56.
above the context of society”. Kant’s view is too individualist and must be developed beyond its boundaries to include a social and metaphysical account of human self-consciousness. Grounding the rise of self-consciousness in awareness of the Absolute explains “the roots of a society’s cultural identity, the constitution of individual subjectivity, and the individual’s ability occasionally to turn against society out of motives that need not be solely egotistical”.

Pannenberg’s consideration of the anthropological question of the identity of self-perception converges with the views of theistic metaphysics.

The metaphysics of Absolute I am proposing would not merely attempt, on the grounds of subjectivity, to reconstrue the constitution of the subject through some source in the Absolute that precedes it. Instead, it would carry out the 'rising above' toward the idea of the Absolute from a starting point which encompasses worldly experience, self-consciousness and their reciprocal mediation.

Pannenberg seeks to show that there is a concept of the Absolute which can be genuinely presented as “the source and goal of finite subjectivity” allowing anthropological insights, to some extent, to condition the idea of God. To further this he examines the phenomenon of self-preservation. On the one hand, he rules out a view that thinks of the individual’s self-preservation as the only factor in preservation. On the other hand, he accepts that self-conscious beings must be involved in their own preservation, and can not simply have continued existence “imposed”. So if God is the preserving Creator, the work of preservation must be conceived in such a way that the creature has a certain independence. This claim allows Pannenberg’s account to include contingency and is “opposed to all viewpoints that judge the independent existence of the finite to be mere appearance”. Pannenberg claims that Christian eschatology meets this criterion, for it asserts the rescue and sustaining of individual humans, who come into eternal fellowship with God, without subsuming their creaturely identity into the divine being.

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38 MIG, 61.
39 MIG, 62.
40 MIG, 63-64, follows Dieter Henrich arguing that the idea of the need for preservation (even self-preservation) implies a dependence on a more general preservation.
41 MIG, 65.
From the line of argument outlined here, Pannenberg concludes that the idea of human subjectivity is not inimical to Christianity; indeed he argues that it has Christian roots. It is only when the self is conceptualised in total independence to God that the emphasis on subjectivity comes into opposition to Christian thought. He draws on his lengthy discussion of the issue to assert that, in fact, such a conceptualisation “cannot be successful”. One attempt to think from such claimed independence is when “the concept of action” is used as a basis for anthropology. Pannenberg includes in this description any philosophical anthropology that sees humans as beings who makes themselves through their own actions. The failure of such views is that they do not acknowledge that there is a subject which is presupposed by the idea of action, because an action requires choosing ends and means. On the other hand, the assertion of the existence of a subject who is able to make a choice of ends requires a capacity to exist through time. So subjects develop through time and yet have a stable identity. A metaphysic must account for how “we know or feel ourselves to be identical with ourselves”, so that in the present we are “everything that we were [in the past] and will be in the future.” This time-bridging unity is, Pannenberg suggests, “appropriately described only as participation in eternity”. Thus he begins to examine directly the temporality or historicity of human experience of the world.

c) Being and time

Pannenberg takes up the question of the relationship of being and time by reviewing the ancient roots of the discussion. He summaries the way in which Plato, and even Aristotle, held to the view that there is “a distinction between real being (and unchanging identity) and the realm of becoming and passing away”. For Plato the distinction was between two realms while for Aristotle it was between attributes and underlying essential forms. Pannenberg explains that Process philosophy offers an alternative to the classical view, but he concludes that this fails since it cannot offer an

42 MIG, 66.
43 ATP, 71, and see Pannenberg’s discussion of Gehlen (39-40) and in relation to speech-act theory (361-76).
44 MIG, 68.
adequate explanation of the unity of the many elementary events. He traces a parallel pattern in Heidegger’s thoroughly temporal view that the totality of life, which is never completed within the history of a life, serves as the basis for the meaning of all individual experiences, and that this meaning therefore changes over the course of a life history.

Pannenberg responds to Heidegger’s position in a way which supports a theistic metaphysics. He finds resources for this in Neo-Platonic thought and its Christian adoption. Pannenberg observes that Plotinus viewed time as grounded in eternity and took eternity to be the “whole of life” existing “in simultaneity” in the to hon and the emanating nous. In these hypostases there were no distinctions and no time. For Plotinus, psyche (world soul) has fallen from eternity and as a result experiences life in time, as the moments of life are separated. Yet psyche still participates in the eternal nous, since it is the logos of the nous. But psyche does not possess life as a whole, rather it strives for a future unity of the whole. Pannenberg summarises Plotinus’ view as: “the whole is present only in the sense that it hovers over the parts as the future whole”. He points out that “Plotinus … first maintained the primacy of the future in the understanding of time”, and this was a primacy grounded “in the fact that the totality of existence is possible only from the standpoint of its future”. Plotinus’ approach includes temporality and relates this to a universal concept which allows, or at least seems to strive for, a grasp of the whole. So his thought touches on several of Pannenberg’s criteria for a metaphysical proposal. Most importantly, Pannenberg can point to Plotinus’ emphasis on the future as the point in which a present unity of experience is grounded. However it seems that Plotinus’ future is infinitely removed.

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45 MIG, 72. See also the fuller examination of Process thought in pp. 113-29.
46 MIG, 71-75.
47 Diogenes Allen, Philosophy for Understanding Theology (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 78, explains Plotinus’ view that “each level of reality … is represented at a lower level, but each image of an image is a less powerful logos or formative principle. Reality is an unfolding from the top downward, so to speak, or from maximum unity to increasing multiplicity”. R. T. Wallis, Neoplatonism (London: Duckworth, 1972), 57, explains that “at each stage of his universe the descent into greater multiplicity imposes fresh limits and restrictions, disperses and weakens the power of previous stages, and creates fresh needs requiring the development of facilities previously unnecessary”.
48 MIG, 77-78, quotes Plotinus, Enneads trans. A.H Armstrong, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3.7.11, 343, “Instead of the completed infinite and whole, [there is only] the moment after moment into the infinite; instead of the unitary whole, [only] the partial and always merely future whole”.
Pannenberg judges that Augustine falls short of Plotinus’ conception of time in that he does not recognise the priority of the future. He concedes that Augustine makes a distinctively Christian contribution to the understanding of time with the view that participation in time was not a result of a fall but rather a gift of the eternal Creator, and by offering an analysis of how the soul experiences time. The soul, in Augustine’s thought, is the individual in relation to God, rather being than the world soul. In *Confessions* Augustine offers a famous reflection on the extension of the soul (*distentio animi*) which through its attention, involving memory and expectation, can bridge time.\(^{49}\) According to Pannenberg, the time-bridging function of the soul has significance for metaphysics.\(^{50}\) The experience of memory uniting past and future in the present reflects the fact that “the being of all finite things is of course closely tied to their duration”, and this duration is, like memory, a “limited participation in the divine eternity”.\(^{51}\) Pannenberg combines three ideas—Plotinus’ view of the unity of time lying in the future, Augustine’s positive account of time and eternity, and his view that the soul unites the moments of time because it participates in eternity—to provide a basis from which a theological response to Heidegger can be developed.

Pannenberg contrasts the Neoplatonic conception of time united in eternity with Kant’s view that the united self provides the basis for unity. He finds the same problems in Kant’s view of time as he did in Kant’s treatment of the ego and the Infinite: the awareness of time must be based in a primordial intuition of the Infinite, which is prior to self-awareness. Heidegger also finds the unity of time in the self, but for him the self is constituted through time and its unity is constituted in the forward movement (*Vorlaufen*) to death. (In his exposition of Heidegger on this point, Pannenberg glosses *Vorlaufen* as *Vorgriff*—anticipation.\(^{52}\) He notes that Heidegger’s approach may seem like Augustine’s, in that both conceive of the self as bridging time and making a unity of the separated moments of life, but that there is a profound difference since Augustine

\(^{49}\) Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1991), XI.xx (26), 235, “What is by now evident and clear is that neither future nor past exists, and it is inexact language to speak of three times—past, present and future. Perhaps it would be more exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present and a present of things to come. In the soul there are these three aspect of time, and I do not see them anywhere else”.

\(^{50}\) MIG, 79-82.

\(^{51}\) MIG, 82.

\(^{52}\) MIG, 84.
views the *distentio animi* as a participation in eternity while for Heidegger *Dasein* anticipates death as the final end to a finite life. For Heidegger, anticipation is anticipation of death, it is “the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all”. Pannenberg disputes Heidegger’s claim that *Dasein* reaches a totality through death. Death, in itself, fragments life, and any unity of life lies in a “possible totality of an existence always extended beyond whatever death makes of it”. So Pannenberg argues that if life is going to have a totality this will have to be seen by “another light” and points to religious hopes for life after death as an expression of this need for a different source of totality.

Pannenberg’s discussion of time and being can be summarised in four propositions.

P1. The wholeness of human existence can only be found when life is viewed as participation in eternity.

P2. Human life must be understood as finite and temporal.

P3. Temporality implies the distinction between the settled nature of the past and the contingency of the future.

P4. Since the future offers the possibility of the wholeness of life it has “the leading role in our consciousness of time”.

Together P1. and P2. assert that human life requires a universal context if it is to be meaningful, but that this universality cannot be established in a way that denies that human life is finite. P3 shows that because life is finite, its contingency and incompleteness must be recognised. P4 unites these claims to offer a “perspective” which leads to a central insight for Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal: “the present can be interpreted as participating in the future totality, or as falling short of it”. P4 cannot be asserted on the basis of Heidegger’s view of death, but only on the basis of a hope of life beyond death.

This position may seem to be merely an epistemological claim, since it deals with understanding and interpretation, but Pannenberg is clear that it is also metaphysical,

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54 *MIG*, 83-86.
55 *MIG*, 77.
56 *MIG*, 86.
for the identity of the self is its essence. With this Pannenberg comes to a crucial conclusion: “The essence of a life as a whole is temporal; it depends upon whatever future it is whose coming will bring about the wholeness of this whole … Dasein exists in the mode of anticipation”. 57

Pannenberg argues that this conception of essence applies to all existence.

Everything that exists is what it is only as the anticipation of its future, in which … the wholeness of each being might be established: as long as something is, its end remains before it; still it is what it is always in anticipation of its end and from its end. 58

This new interpretation of essence can be termed Pannenberg’s “temporalised essentialism”. Mostert describes Pannenberg’s metaphysic as differing from classic ‘essentialist’ ontology by the inclusion of temporality and the primacy of the future. 59

So temporalised essentialism is a convenient term for his view. Pannenberg says that he has “something in mind along the lines of Dilthey’s hermeneutic of historical experience … a descriptively demonstrable fact with ontological implications”. 60

d) Concept and anticipation

Pannenberg turns to the task of clarifying his metaphysical proposal and validating it in the context of philosophical discussion. The metaphysical tradition has appealed to “concepts” [Begriffe] and has held that these provide a “definitive foundation” from which conclusions could be drawn by logical necessity. This was challenged implicitly by Hegel’s stress on the historicity of philosophy and explicitly by Dilthey’s rejection of “logicism”. Pannenberg seeks to show that his proposal does not depend on such unchanging concepts but is a “conjectural reconstruction”. 61 He argues that the strength of his proposal is that it treats epistemology and ontology as having a common, historical structure.

In order to make the epistemological point, Pannenberg takes up the theme of the

57 MIG, 86-87.
58 MIG, 88.
59 Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 73-74.
60 ST 2, 303 n.92.
61 MIG, 94.
incompleteness of human understanding. As noted in Chapter 1, he holds that all assertions “have the structure of anticipation” since hypothetical thought “anticipates empirical constellations by means of assertions, which then require confirmation or refutation”. Pasquariello points out the conscious contrast for Pannenberg between his own Vorgriff (anticipation) and Hegel’s Begriff (concept). For Hegel the dialectic was resolved in his own time and standpoint as the ‘concept’, for Pannenberg the process of knowing and being lies open to the future and is now only anticipated. Pannenberg views this anticipatory structure as not only noetic, but also ontological: anticipation is not “external to the content” but is “a form appropriate to its own content”. To justify this claim, he turns explicitly to theology, and two cases in which anticipation has ontological implications: Jesus’ message as an anticipation of the Kingdom of God, and his resurrection as an anticipation of the general resurrection. In both these cases anticipation is more than an announcement that looks to the future, but “the future … is viewed as already and actually having broken into history”. In both cases there is a “presence” (not simply a predication), but there is also a future event that “will reveal the truth about the present”. The explicitly theological orientation of the kingdom and the resurrection may seem to distinguish sharply these theological concepts from others but Pannenberg draws on his previous discussion of being and time to assert that “all created life is … a form of participation in the divine eternity, however weak or limited this participation may be”.

Pannenberg claims that the New Testament conception can provide a missing element for the philosophical discussion.

It is just this … basically apocalyptic characteristic of the ministry of Jesus that, by means of its anticipatory structure, can become the key to solving a fundamental question facing philosophical reflection in the problematic post-Hegelian situation … It is possible to find in the history of Jesus an

62 *MIG*, 94.
64 *MIG*, 95-96. Todd S. LaBute, “The Ontological Motif of Anticipation in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg” *JETS* 37 no. 2 (Jun 1994), 277, observes that “the ideas that are being proposed by Pannenberg are not to be understood as merely on an epistemological basis … he is proposing an ontology that is future oriented”.
65 *MIG*, 97. Boutwell, “Ecclesiology of Wolfhart Pannenberg”, 26, claims that although Pannenberg deals with the content of eschatology “the primary and pervasive function of eschatology within the structure of [his] theology is ontological”. For Pannenberg there is not the dichotomy between the content of eschatology and its ontological function Boutwell’s comment may suggest.
answer to the question of how “the whole” of reality and its meaning can be conceived without compromising the provisionality and historical relativity of all thought, as well as the openness to the future on the part of the thinker who knows himself to be only on the way and not yet at the goal.66

Pannenberg holds that the destiny of the cosmos is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus, and this shapes his metaphysics. Clayton comments that “Pannenberg did not come to a theory of anticipation by reading Hegel or Heidegger … his pivotal systematic principle is meant to express the fundamental structure of the central event of Christianity, the resurrection”.67 Mostert also defends Pannenberg’s claim that “the concept of anticipation … has a ‘strictly theological’ root”.68 Olson refers to the resurrection as the “supreme analogy” of Pannenberg’s metaphysic.69 ‘Analogy’ is not the right word since an analogical relation consists of a similarity between two objects that are in fact in differing categories, while for Pannenberg the resurrection is actual participation in the future of all reality in the kingdom of God.

The view that biblical eschatology is a major source for Pannenberg’s metaphysics is contradicted by Lösel, who describes Pannenberg’s model of religions (in which he has shown anticipation is a key element) as “a ‘joint venture’ of theological Hegelianism and religious Darwinism”, and by Molnar, who views it as a direct adaptation from Heidegger.70 Against Lösel and Molnar it should be noted that when Pannenberg sharply differentiates his view from those of Hegel and Heidegger, he does so in order to develop a position which reflects a Christian eschatology. The same observation can be made about his points of differentiation from Plotinus, Dilthey and even Augustine. The claim that Pannenberg’s sources are primarily theological finds a reverse confirmation when he is criticised, from the perspective of process theology, by Ralph James, who asks, “Is not Pannenberg’s universal history unnecessarily restricted by finite historical thinking centred in his desire for salvation through Jesus Christ?”.71 That is, he views Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal as hampered by Christian

66 “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic”; BQT 1, 181.
68 Mostert, God and the Future, 112-16.
69 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 201.
theological commitments. It can be reasonably concluded that Pannenberg deliberately
draws on a Christian interpretation of biblical eschatology in developing his
metaphysical proposal. This is not to foreclose a further examination of the interplay
between theological and philosophical concerns in his thought, nor to disallow a
theological critique of his metaphysics. It shows that Pannenberg’s proposal must be
seen as having important elements grounded in the claims of Scripture about Jesus’
resurrection and the eschaton.

Pannenberg applies the insights drawn from biblical eschatology to the problem of
developing a metaphysic which allows for historical contingency and also universal
rationality. To do so he turns to the notion of anticipation (Vorgriff). Pannenberg does
not oppose Vorgriff to Begriff, but seeks to show that all appropriate concepts have an
anticipatory structure, that is Begriffen are Vorgriffen.72 According to Pannenberg, all
concepts have a “two-sidedness”: an aspect of identity and one of difference. In one
aspect, a concept claims to give access to a particular object and this can only be so if it
has an identity with the object. In the other aspect, the concept remains distinct from its
object and requires ‘verification’ through the thing it denotes. This need for verification
shows the difference between the concept and its referent, while the possibility of
verification shows the possible identity of the two. According to Pannenberg, the gap
between concepts and their objects, is only fully closed eschatologically. He argues
from this that “the anticipatory form of knowledge corresponds to an element of the
‘not yet’ within the very reality toward which knowing is directed”, for “the identity of
things themselves are not yet completely present in the process of time”. That is, in the
light of Christian eschatology, Dilthey's insight into the historical structure of the
meaning of human life, must be extended to “the question of the essence of natural
events and things”. Pannenberg states that “the decision concerning the being that
stands at the end of the process [of a thing becoming what it is] has retroactive
power”.73

72 MIG, 99-103, offers a critical re-interpretation of Kant and Hegel to show that their concepts, in fact,
have an anticipatory structure.
73 MIG, 104-5 cf. TKG, 65. When Pannenberg refers to a ‘decision’ he uses the word in a metaphorical
sense as we might about a war being “decided”. He does not, in the first instance, mean that God
‘decides’ the outcome, though as he explains his metaphysical proposal it becomes apparent that the
locus of decision is the eternity of God.
Pannenberg further elucidates the notion of retroactive effect in terms of Aristotelian physics, in which actuality (energeia) in its becoming resulted in entelechy, or completion. According to Aristotle, movement to the end (to telos) is determined by the essence (to ti ēn einai). Pannenberg observes that the essence “must somehow be already present and efficacious during the motion”. That is, there is a form of a thing’s essence present in the process even “though the thing will be completely there only at the end of its becoming”. So Pannenberg detects an anticipatory structure in Aristotle’s ontology. According to Pannenberg, Aristotle failed to follow this through because instead of continuing his analysis in terms of motion, he reverted to viewing essential forms as “timeless and immutable.” A result of this was that the Aristotelian doctrine of motion could never deal with the appearance of “what is completely new”. Only Dilthey’s analysis of historicity allowed a “breakthrough”.74

Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal accepts “time and becoming as the medium that constitutes the whatness of things”. The obvious sense of this is that substance or essence emerges through time. Pannenberg’s proposal also claims that the essence of an object already exists as future, anticipating the completion of becoming. From this discussion a new temporal definition of the concept of substance emerges: “things would then be what they are, substances, retroactively from the outcome of their becoming on the one hand, and on the other in the sense of anticipating the completion of their process of becoming, their history”.75 Pannenberg admits that this counterintuitive proposal is hardly necessary when thinking of typical and self-repeating forms, the focus of Aristotle’s doctrine. Temporalised essentialism is an account which can also include human lives and societies, which have their identity more obviously decided in historical development. Pannenberg’s proposal reconfigures classical metaphysics to deal with the historical nature of reality without adopting the atomism of process thought.76

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74 MIG, 106-107.
75 MIG, 107.
76 MIG, 107-108 and see further pp. 125-29. An obvious objection to Pannenberg’s view is that it does not cohere with “natural-scientific descriptions of material processes.” MIG, 108 suggests that field theory may allow this, but does not present his argument, it is developed in ST 2, 79-84.
Pannenberg extends the connection between this philosophical reflection and Christian eschatology. Heidegger focussed entirely on the life of an individual. According to Pannenberg, this fails to deal with the fact that all reality is intertwined, and the context of any event, form, or individual, is the whole of reality. Jewish apocalypticism expresses a better view: “that the end of world history will bring fully to light all of its events and the life of each individual”. Further, this ‘end of history’ is not ‘nothingness’ but ‘eternity’. So the “essence of each individual thing” will be decided from eternity, and this is already present in the ‘manner in which it has anticipated eternity.”

\[\textit{e) Time and eternity}\]

Pannenberg’s view of anticipation is related to his view of the relationship of time and eternity. He concludes the presentation of his metaphysical proposal, with a claim that can be made on the basis of Christian revelation.

But the end of history is not nothingness. The end of time (as we saw in Plotinus) is eternity. It is from the standpoint of this end that the essence of each individual thing, the manner in which it has anticipated eternity, will be decided.\[e\]

Pannenberg has given two extensive treatments of the relation of time and eternity, in \textit{Systematic Theology} and in a later article. In these presentations the theological foundation of Pannenberg’s metaphysics is made very clear. He presents his view in contrast to the classic view of divine timelessness taken by Augustine and in contrast to more recent views of divine temporality. His position is also a contrast with views typical of process theology, which do not allow for ontological distinction between the immanent and essential Trinity meaning that the divine essence is what God becomes.

\[\textit{77 MIG, 109. MIG, 98, notes that Clement of Alexandria described faith as “the anticipation or prolepsis of future salvation”, (original emphasis). Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 73, says Pannenberg’s “philosophy of the whole of reality is … really an ontology of final coherence”. LaBute, “Ontological Motif of Anticipation”, 279, notes that “of critical importance for Pannenberg’s ontology is the relationship of the part to whole”, and that this relationship is only resolved eschatologically. Bradshaw, \textit{Trinity and Ontology}, 142, observes that in Pannenberg’s thought “the past and the present are continually released from the future”}.\]

\[\textit{78 MIG, 109. “Theological Questions for Scientists”, 24, similarly states that “without an answer to the question regarding time and eternity, the relation of God to the world remains inconceivable”}.\]

\[\textit{79 ST 1, 401-10 and “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 62-70}.

through history.\textsuperscript{81}

Pannenberg appeals to the Bible’s presentation that “all time is before the eyes of God as a whole”, while God is the source of life and creation but is always unchangeably himself. Moreover, the Bible presents God as one who acts in time. He argues that Christian thought erred when it accepted the Platonic view that time and eternity are antithetical. He argues for the Plotinian conception of eternity as the simultaneity of that which becomes divided in temporality and so as the source of time and the goal of time-bound creatures. In this view eternity is not the antithesis of time but is “constitutive of the time that is distinct from it”.\textsuperscript{82}

Despite his high regard for Plotinus’ conception of time and eternity, Pannenberg is not entirely satisfied with the Plotinian view and notes two significant limitations. The first is that the Neoplatonist has no eschatology but holds that the participation with God for which the soul strives is reached only in “the self-abnegation in the experience of mystical union”.\textsuperscript{83} Although Pannenberg does not make the point, this aspect of Plotinus’ view is a return to the Platonic antithesis, for it offers no way in which time experienced by the creature can be included in participation in God. The second, related, limitation is that Plotinus has no way of relating God to the future. In contrast, Pannenberg argues that God’s eternity has a structure that reflects the priority of the future. He argues that Exodus 3:14, the\textit{ locus classicus} for the view that God’s eternity is atemporal, in fact hints at the priority of the future for the God who\textit{ will be }who he will be. More importantly, Pannenberg appeals to the New Testament presentation of the kingdom, which is present in Jesus’ ministry but lies in the future. Pannenberg claims that the kingdom establishes God’s identity (or essence): “with the manifestation and recognition of [God’s] kingship his divine nature itself is at stake”.\textsuperscript{84} In other words, the eternal identity of God is established in the life, ministry, death and

\textsuperscript{81} See “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 67, for discussion cf. \textit{ST} 1, 331.
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{ST} 1, 401-8 cf. “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 63-65. Pannenberg notes that even Plato sought to express some positive relation between the time and eternity. Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 106-109, comments on the importance for Pannenberg’s thought of God’s involvement in time and his assessment of Augustine and Plotinus.
\textsuperscript{83} “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 65.
\textsuperscript{84} “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 54.
resurrection of Jesus.

Pannenberg claims to be able to affirm that God’s identity is established in history and that it is not dissolved in history. These two assertions may seem to form an antimony. However, Pannenberg argues that an appeal to God’s eternity as futural avoids this. He argues that when “the divine identity of the Father is conceived in terms of the power of his future”, and that this future is understood as the source of new events in history, the events of history may be held to establish God’s identity without compromising God’s transcendence.  

This conception is in accord with Pannenberg’s claim for the power of the future, for eternity establishes the nature of things and unifies history from the eschaton.

Pannenberg’s view of the relationship between time and eternity is therefore grounded in his view of the relationship between God and time. We have already seen that for Pannenberg the true Infinite, or the Absolute, is a philosophical expression which finds its reality in the triune God. In the same way, he does not propose an abstract “eternity” which is different from God. He argues that the concept of God as both transcendent over changing time and having a real relationship with time, mediated via the future, is only coherent if God is an “intrinsically differentiated unity”, as the doctrine of the Trinity affirms. This trinitarian approach must include an emphasis on the economic Trinity, for God is not only eternally differentiated, but each person of the Trinity is related differently to time, and together they draw temporal creation into unity with God’s own eternity. Pannenberg holds that God “does not have ahead of him any future that is different from his present”; he is his own future, and that is “perfect freedom”. Pannenberg holds that temporal distinctions are not lost in the eternal present of the triune God, but are brought into a perfect unity. Pannenberg’s view that in eternity time is united in simultaneity but retains the differentiation of moments means that his ontology affirms genuine temporality and also affirms the unity of reality.

This theological exposition of God’s relationship with time is reciprocally related to the

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86 ST 1, 410.
more philosophical discussion of ‘concept’ and ‘anticipation’. Temporalised essentialism is incoherent apart from the claim that events in history depend upon, and are gathered up into, the eternal present of God in the eschaton, so that what seem to be fractured and separated parts are found to share in a unified whole. Pannenberg’s theological claims are given credence by their capacity to suggest resolutions to apparently intractable philosophical puzzles about being and time. At the same time, the metaphysical proposal can be tested for its coherence with biblical revelation and Christian eschatology. Meanwhile, both elements of Pannenberg’s thought await final verification in the eschaton itself.

**Anticipation and Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal**

At this point in the discussion it is possible to offer a definition of “anticipation”. Antizipation and Vorgriff are used interchangeably by Pannenberg, as shown by the English translations which use “anticipation” for both terms. He also uses the adjective antizipatorischen and the verb antizipieren. Occasionally he uses the noun Prolepse (prolepsis) and the adjective proleptisch (proleptic) as synonyms for “anticipation” and “anticipatory”. The phrases “the retroactive power of the future” and “irruption from the future” express the same thought from a different perspective. The interest of this thesis is in the concept denoted by all these terms, which are all identified as anticipation.

When Pannenberg uses the concept of anticipation he expresses a notion that is both epistemological and ontological. The epistemological notion is straightforward: that a thing is revealed as it is and known and understood in its essence at the end of its existence (and fully at the end of the historical process). The ontological notion is counterintuitive: that what is revealed as the essence is determined from the end of the process, so that a thing has its essence during the temporal process in anticipation of the final reality. The correlate to this claim is that, because what appears at the end is the

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87 Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 129, in 1988, commented that Pannenberg had not offered an explicit definition of ‘anticipation’. Even in MIG (which Clayton translated) there is no full definition.

88 Mostert, God and the Future, 116, has a similar discussion of the epistemological and ontological aspects of anticipation.
essence, this has been present, anticipatorily, throughout the process and has been available to be known provisionally. The fact that what exists at the end of history is constitutive for present reality is what Pannenberg in an early article calls “the power of the future”. There he states, “the future creates the past and the present”. 89 In *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* he makes a similar assertion: “the future is to be construed as the source of the wholeness of finite being, and its being as the anticipation of its future”. 90

In Aristotelian metaphysics, essences determine ends. Aristotle asks, “What then is it (apart from the active cause) which causes that which exists potentially to exist actually in things which admit of generation?” Taking the example of a sphere, he concludes that “there is no other cause of the potential sphere’s being an actual sphere; this was the essence of each”. 91 That is he holds that it is the essence which connects the potential existence of an object to its actual existence. At points he suggests that the formal cause (*eidos*) and the final cause (*telos*) are the same. 92 Pannenberg reverses Aristotle’s claims to argue that ends determine essences because what comes about at the end constitutes identity, which has been present, in anticipation, all along.

Pannenberg argues that this might have led Aristotle to perceive the principle of “retroactive causality”. 93

This correlation of the epistemological and ontological aspects reflects Pannenberg’s idealist heritage, in which being and thought are held together. In Pannenberg’s version their unity is an eschatological truth, which is thus true for all reality by anticipation. Pasquariello explains Pannenberg’s view that “only because the end preappears can thought anticipate … only insofar as there is thought at all does the end preappear”. He correctly states that

Pannenberg’s understanding of the dialectical movement of the process of anticipation and anticipated should be understood as the reciprocal interplay of being and thought which are structured anticipatorily in view of their

89 *TKG*, 56, 61.
90 *MIG*, 88.
92 e.g. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VIII.vi.5, 417.
93 *MIG*, 106.
anticipated unity in ultimate reality.  

Pannenberg considers that this proposal is viable because God’s eternity, in which the Creator includes his whole creation is the future of reality.

Clayton notes the epistemological and ontological senses of anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought. However his summary confuses their relationship when he states that

if the already has any force, it must convey that the eschatological rule of God has already been decided in Jesus’ resurrection, though ‘what really happened in Jesus resurrection’ will only be fully disclosed at the eschaton. I can only interpret this as meaning that any further change will be epistemological but not ontological: the gist of the outcome has been decided (ontologically) in Jesus’ resurrection, though we still have more to learn about its nature.

This interpretation eliminates Pannenberg’s most distinctive assertion, that the future constitutes reality and has ‘retroactive force’. For Pannenberg, ontology and epistemology run parallel; there is a partial revelation ‘now’ of something which has its reality in anticipation. When eternity enters time in the eschaton then things will reach their final state and gain a settled identity and be seen for what they are. Thus, Pannenberg does not view Jesus’ resurrection as the locus of ontological determination and the eschaton as the revelation of what is determined there. Rather, the eschaton is the locus in which true identity is determined. Clayton’s comments relate to Jesus—God and Man in which Pannenberg does use mainly ‘revelatory’ language to describe the eschaton. In Metaphysics and the Idea of God and Systematic Theology it becomes clear that the resurrection has its significance in its ontological anticipation of the eschaton, and not simply in its retroactive effect on Jesus’ pre-Easter life.

The motif of anticipation allows Pannenberg to deal with the fact that truth claims and interpretations shift through time. This shifting threatens to overwhelm an epistemology based on a static metaphysic, for if truth is that which is stable and unchanging, then

94 Pasquariello, “Philosophical”, 343.
95 Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 131; the emphasis is original and he quotes from JGM, 397.
96 Even in JGM Pannenberg states that “only the future decides what something is” (136).
truth claims seem to be very distant from truth itself. Pannenberg argues that an anticipatory view allows for the historicity of knowledge without conceding the case to a thorough-going cognitive relativism, which holds ‘that there are no universal truths about the world’. This is particularly important in theology, for discussion of the Absolute in any meaningful way is impossible if the case of cognitive relativism is granted, since true knowledge of the Absolute cannot be relative.

**Conclusion**

a) Assessing anticipation as a metaphysical claim

It is common for responses to Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism to express incredulity. Roger Olson identifies the ‘futurity principle’ as the “most difficult problem in Pannenberg’s doctrine of the Trinity” and the idea which has “perplexed and delighted interpreters for over two decades”. William Hill calls it a “somewhat idiosyncratic idea”. John Polkinghorne also calls Pannenberg's view of the priority of the future “idiosyncratic”, and rejects it on both scientific and theological grounds. David McKenzie finds what he calls Pannenberg’s “future principle” to be unclear. David Pailin asks, “Is the notion of the future’s influence on the processes of the reality plausible?” George Pattison not only wonders whether Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal is justified or justifiable, but even if it is meaningful. The discussion of this

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99 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 203.
100 John Polkinghorne, Faith, 167-68, observes that while it is possible to solve physics equations in such a way that “effects propagate from the future into the past”, in fact the universe always runs the other way, and he asserts “it is perfectly possible to combine ordinary notions of causality … with the belief that the determinative divine purposes will be fulfilled”.
104 George Pattison, review of Metaphysics and the Idea of God by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *ET* 102 no. 8 (May 1991): 2, expresses doubt about the success of any metaphysical argument. Although he does not mention this explicitly it is easy to suspect the influence of logical positivism in this assessment,
chapter shows that Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal cannot be dismissed as meaningless, unless all metaphysics is rejected a priori. He relates his proposal to a wide range of thinkers and seeks to cast light on many classical and modern problems. It remains to be considered how the proposal can be assessed, but it should be recognised as a proposal that deserves a careful hearing. Mostert summarises five, more precise, criticisms of Pannenberg’s use of anticipation:
1) it is an ontological claim which lacks support;
2) his whole theology is overly concerned with ontological questions;
3) it is determinist;
4) the consummation of history is unthinkable;
5) his use of the motif is not consistent.\textsuperscript{105}

In early works Pannenberg did not explain his metaphysical proposal in detail. At that stage the criticism that the proposal lacked support had some validity. Clayton comments in his preface to \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God} that “one might argue that this was a book that Pannenberg had to write”, since both English-speaking critics and philosophers at the University of Munich were demanding that he explain and defend his elusive comments. Clayton suggests that even \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God} does not deal with the question as fully as may have been hoped.\textsuperscript{106} However, after its publication Pannenberg cannot be accused of making unsupported claims about his temporalised essentialism and anticipation. His case may not be convincing to all critics, but it has been presented carefully and in considerable detail.

The claim that Pannenberg’s thought is overly concerned with ontological questions usually rests on a misunderstanding of his project. Although Pannenberg devotes considerable attention to metaphysics, he does so for the sake of theological exposition. He has argued persuasively that theology must engage with ontological questions, and he seeks an ‘asymmetric bipolar relational unity’ between fundamental and systematic

\textsuperscript{105} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 125.
\textsuperscript{106} Clayton, “Translator’s Preface”, \textit{MIG}, viii.
theological concerns. It is only at the end of a careful examination of Pannenberg’s project, such as this thesis offers, that it is possible of conclude that he has, or has not, placed too great an emphasis on ontological concerns.

The objection that, despite his claims, Pannenberg’s view does not preserve human freedom is one that has been made by Clayton, Ford, Polk and Pailin. Ford and Polk take a process view and would presumably raise this objection to any account which treats God as ‘all-determining’. Thus Polk repeats Gilkey’s view that Pannenberg’s view is “a kind of Calvinism set into temporal reverse gear”. Mostert defends Pannenberg against charges of determinism. When Pannenberg states in his doctrine of election that “there is no guarantee of an ultimate universal reconciliation, but in a history that is still open the possibility of forgiveness is promised”, his view God is less determinative of human destiny than in traditional Augustinian accounts. So those in the Augustinian tradition will not find Pannenberg too deterministic; those who are critical of it may well do so. The resolution of long standing differences over determinism and human freedom in the doctrine of providence is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The objection that the consummation of history is unthinkable rejects a claim for which Pannenberg presents considerable evidence. To sustain this objection, the critic must reject a creedal statement of the Christian faith. From Pannenberg’s point of view, the claim that history has a consummation is debatable and can only be held provisionally. However the argument of Metaphysics and the Idea of God makes a good case for regarding the idea as thinkable.

The objection that Pannenberg’s use of anticipation is inconsistent is the most serious of the five areas of criticism. Clayton identifies two senses of anticipation in Pannenberg’s


\[109\] Mostert, God and the Future, 97-104.

\[110\] ST 3, 462.
work: the epistemological and the ontological. He comments on a tension between the two notions, but finds that Pannenberg’s view demands that in the eschaton time will not cease but “will be transcended and preserved (aufgehoben)”, a notion which combines both senses of anticipation. Clayton demands that this synthesis be assessed as a metaphysical proposal. He also comments that Pannenberg shares the idealist assumption of the unity of thought and being. Pannenberg does reflect the tradition of German idealism. However, on the whole, he more fully reflects the Christian view that in the light of the revelation of God’s reality humanity can think about reality and “true being”. Pannenberg’s move to ground this eschatologically reflects the Christian view that only in God’s light do we see fully (Ps. 36:9 cf. 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2).

Olson’s assessment is similar to that of Clayton. He accepts that the analysis of other views offered in *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* has shown their shortcomings and that Pannenberg’s approach, if valid, “is a creative advance in thinking about the God-world relationships”. But he suspects that Pannenberg’s linking of the noetic and ontological concepts is “more asserted than actually defended” and is not a coherent metaphysical solution.

Mostert recognises the power of Clayton’s criticisms and views them as leaving questions for Pannenberg to answer, rather than being decisive objections to his view. He provides the defence that he perceives Pannenberg’s approach requires, by showing that Pannenberg’s thought must be understood as a trinitarian doctrine of God.

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111 Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 136-42, summarises Pannenberg’s two uses as one in which God has established the future in the present through Jesus’ resurrection (he calls this anticipation); in the other sense all reality, including God’s, depend on the outcome of history (anticipation).

112 Roger Olson, review of *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* in *JR* 72 no. 2 (1992), 286, identifies “the real presence of the future in advance” and “subjective and provisional preapprehension of the future” which correspond Clayton’s anticipation and anticipation.

113 Olson, review of *MIG*, 286. This is in contrast to Roger Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology: the Historical Being of God in Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg” *SJT* Vol 36 (1983) 222-23, where he expresses the view that Pannenberg’s metaphysical suggestions made his position “a more viable doctrine of the immanent and economic Trinity” than Moltmann; and that Pannenberg’s view of the relationship between present and future is “the key to making this reciprocal causality [between God’s historical being and his transcendence] ontologically feasible”. Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 201-206 returns to a greater appreciation of Pannenberg suggesting that *ST* sheds some light on his “understanding of this enigmatic power of the future”, though still holding that for some the enigma will only be deepened and that the “eschatological ontology” retains an ambiguity.

He concludes that in Pannenberg’s thought “the theology of the eschatological kingdom of God and the theology of the Trinity coincide” and that this is the best defence of Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal.\textsuperscript{115} It is consistent with Pannenberg’s approach to claim that his metaphysical proposal must be tested theologically and later chapters of this thesis offer an assessment on that basis.

Jenson’s response is a contrast to these. After years of appreciative dialogue with Pannenberg, he announced that the final effect of Pannenberg’s metaphysics on his theology is not as radical as may have been expected.\textsuperscript{116} However, Pannenberg’s view is more radical than Jenson allows. Pannenberg’s claim for the retroactive power of the future shows that he is not simply thinking of “a claim staked out in history, which … will be verified or falsified”.\textsuperscript{117} He grounds this epistemological aspect in the ontological claim that essence is established eschatologically and emerges into time from the future. Jenson’s comment suggests that he had hoped Pannenberg was working to rethink time almost as an end in itself. In fact, as will become clear through the examination of christology and the doctrine of God, Pannenberg’s concern to relate God to history is the motivation for his use of anticipation. As such it remains an ontologically advancement worthy of investigation.

Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal cannot be assessed directly. It is, by Pannenberg’s account, a provisional claim, which can only be confirmed or negated directly in eternity. The anticipatory nature of Pannenberg’s position is not a weakness \textit{per se}, nor does it exclude preliminary and partial attempts to verify its truth. Although it claims to describe the structure of all reality, it has its great significance in providing a framework in which a trinitarian doctrine of God may be developed which is faithful to the revelation in Christ and meets modern objections to metaphysical theism. Anticipation and Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism must be primarily assessed in

\textsuperscript{115} Mostert, \textit{God and the Future}, 235.
\textsuperscript{116} Robert W. Jenson, review of \textit{Systematic Theology} Vol 2 by Wolfhart Pannenberg, \textit{FT} 53 (May 1995): 62, states that “I had thought that Pannenberg intended his notion of prolepsis as a piece of revolutionary metaphysics, as integral to a reconstrual of time itself. In this volume [ST2] it becomes clear… that he intends something much less odd. Pannenberg’s notion of prolepsis… is fully coherent with usual understandings of time and eternity. A prolepsis … is simply a claim staked out in history, which, when and if history is fulfilled, will be verified or falsified”.
\textsuperscript{117} For instance, as later chapters will show, he still affirms a pre-existent Son and the eternal Trinity.
terms of their contribution to the coherence to his theological project. In the following chapters the assessment of Pannenberg’s proposal proceeds through an examination of three key sections of his thought: christology, the doctrine of reconciliation and the doctrine of God. Each chapter outlines Pannenberg’s use of anticipation and his metaphysical proposal and offers an assessment of their value for theology.

b) Grundprinzip and theological rationality

Chapter 1 noted Shults’ two major claims in his interpretation of Pannenberg: 1) “the attempt to understand and explain all things sub ratione Dei … is the basic principle of Pannenberg’s approach” and this relation to God is developed “through the reciprocally related concepts of the ‘true infinite’ and the Trinity”; 118 2) Pannenberg’s ‘theological rationality’ has significant commonality with ‘the postfoundationalist model’ as “both aim to identify a higher relational unity where previous models have seen dichotomies”. 119 Shults argues that this ‘rationality’ is worked out in a reciprocal relation between ‘fundamental’ concerns (anthropology, philosophy) and ‘systematic’ concerns, a relationship that displays “asymmetric bipolar relational unity”. 120

This chapter has confirmed Shults’ first claim. Pannenberg seeks to justify a theistic metaphysic by showing that an understanding of reality requires the horizon of the Infinite, which is to be understood as the Triune God of Christian faith. 121 Pannenberg can claim an identity between the Infinite and the Trinity, because the first is a concept which is found to be an anticipation of the second. The full verification of the identity waits the eschatological revelation of the Trinity. That is, the relationship between the

118 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 92.
119 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 165. The three rationalities Shults deals with are: foundationalist, which starts with and emphasises epistemic questions; non-foundationalist, which is interested (often solely) in hermeneutics; and postfoundationalist which “wants to refigure epistemology and hermeneutics as mutually conditioning moments in the definition of human rationality” (154), having given a fuller exposition of postfoundationalism in dialogue with the other two positions (25-81).
120 Shults, Postfoundationalist, 206-208, illustrates this by the ‘mobius strip’ which has two sides, but can only be perceived as a unity when both sides are grasped at the same time. In terms of Pannenberg’s thought, this means that while the systematic movement ‘sublates’ [aufheben] the fundamental, and so has a measure of ‘control’, yet the full unity of seeing all things sub ratione Dei is only available when the two perspectives are grasped in unity, though retaining their own unique character.
121 MIG, 24ff, 38-40. Shults makes little use of MIG, he refers mainly to one essay, reprinted as chapter 7.
Infinite and the Trinity can only be grasped in terms of Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism with its anticipatory structure.

This assessment provides significant support for Shults' second claim. In *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* Pannenberg is working in the “fundamental” aspect of his theology, seeking to clarify metaphysics for the sake of Christian theology. The control granted to theological concerns appears in Pannenberg’s argument that philosophy cannot supply its own basic material, but always depends on prior religious-cultural themes and in his critique of the Hegelian ‘absolute’ from the viewpoint of Christian Trinitarian thought. Anticipation itself, which is essential for Pannenberg's metaphysics, is drawn from explicitly theological sources. These observations suggest that in Pannenberg’s thought there is indeed an ‘asymmetric bipolar relational unity’ between fundamental and systematic concerns. The full test of Pannenberg’s theological rationality will be in the theological aspect of his work, for only there it will be clear if philosophy and anthropology are genuinely sublated in his theological exposition.

One aspect of Shults’ interpretation of Pannenberg requires further comment. His main discussion of anticipation considers it as one of the ‘usual suspects’ for Pannenberg’s *Grundprinzip*, along with ‘reason’ and ‘history’. He argues that viewing all things *sub ratione Dei* is Pannenberg’s true *Grundprinzip*. Anticipation is a different type of concept from the other “usual suspects”. ‘History’ and ‘reason’ are general concepts and any attempt to view all thing *sub ratione Dei* would inevitably have to deal with them. However, it is not obvious that anticipation would have to be a key concept in such a task. For instance, Aquinas also identified the task of theology as relating all things *sub ratione Dei*, did not make anticipation the key to achieving this. Anticipation plays a precise role in Pannenberg’s thought and has a special relation to Pannenberg’s *Grundprinzip*. This chapter has shown that anticipation is the key motif which allows him to relate all things to God. Because he can argue that all reality anticipates an existence in God’s eternity, he can argue that all things must be seen in their relation to God. Thus Shults' thesis can be refined, not to displace *sub ratione Dei* as the basic

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122 Shults, 84-92, and see n.28, claims that treatments which accept one of the “usual suspects” as the basic principle of Pannenberg's thought distort their treatment of him.
principle in Pannenberg's thought, but to indicate that such a view is possible in anticipation of the eschaton and so requires Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal. ¹²³

¹²³ Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 123, recognises, and demonstrates, that “the concept of anticipation lies at the heart of Pannenberg’s theological project”.

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A Methodological Transitio

Introduction

The first four chapters of this thesis have been primarily expository. Chapter 1 outlined Pannenberg’s theological project and Chapter 2 showed how his understanding of revelation highlights the importance of eschatology and anticipation. Chapter 3 examined the intellectual setting of Pannenberg’s thought and the challenges to which he sought to respond, and showed that his anticipatory metaphysic was developed as a key element of his response. Chapter 4 provided an exposition of Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism, in which anticipation is a key concept. On the basis of these chapter it is possible to begin to test Pannenberg’s proposals more thoroughly. Before proceeding to an assessment it is necessary to establish a methodology for doing so. This transitio outlines the approach that guides the following chapters. It indicates the reasons for the methodology, all of which flow from the observations of the first four chapters.

A proposed methodology for a critical assessment of Pannenberg’s christology

a) Invitation to assessment

Pannenberg’s project invites assessment. He is, as Mostert notes, a public theologian; that is, he seeks to clarify and validate Christian claims in the arena of scholarly discussion, interacting with many disciplines.¹ He recognises that theological claims are provisional and has a notable confidence in the historical process of religious, philosophical, and scholarly conflict to advance human insight into reality. He provides criteria by which theological claims should be tested. All of this is an invitation to assess Pannenberg’s claims with the goal of making a contribution to the project of Christian theology. Schwöbel observes that Pannenberg’s approach to theology should be “taken so seriously that one should not hesitate to criticize the execution of this program in Pannenberg’s own work”. Schwöbel also warns that Pannenberg’s rigorous

¹ Mostert, God and the Future, 238.
argumentation sets the standard which his critics should seek to meet.²

b) Careful exposition

Chapter 1 noted that the density of Pannenberg’s argumentation means an analysis of his thought requires careful attention to his often very detailed presentation. Assertions that are key to his argument are often presented with little fanfare and their full significance is only clear when the positions with which he interacts and the full sweep of his argument are grasped. Likewise, the argument of a section of his work is often woven through discussions of several different disciplines and must be traced carefully. It is possible to make valid generalisations about Pannenberg’s thought since it is remarkably consistent, but any generalisation needs to be established by a close reading so that it can be properly nuanced. As well, Pannenberg often makes mention of an idea which receives fuller exposition elsewhere in his work. Temporalised essentialism is a case in point: the proposal explained in Metaphysics and the Idea of God is the rationale for many claims in Pannenberg’s work, though it is often implicit. These observations determine the main method adopted in this thesis, which consists of close readings of various parts of Pannenberg’s corpus while relating these to parallel sections of other works, and setting the discussion in the context of the theological and philosophical debates with which he interacts.

c) Conceptual analysis

Pannenberg’s argumentation is not only dense, it strives for conceptual precision. His careful interaction with his philosophical heritage leads to many discussions of the exact nature of the claims he is making and of what it is they do and do not imply. So his writing demands careful conceptual analysis that seeks to clarify the precise nature of his claims, the concerns which motivate them and the arguments which support them.

Pannenberg states that testing for coherence is the method of assessing the truth of claims. We cannot access the essence of things and check claims directly for

correspondence to reality. We can, however, ask how well various claims cohere with other claims, some of which may seem better established. Lombard comments that coherence views of truth are not usually satisfied with showing that claims are merely consistent, or non-contradictory, but strive to show a higher standard of coherence: “coherence is intended to be a substantially more demanding relation than mere consistency, involving such things as inferential and explanatory relations within the system of beliefs”.\(^3\) This is true of Pannenberg’s approach, in which he is concerned to explore the conceptual connections within a theological position and to test claims for their explanatory power.

Chapter 1 showed that Pannenberg asserts that, as a science, theology must be tested for coherence with four areas: the biblical traditions, current philosophical inquiry, general human experience and the development of theological discussion.\(^4\) The assessment in this thesis focuses on the first and fourth of this list and examines the coherence of Pannenberg’s claims with these areas. The selection of these areas is justified by the fact that Pannenberg is offering a theology in which distinctive Christian claims are primary. Although he includes more general concerns, these are usually transformed in the process of discussion and so are not accessible to an analysis that is independent of a consideration of the theological claims. Consider, for example, Pannenberg’s treatment of metaphysics in \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God} or anthropology in \textit{Anthropology in Theological Perspective}. Both works draw on a wide range of material to make claims that have a primarily theological orientation. The discussions are so entwined with theological claims that they cannot be assessed apart from these. Such theological focus is entirely consistent with Pannenberg’s commitment to viewing all things \textit{sub ratione Dei}. Since Scripture and classical theological tradition have such a leading role in Pannenberg’s thought, they are the criteria against which Pannenberg’s thought can be most directly assessed.

\(^3\) Lombard, “Coherence Theory of Truth”, \textit{CDP}, 153.

\(^4\) See \textit{TPS}, 345, and for further discussion see Worthing, \textit{Foundation and Functions of Theology}, 41, and van Huyssteen, \textit{Theology and the Justification of Faith}, 89.
d) Scripture

A consideration of Pannenberg’s thoughts in relation to Scripture requires some clarification. Chapter 2 considered Pannenberg’s view of revelation, including his view of Scripture. He holds that the Scripture principle of classic Protestantism is not viable in contemporary thought. Instead, the primary form of revelation is events, though these are closely related to proclamation which is based on them. He approaches Scripture seeking to find how it witnesses to and reflects God’s historical revelation, which in turn anticipates eschatological revelation, both of which have to do with “the gospel and its contents”. So he holds that the words and sayings of Scripture have authority in the church “insofar as they bear witness” to God’s saving presence in Christ. In doing so, Pannenberg is not bound to the concepts or expression of Scripture and holds that at times Scripture must be subject to theological criticism. He makes use of what he considers to be the best critical scholarly study of Scripture in its historical context, though he does not follow any particular approach completely. As noted in Chapter 2, in practice Pannenberg applies such criticism conservatively and he works closely with the text of Scripture as he develops his thought.

An assessment of Pannenberg’s thought should deal with Scripture in a similar way. It needs to relate carefully themes in Scripture to the salvation present in Christ, and remain in interaction with contemporary critical study. Chapter 2 argued that Pannenberg’s view of revelation could be developed to affirm an approach which took a greater direct interest in the biblical text itself as part of the content of revelation. The assessment of Pannenberg’s thought in the rest of this thesis identifies a number of points where such attention would lead to different conclusions from those of Pannenberg, and where the difference is theologically significant. For instance, Chapter 9 argues that the New Testament has an eschatological schema which is less anticipatory than Pannenberg’s schema. If such a consideration is to be relevant to Pannenberg’s thought it must be substantiated by careful biblical scholarship and be shown to be related to the historical revelation of God in Christ.

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5 ST 2, 463.
Gilbertson places Pannenberg and Moltmann in dialogue with biblical scholarship and offers a reflection on how biblical studies should relate to systematic theology. He develops an extensive account of the theology of the book of Revelation and then brings that into dialogue with their systematic theological proposals. This thesis focuses on the thought of Pannenberg and then seeks to bring relevant biblical themes into dialogue with that. Thus the appeal to Scripture in this thesis is more *ad hoc* than in Gilbertson’s work. Nevertheless, Gilbertson provides a guide for the approach to Scripture to be adopted here. He stresses the need for a dynamic interrelationship, or dialogue, between the study of Scripture and the elaboration of Christian theology. This will be evident in discussions which raise questions about Pannenberg’s thought and which assess how well his theology and classical approaches include biblical themes. Gilbertson warns of losing the balance in this dialogue. In this thesis, the risk is that systematic concerns may overwhelm the biblical voices. In order to reduce such an imbalance, the discussion follows Pannenberg’s lead and makes use of well-credentialed biblical scholarship. It seeks to allow sufficient space for the scholarship to have its own voice so that through it the biblical text may be heard in relative independence of systematic questions. No claim is made to offer a comprehensive survey of recent scholarship on the biblical themes in question, but neither does Pannenberg’s make such a claim. Gilbertson follows McGrath, stating that although Scripture is not “primarily a set of doctrinal propositions”, Christian theology rightly asserts statements about the nature of reality on the basis of the Bible’s testimony to Christ. Pannenberg would affirm this, and both his exposition and the following assessment assume it. Finally Gilbertson argues that “according a central place to ontological truth-claims in the text does not entail a process of stripping away the rich and varied imagery of the text”. This last point returns the discussion to the question raised earlier about the extent to which the text itself with its imagery and thought forms is part of the content of revelation and so has a normative role for theology.

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8 Gilbertson, *God and History*, 43-44, original emphasis.
Pannenberg’s positions should also be compared to those of classical theological tradition. The term “classical theological tradition” requires some discussion. There is no easily identified “tradition”; the term embraces those thinkers and communities which have been committed to the so-called Great Tradition. Olson locates this Great Tradition in the Great Church which existed before the rupture of fellowship between Constantinople and Rome. This includes the seven Ecumenical councils as the dogmatic expressions of the tradition. Olson presents a historical description rather than one oriented to how contemporary theology may draw on such a resource. The description by Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445) is a more useful description for the purposes of this discussion. He famously argued that church doctrine was to be found in that which was believed “always, everywhere and by all” (semper, ubique, et ab omnibus). He offered a further rule concerning the development of theology in which there is “advance” (profectus) but not “alteration” (permutatio). Both the idea of holding only to that which is taught universally and the idea of advance without alteration are naïve, since there are variations within the classical theological tradition which cannot be resolved by resort to the Vincentian canon and reformulation of theological claims always involves elements of change. When these two rules are brought together, however, they provide a useful description of the goal of theological reflection: to develop theology in response to contemporary questions within the received tradition reflected in the seven ecumenical councils. The dialectic of consensus and development may question elements of the tradition and even of the decrees of the councils, but seeks to do so in a way which develops from them. Guarino observes that such an approach does not claim “a positivistic criteriological principle for development” but has “inspired theologians and church teaching for centuries and still has something essential to teach theology today”.

The rest of this thesis offers an assessment of Pannenberg that views him as within this

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broad and developing theological tradition and seeks to remain so itself.

Examining Pannenberg against classical theological tradition may seem to offer too narrow a base, since he is a constructive theologian who is not limited by theological tradition. His presentations of the historical development of thought in *Systematic Theology* may suggest that he prefers recent approaches over classical ones. Although his discussions take the form of historical surveys he does not abandon the classical formulations in favour of more recent ones. On some topics he affirms classical formulations, in others he prefers more recently developed positions, in some he finds that neither are satisfactory. The following chapters show that generally he accepts the challenges of some contemporary scholarship but offers a reconfiguration of classical orthodox theology.

This analysis of Pannenberg’s theological method is confirmed by the conclusions of Grenz’s monograph surveying Pannenberg’s thought. He identifies three central concerns which characterise approaches to systematic theology: the Bible, the Christian heritage and the contemporary world. He argues that Pannenberg “seeks to present a delineation of the Christian faith that reflects the main themes of the Bible as he understands them”. He also argues that Pannenberg shares many of the concerns of “confessionalist theologians” though Pannenberg is no “mere confessionalist”, and that his theology is often shaped by “ecumenical concerns”. Grenz notes that the constraint of the first two commitments in Pannenberg’s thought “often becomes a stumbling block to the avant-garde in both church and society”. Grenz supports the conclusion that Scripture and classical theological tradition are the key sources in Pannenberg’s thought.

In the opening pages of *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg himself confirms that Scripture and the classical theological tradition are the key sources and tests of theology. He affirms Vincent’s stated goal of accepting consensual doctrine, though he notes that “the criterion of consensus” is “not … easy to apply” and admits that it appears that an additional authority is required. He is not, however, willing to grant to ecclesiastical

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14 *ST* 1, 11.
consensus, whether Eastern, Roman or Protestant, the authority to determine the truth of
dogma. While acknowledging the role of the church, he views the church’s consensus on
dogma as instrumental, giving expression to understanding which arises from Scripture
and must be tested by Scripture. He takes the Protestant position that Scripture must
continue to test all interpretation “whether private or official” and that the “content and
truth of dogma do not rest … on the consensus of the church” but that “knowledge of the
subject matter of scripture produces consensus”. 15

Conclusion: a method of assessment

The inter-relation of Scripture and classical theological tradition in Pannenberg’s
reformulation of theology suggests that a method of assessing Pannenberg’s proposals is
to analyse his position carefully, examining how his ideas develop as implications and
explanations of each other and then to consider how he differs from the classical
tradition, particularly in the Protestant and Lutheran forms which are Pannenberg’s
immediate heritage, and to examine the reasons for such differences. Pannenberg’s
tendency is to suggest reformulations which in his view reflect the biblical material more
faithfully or solve dogmatic problems by offering a fuller coherence between various
theological propositions. It is reasonable, therefore, in the following chapters, to test his
proposals to see if they do indeed do one or both of these.

15 ST 1, 15-16.
Chapter 5  Anticipation in Pannenberg’s Christology

Introduction

The first four chapters highlighted the role of christology in Pannenberg's project. In summary we can say that his theology is grounded in and developed from christology and finds its focus in the Triune God. This chapter begins the assessment of the place of anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought by examining the role of anticipation in Pannenberg’s christology.¹ It begins by outlining Pannenberg’s commitment to ‘christology from below’, which comes from his concern to relate christology to human, historical experience. It then describes how Pannenberg develops his christology from an account of the historical Jesus, highlighting the role of anticipation and the way in which Pannenberg appeals to Jesus’ resurrection. Pannenberg’s christology is shown to be a reconfiguring of Chalcedonian christology, and so the two approaches are compared and assessed for their capacity to incorporate New Testament material and for their conceptual structure.

Christology from below

Pannenberg is committed to ‘christology from below’ and an examination of the historical Jesus. In Pannenberg’s context, a demonstration of the truth of Christian claims requires a consideration of the historical Jesus. The focus is not forced on him simply as an apologetic issue. History is a primary concern in his program and, at this central point of his theology, his commitment to demonstrating revelation in history is prominent.

a) Defining ‘christology from below’

‘Christology from below’ stands in contrast to ‘christology from above’. ‘Christology from above’ is the classic approach to christology which assumes the divinity of Jesus and for which “the concept of the incarnation stands in the center”. ‘Christology from below’ does not assume Jesus’ divinity or centre on the ‘incarnation’ but begins by examining the historical and human Jesus. It can denote a range of methodologies. Pannenberg’s analysis is that the earliest form of ‘christology from below’, the 18th century emphasis on Jesus’ messianic consciousness, was continued by thinkers such as Isaak A. Dorner (1809–1884), who focussed on the concept of Jesus’ human personality. Brown claims that Dorner does not offer a ‘christology from below’ because he does not use historical criticism. Although Pannenberg makes extensive use of historical criticism, its use is not the defining feature of ‘christology from below’ for him. He makes the major distinction, not between critical and pre-critical approaches to history, but between approaches which start with the eternal pre-existent Son and those which start thinking from history. Pannenberg’s broad definition of ‘christology from below’ leads him to place Dorner, and even Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) in that category, though he notes that the last two had an approach which suppressed “a historical grounding in favor of a reconstruction of christology in terms of the faith-consciousness” which is found in the community of faith. For Pannenberg, an approach that begins the study of Jesus from the historicity of human experience is ‘christology from below’, regardless of how this historicity is approached.

b) Why christology from below?

Pannenberg gives three reasons why christology cannot be developed ‘from above’.

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2 JGM, 33. ST 2, 278, defines “christology from above” as any view that takes “the whole NT witness to Christ from the standpoint of [the] sending of the pre-existent Son into the world”. See Bradshaw, Pannenberg, 68-70, for a further discussion of Pannenberg’s ‘christology from below’.

3 ST 2, 287.


6 ST 2, 281.
(1) In a context in which Jesus’ divinity is contested it cannot be assumed. Christology has to present reasons for the confession of Jesus’ divinity.\(^7\) Pannenberg states programmatically “we must discover the contours of the divine sonship of Jesus in his human reality”.\(^8\)

(2) ‘Christology from above’ does not properly come to terms with the historicity of the human Jesus. Pannenberg claims that there is a loss of substance in christology when the unique historical setting of the life of Jesus recedes before an “independent incarnational theology”.\(^9\)

(3) A ‘christology from above’ assumes God’s point of view that is inaccessible for us.\(^10\)

Reasons (2) and (3) demonstrate Pannenberg’s anthropological concern. He holds that christological claims must illumine human life, and they cannot do so if they are inaccessible for humans. He relates Jesus to human experience in two ways: one particular and the other general. The examination of the particularities of Jesus’ own historic human life is one way; the other is to relate Jesus’ life and ministry to the experience of all humans. This chapter will focus on the first approach, since the motif of anticipation is more prominent in it, though the second is also an important part of Pannenberg’s ‘christology from below’\(^11\).

Pannenberg’s concern to relate christology to anthropology is the source of his major unease about the Chalcedonian tradition, which understands Christ as two-natures in hypostatic union in which the human nature has its hypostasis in the divine Son. He expresses caution about such formulations and states that a presupposition of christology is that “we not think of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ as two natures that stand ontologically on the same level and have nothing to do with one another apart

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\(^7\) JGM, 34.  
\(^8\) ST 2, 325; JGM, 34-35.  
\(^9\) JGM, 158.  
\(^10\) JGM, 35.  
\(^11\) ST 2, 278-323 discusses the relationship between general anthropology and christology.
from their union in the person of the God-man”. He rejects the Chalcedonian focus on Jesus’ birth (more properly his conception) as “constitutive for the union of deity and humanity”. From this starting point, the Chalcedonian tradition could never properly affirm the free humanity of Jesus and so could not relate christology fully to anthropology. He asserts that “in the history of early christology the equation of the incarnation of the Logos with the birth of Jesus blocked the way to any evaluating of the human uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth as a medium of the revelation of the divine Logos”. He holds that this tradition either stressed an independent humanity (Nestorianism) or a fully dependent humanity (Monophysitism, which approached Docetism).

Rise argues that Pannenberg’s concern to relate christology to anthropology comes from his commitment to rebut Feuerbach’s claim that theology is merely a false projection of anthropology. The challenge to establish the truth of Christian claims about God is a constant concern for Pannenberg and we have seen that Feuerbach is one of the thinkers against whom Pannenberg argues. Yet Pannenberg’s anthropological concern is not primarily polemic, as it arises immediately from his theological method. Christian claims that the Logos, the mediator of creation, has become incarnate in Jesus can only be sustained if christology casts light on human existence.

Rise correctly comments that Pannenberg’s approach “is a thinking ‘from below’ which from the outset includes the aspect ‘from above’”. Even in Jesus—God and Man, Pannenberg indicates that he will “later show the relative justification” for the ‘from above’ approach. In Systematic Theology Pannenberg is more emphatic about the need to relate christology to the Trinitarian God and moves materially closer to “the

12 ST 2, 385; cf. JGM, 127-32. Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology, 159, states that, “Pannenberg is, therefore, no advocate of a merely ‘functional’ christology in Jesus, God and Man. The essence of God is involved in the man Jesus” (original emphasis).
13 JGM, 338ff and ST 2, 383-84.
14 ST 2, 301; see Bradshaw, Pannenberg, 96-98 and Grenz, Reasons, 160-61 for further discussion of Pannenberg’s assessment of Chalcedon.
15 Ibid., 384; cf. JGM, 291-92.
16 Rise, Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, 19.
17 ST 2, 290-97.
18 Rise, Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, 17.
19 JGM, 405-406.
classical christology of the incarnation”.

Loder is wrong to conclude that Pannenberg has abandoned the history of Jesus as his starting point. In Pannenberg’s christology, as in other areas of his thought, there is a mutual conditioning or reciprocity between ideas. In this case, the human, history of Jesus, and the incarnation of the eternal Son are in a reciprocal relationship and are understood in terms of each other. This is consistent with Pannenberg’s presumption that the historical must lead to the eternal and the eternal will complete the historical. He outlines his methodology as follows:

we give precedence to arguing from below, presupposing, of course, that this procedure leads to the conclusion that the concept of the incarnation is not a falsification but a pertinent development of the meaning implicit in the coming and history of Jesus … material primacy belongs to the eternal Son, who has become man by his incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth.

As in his metaphysical reflections, in christology Pannenberg asserts that human experience and knowledge must be recognised as historical. He further holds that reflection on the events of history properly leads to a ‘rising above’ which allows an appreciation that historical reality participates in the eternal. For christology this means that the history of Jesus is the starting point for knowledge of the Son. There is a reciprocal relation between the historical Jesus and the eternal Son, though such a relationship cannot be simply assumed but must be demonstrated.

**Christological source of anticipation**

Earlier chapters showed that Pannenberg finds the concept of anticipation in the material of christology. He takes up Bornkamm’s idea “that Jesus’ claim results from the presence of the expected eschatological future in [his] activity”, which means there was a ‘now but not yet’ tension in Jesus’ ministry and his identity. Pannenberg states that “the tension between the presence and the future in Jesus’ proclamation makes the

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20 ST 2, 288-89.
21 J. E. Loder, review of *Introduction to Systematic Theology* by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *TT* 49 no. 4 (Jan 1993): 558, claims that ST “represents a shift from the way Pannenberg earlier designated his thought as developing a ‘christology from below’”. This does not reflect Pannenberg’s own view, which is that his Trinitarian thought develops from his original approach.
22 ST 2, 289.
proleptic character of Jesus’ claim apparent; that is, Jesus’ claim means an anticipation of a confirmation that is to be expected only in the future”. 23

*Systematic Theology* 2 offers an extensive discussion of Jesus’ proclamation of a future kingdom and the presence of the kingdom in his ministry and the scholarly discussion of how Jesus’ sayings about the future rule of God relate to his teaching about God’s rule as present. Pannenberg argues that Jesus spoke of a present “inbreaking” kingdom. For Pannenberg, this present depends on the future: “we must understand this future itself as the dynamic basis of its becoming present”. 24 The kingdom of God has this feature because its content is the full rule of the one God, that is, it is a unitive future. 25 Pannenberg then demonstrates the anticipatory structure of several elements of Jesus’ ministry including his offer of eschatological salvation to the lost, the forgiveness of sins, his interpretation of the Old Testament law and his claim to authority. 26 For Pannenberg the dynamic of Jesus’ proclamation is anticipatory, and so his whole ministry has the same dynamic and his person and work can be understood in such a framework.

**The resurrection**

Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology appeals to the resurrection. The significance of the resurrection depends on it being understood as an eschatological event, as an anticipation of the unity of all things with God. That meaning depends on the Jewish expectation of a universal resurrection from the dead, an expectation Jesus shared. Jesus’ preaching and the implications of that for his own identity also provide the context for the meaning of the resurrection. Pannenberg claims that the significance of the resurrection is clear when it is recognised that it is “the resurrection of Jesus”, who

23 *JGM*, 58.
24 *ST* 2, 329; see the whole discussion (327-34).
25 *ST* 2, 330; Pannenberg states that “the particular dynamic of Jesus’ message of the *basileia* … is that the rule of God is imminent but that it also emerges from its futurity as present. The basis is that the oneness of God is the content of this future, and his rule is the outworking of his claim to the present life of the creature”.
26 *ST* 2, 330-34.
has claimed to bring the saving presence of God. The facticity of the resurrection also has to be established, and Pannenberg argues carefully for this.

Pannenberg contrasts his account of the resurrection with that of Bultmann and Barth, who hold that the resurrection of Christ was “disclosure”. He argues that the Easter event “determines” the meaning of Jesus’ life and his relationship with God. That is, the proper understanding of Jesus’ life and his identity depend on the resurrection, not simply for their being known as such, but for their being what they are.

Only by his resurrection … did Christ attain to the dignity of the Kyrios … Only thus was he appointed the Son of God in power … Only in the light of the resurrection is he the preexistent Son. Only as the risen Lord is he always the living Lord of his community.

What comes about in the resurrection is what has been true about Jesus from the beginning: “what has become evident in the resurrection … has been on the stage from the very beginning” and “it had been on stage from the very beginning because Jesus has been raised from the dead”. Pannenberg’s appeal to anticipation and his eschatological metaphysic allows him to move from the historical Jesus, who is not apparently divine, and understand him as the eternal Son of God. The resurrection is the hinge point in this development because it establishes Jesus’ human life as the life of the Son of God as it, in turn, anticipates the eschaton. On that basis the New Testament texts can be justified in including elements that are not strictly historical but are valid reflections of what was proleptically true and, thus, genuinely true of Jesus during his pre-resurrection ministry.

Taylor claims that the resurrection is the epistemological basis for Pannenberg’s christology while the Son’s eternal self-distinction from the Father is the ontological basis. His reading makes Pannenberg less radical in his appeal to the historical Jesus than the reading suggested here. Taylor’s summary fails to note that in Pannenberg’s

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27 ST 2, 344.
28 ST 2, 347-63.
29 ST 2, 345.
30 ST 2, 283ff. Mostert, God and the Future, 43, shows that “the resurrection of Jesus is of foundational importance in Pannenberg’s theology”; see full discussion (43-54).
31 JGM, 137. The first quote is from O. Webber. Grundlagen der Dogmatik Band II (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1962), 102, which Pannenberg accepts and expands.
Christology: unity and self-distinction from the Father

Pannenberg’s christology is based on finding in Jesus’ human, historical life a movement of unity and distinction in relation to his Father, a movement taken up into the eternal life of God in the resurrection. This section will consider how the two directions of this movement are grounded by Pannenberg in the historical Jesus, and how they are viewed together in a christology which affirms the pre-existence and incarnation of the Son.

a) Jesus’ unity with God

Jesus’ unity with God is the basic claim upon which Pannenberg builds his christology. He notes that the Gospels present a variety of expressions and narratives relating to Jesus’ unity with God. He concludes that this variety means that “purely on the basis of the various conceptions one may scarcely bring the various statements together into an overall picture”. To do so would involve eliminating distinctive features of the various presentations for the sake of conformity. He proposes “to discover in the historical development of the primitive Christian Christological traditions a definite theme that connects the varied conceptions with one another and in which an intrinsic logic that is

32 Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 113-19, (original emphasis). His criticisms of Pannenberg are expanded on pp. 202-207.
also apparent to us asserts itself”. Pannenberg takes the same approach.

Pannenberg argues that Jesus offered an experience of eschatological salvation in his public ministry. Jesus maintained that “the coming rule of God was present already to the salvation of those who received his message”, and “he was also the mediator of the inbreaking of the rule and the forgiving love of God”. That is, Jesus must be understood as the one who claimed to bring God’s saving rule into the experience of his hearers. This is a claim for unity with God, since the kingdom is, on Pannenberg’s definition, the immediate revelation of kingship of God. Pannenberg argues that Jesus did not directly identify himself as the Messiah, but still the implications of his claim to bring the kingdom were an offence to many of his hearers because of its messianic implications. This offence arose “out of the ambivalence into which the message of Jesus thrust his own person” and led to the crucifixion. Jesus’ fate seems to make his claim an “illusion”. The truth of Jesus’ claim and the possibility of his death having “saving significance” can only be the case if his claim is validated by a future event, so the “ambivalence was set aside only by the resurrection of the Crucified”. The resurrection means that Jesus’ claims and their implications are confirmed and his life has been taken into unity with God, and so, on the basis of an appeal to the retroactive power of the future, it can be truly said that he always was in union with God.

b) Self-distinction

The description of Jesus’ unity with the Father has already shown that the life that is united to the Father was lived in distinction from him. This observation is the basis for a distinctive aspect of Pannenberg’s christology. Rather than ascribing Jesus’ submission

33 JGM, 134.
34 ST 2, 328-34; quote from p.334.
35 ST 2, 335-43, quotes from p.343. JGM, 66-73, argues that “if Jesus ... is ascended to God and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus”; that “the transition to the Gentile mission is motivated by the eschatological resurrection of Jesus” and that “what the early Christian tradition transmitted as the words of the risen Jesus is to be understood ... as the explication of the significance inherent in the resurrection itself”. JGM, 74-108, supports these conclusions by arguing for the modern meaningfulness of resurrection language on anthropological grounds, for the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection and the viability of the expectation of Jesus’ return even with its extended delay.
to the Father simply to Jesus’ human nature or exclusively to the economic Trinity, he views it as an essential part of the Son’s relationship to the Father and so as an aspect of his deity.

Consistent with his approach to christology, Pannenberg grounds these claims in the human, historical life of Jesus. He argues “the differentiation of God as Father from his own person is … constitutive for Jesus’ message and attitude”.\(^{36}\) Jesus proclaimed God the Father and his Kingdom, not himself, and he did not claim that his presence was the presence of the Father’s future kingdom (though it turned out, in the light of the resurrection, that his ministry was a provisional presence of the kingdom). Jesus witnessed to the Father, sought to glorify the Father, and honoured the claims of the first commandment to have no other God: “The aim of the whole message of Jesus is that the name of God should be hallowed by honouring his lordship”.\(^{37}\) Pannenberg sets this differentiation alongside Jesus’ “close link” to the Father, so the use of the term ‘differentiation’ should not be taken to imply that Jesus is distant from the Father. According to Pannenberg, it is the resurrection that establishes Jesus’ ‘differentiation’ from and intimacy with the Father, which are correlated truths.\(^{38}\)

The movement of self-distinction of Jesus from his Father is constitutive for the identity of the Son and the Father. Pannenberg uses the term ‘subordination’, stating that “this uniqueness of Jesus rested on the unconditional subordination of his person to the lordship of God … only in this subordination to the rule of the one God is he the Son”.\(^{39}\) He explains that by distinguishing the Father from himself as the one God, the Son moved out of the unity of the deity and became man, but in doing so he actively expressed his divine essence as the Son. The self-emptying of the Pre-existent One is thus not a surrender or negation of his deity as the Son, it is its activation.\(^{40}\) Pannenberg avoids a subordinationist doctrine of God by developing the theme that the Father also makes himself dependent on the Son. He refers to the Father “handing over his lordship to the Son” and thus “his kingship [is] dependent on whether the Son glorifies him and

\(^{36}\) ST 1, 263.
\(^{37}\) ST 1, 309.
\(^{38}\) ST 1, 264-65.
\(^{39}\) ST 2, 372-73.
\(^{40}\) ST 2, 377.
fulfils his Lordship”. This means that the reality of God’s lordship “has its place in the intratrinitarian life of God, in the reciprocity of the relation between the Son … and the Father”. The handing over of lordship by the Father occurs, like submission and self-differentiation, in the human history of Jesus. Pannenberg’s christology is thus reciprocally related to a doctrine of God, as is shown in Chapter 8.

c) The incarnation and the pre-existence of the Logos

The movements of unity with the Father and self-distinction from the Father in the historical life of Jesus provide the dynamics of Pannenberg’s christology. Based on Jesus’ life and the resurrection, he affirms the pre-existence and incarnation of the Logos. He asserts, “we cannot separate the eternal dynamic of self-distinction (the logos asarkos) from its actualisation in Jesus Christ (the logos ensarkos)”. The identity of the pre-incarnate Logos with Jesus Christ depends on eschatological ontology. Jesus’ sonship, which is actualised in history as sonship with the eternal God, must stretch back to all his life and into eternity. Pannenberg states that he takes from Dorner “the interest in the becoming of the divine-human unity in Jesus’ earthly life” and claims that setting Dorner’s christology in an anticipatory structure “overcomes the dilemma between a unity with God either already consummated in the beginning or only realized through a subsequent event in Jesus’ life”. He asserts, “the Easter event definitively decided the personal identity of Jesus as the Son of God, but in the light of that event he was the Son of God from the very beginning … even from eternity”.

Pannenberg views pre-existence and incarnation as concepts that, in themselves, are ‘mythic’ (which appeal to a prehistoric, or supra-historic reality, which is not accessible to historical human knowledge). He explains that theology uses the concepts not as mythological, but based on the meaning of the resurrection for the historical life of Jesus.

That in the eternal God himself a becoming takes place, a path to

41 ST 2, 313.
42 ST 2, 63.
43 JGM, 307.
44 ST 2, 319; cf. 367-71. JGM, 141, argues similarly that “if Jesus as a person is ‘the Son of God’, as becomes clear retroactively from his resurrection, then he has always been the Son of God” (emphasis added); and see JGM, 152-58.
incarnation: which took shape only in the career of the man Jesus (indeed only at the end of that career), yet precedes the earthly beginning of his life as unity with the eternal God—these are the most important of the paradoxes that emerge here. They can be tolerated only when one perceives the necessity of their emergence from the circumstance of the proleptic appearance of the eschaton in Jesus’ history.\textsuperscript{45}

Diagram B illustrates Pannenberg’s christology in the setting of his anticipatory ontology. The series of arrows represent the historical, human life of Jesus in which he differentiates himself from the Father and in doing so actualises his unity with the Father. There is, at the same time, an act of the Father, which differentiates him from and unites him with the Son, and parallel acts of the Spirit, but only one relation can be shown on the diagram. The resurrection affirms Jesus’ life and claims, and in it the dynamic becomes a single movement of differentiated unity. What occurs in the resurrection anticipates what will be the case in the eschaton, in which the dynamic of the differentiating unity of Father, Son, and Spirit draws all reality into it. The arrows representing the development of history through time and the corresponding effect of the future are established on the basis of the theological claims.

\textsuperscript{45} JGM, 157. \textit{ST} 2, 302-303, explains that “the particular identity of [Jesus’] person is related to the course of his history … only in the light of this outcome may we say … that the child Jesus who was born of Mary was the Messiah and the Son of God … rightly the christology of the early church found the uniqueness of Jesus in his divine sonship.”
Pannenberg’s christology is a reconfiguration of the Chalcedonian approach. He claims it overcomes the weakness of Chalcedon and gives full expression to the human, historical life of Jesus. His approach removes the need to discuss the ‘renunciation’ of divine attributes in the incarnation because that “presupposes an unrestricted possession of the attributes at the beginning of the earthly history.” He argues that the New Testament passages that deal with incarnation refer to “the totality of [Jesus’] life and work … not to his human birth” (John 1:14; 3:16; 1 John 4:2, 9). He appeals to passages such as Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8-9 to argue that Jesus’ identity as Son and his unity with the Father were mediated by his whole life.

Pannenberg’s christology has a structure parallel with, but different from, the classical approach. Both affirm Jesus’ identity as the eternal Son of God who shares in a unity
of essence with the Father and the Spirit.\footnote{See ST 1, 319-27.} Chalcedon presents that identity as constituted by the incarnation of the eternal Son who takes on the human nature, which is individuated as the human Jesus. In contrast, Pannenberg finds the identity of the Son and his unity with the Father as constituted by the human life of Jesus.

Certainly from the standpoint of the Easter event the conception and birth of Jesus had to be seen as the entry of the eternal Son of God into union with this human life (Gal. 4:4). The union of the Logos with this human life continued throughout the whole of the earthy history of Jesus as the eternal Son of God took shape in him through the relation to the Father. We are not to take this to mean that the deity and humanity gradually grew together in the course of Jesus’ history. But with the development of his human life, a relationship to the Father developed with increasing depth, and with it divine sonship.\footnote{ST 2, 383-84.}

His comment that we should not think of Jesus’ humanity and divinity as growing together reflects the fact that the divinity of the Son is constituted by the whole life of the human Jesus taken up into eternity. The relationship between Jesus and the Father grows in depth through history, but the God–man relation exists from the beginning of Jesus’ life on the basis of that life anticipating its conclusion in eternity. Pannenberg differs from classical christology by identifying Jesus’ humanity, not the Logos, as the acting subject in the incarnation.\footnote{See Jenson for an illuminating and appreciative discussion of this aspect of Pannenberg’s Christology; Jenson “Jesus in the Trinity”, 192-95.}

\textit{Assessing Pannenberg’s christology}

Pannenberg’s christology is “magisterial”.\footnote{Molnar, \textit{Incarnation and Resurrection}, 261.} It integrates a wide range of themes and presents careful arguments dealing with the history of theology, Biblical exegesis, the historical Jesus, and general anthropology. The subtlety and complexity of the presentation make an assessment difficult. The main difference between Pannenberg’s christology and Chalcedonian christology has been identified. The following assessment of Pannenberg’s christology focuses on this difference and its motivations and implications. It examines how Pannenberg’s christology reflects the witness of the
New Testament and its relation to the classical christological tradition. It has a specific focus on the role of ‘anticipation’ in Pannenberg’s christology.  

a) New Testament christology

Both Pannenberg’s christology and the Chalcedonian tradition deal with a wide range of New Testament material and overlap at many points. An assessment needs to identify areas in which Pannenberg and Chalcedonian christology deal with New Testament material in different ways and compare the two approaches. Since Pannenberg’s account is based in the historical Jesus and concerned about his historical humanity the comparison will be made on the basis of the treatments of the christological presentations of the Gospels. There are several aspects of christology in the Synoptic Gospels that provide points at which the two approaches can be tested. These points are the presentation of Jesus’ humanity, the obscurity of Jesus’ identity, the evidence of Jesus’ self-awareness, and the presentation of the transfiguration. After examining these, the discussion will turn to Johannine christology.

i. The presentation of Jesus’ humanity in the Synoptic Gospels

It is common in twentieth century theology to observe that Chalcedonian christology tends to detract from a proper emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Wienandy admits, “the inherited scholastic tradition, in the light of this emphasis on the divine, portrayed Jesus as displaying little, if any, frailty and ignorance”. This section will examine these claims by focussing on Jesus’ profession of ignorance of the timing of the apocalyptic events he predicts (Matt. 24:36/Mark 13:32), texts that have particularly troubled orthodox exegetes. Pannenberg observes that patristic and medieval christology was opposed to any Docetic tendencies on the question of Jesus’ suffering and corruptibility but that with the question of Jesus’ knowledge “a Docetic-

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54 See Grenz, *Reason*, 179-200 for a review of the major criticisms of Pannenberg’s christology and a thoughtful defence of it against many of the criticisms. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 410-13, offers a very appreciative assessment of Pannenberg’s christology.

Monophysite threat was continually present and occasionally dominant”. Berkouwer examines the development of “the practice of reading the parts of scriptures which most clearly bring out the humanity of Christ in such a way as to deprive them of their original force” and offers the treatment of these texts as “a striking example” of the practice. He notes that this practice has been given a place in the decrees of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1918, the Holy Office issued *Circa quondam propositiones de scientia animae Christi* that concludes that it cannot be safely taught that there may be a limitation to the knowledge of the soul of Christ while he lived among men.58 Berkouwer complains that “by this dogmatic exegesis the text is robbed of its evident meaning”.59

Since the Patristic era, exegetes have offered various ways of handling these texts. Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus explain the passages in terms of the ignorance of the human nature of Christ. They state that the Logos knew all things, but that the human mind of Christ did not, because the Logos did not reveal this. B. B. Warfield defends this stream of exegesis and develops it more fully in a context in which critical-historical considerations were being pressed on Christian theology. He contends that in the New Testament presentation “a duplex life is attributed to him [Jesus] as his constant possession”. As a result, Warfield affirms both the omniscience and the ignorance of Christ. There are two evident problems with this approach. One is that the text speaks of the “Son” not knowing and the exegete must explain this use of a divine title in connection with an attribute of human nature. The other is that, as Warfield admits, it is very difficult to conceptualise the life of Christ in such Chalcedonian

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56 *JGM*, 33 n.24.

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terms. From Pannenberg’s point of view this approach falls back on paradox and incoherence too quickly, and although it asserts the real and full humanity of Christ he claims that this cannot be properly emphasised by Chalcedonian christology. Resort to such an explanation may be permissible but is hardly obvious in the texts.

A more common approach, found for instance in Hilary and Augustine, refers to “official ignorance” claiming that Christ knew all things in himself but was not commissioned to reveal the day or the hour of the final judgement. Scotus’ suggestion was that Christ’s humanity received an infinite range of truths though not simultaneously, but only in temporal succession. If he had so chosen, the incarnate Christ could have known the time of his return. These suggestions deal with the text no better than the fully Chalcedonian approach and are more ad hoc, lacking a consistent dogmatic basis. Other approaches, such as Kenotic christology or subordinationist readings, move outside the classic christology which Pannenberg is seeking to reformulate and will not be considered here.

Some ‘solutions’ make a closer examination of the text, either in textual criticism or exegesis. There has been a view, going back to Ambrose, that the words οὐδὲ ὁ ιερός are an interpolation. There is no support for such a claim in the textual tradition and no viable explanation of how such an interpolation could enter the text. Various exegetical suggestions come from the Patristic writers. Basil of Caesarea argued that εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ should be translated “if not the Father” and means that the Son only knows because of his substantial union with the Father. Others suggested some figure of speech, for example, Gregory of Tours claimed that “the Son” is the church and “the Father” is God. Lane argues that the statement about the ignorance of the Son is “accidental with respect to Jesus’ intention” which is to show the disciples that they

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62 Warfield, “Human Development of Jesus”, “there is mystery enough attaching to the conception; but the glory of the Incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze, not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man”.

63 Thomas Aquinas, Summa, III.15.3 resp.; III.10.2 ad.1. takes a similar approach.


65 Carl, 5 and 18-19.

must be prepared for ‘the Day’ rather than seek to predict it.\textsuperscript{67} None of these suggestions is convincing.

Pannenberg deals with the texts quite straightforwardly. He includes them in a treatment of a wider theme of Jesus’ lack of messianic consciousness: “Jesus’ lack of knowledge was apparently not only related to the Day of Judgement, but thereby to his own person as well”. These texts fit well with Pannenberg’s anthropological concerns and are part of his anticipatory christology. He holds that when Jesus speaks the words of the apocalyptic discourse in which his statement of ignorance is found, Jesus’ identity as the Son of Man is not yet established, and so Jesus is not aware of it. Jesus ignorance of the future is part of his real humanity. Pannenberg adopts Rahner’s claim that human freedom requires a level of nescience and states that “as awareness of the not yet decided future, the knowledge of one’s ignorance is a condition of human openness and freedom”.\textsuperscript{68}

\textit{ii. The obscurity of Jesus’ identity}

There is a strand of material in the Synoptics in which Jesus’ identity is obscure. It is grasped only gradually by his disciples (Matt. 8:27; 16:16-17), and John the Baptist doubts that Jesus is “the one who was to come” (Matt. 11:3/Luke 7:19). The crowds have, at best, a partial and wavering recognition of Jesus’ identity (Matt. 9:8; 13:54-57; 16:14; 21:8-11; 22:33; Mark 11:8-10; Luke 7:16; 19:37-38). Jesus’ opponents recognise his claims, or at least the implications of his words and deeds, but refuse to acknowledge him (Matt. 9:34; 12:14; 21:23; Mark 3:6; 11:28; Luke 20:1-2). Lack of faith is not the only reason that Jesus’ identity is hidden. He silences likely witnesses to himself (Matt. 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20; 17:9; Mark 1:25; 34; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Luke 4:41; 9:21) and avoids direct claims to be the Messiah until his trial (Matt. 26:64;

\textsuperscript{67} William L. Lane, \textit{The Gospel According to Mark}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 482.
\textsuperscript{68} JGM, 333. Rahner, \textit{Theological Investigations}, 5:202, states that “a philosophy of the person and of the freedom of a finite being, a philosophy of history and of decisions, could undoubtedly show with comparative ease that the fact of challenge, of going into the open, of confiding oneself to the incalculable, of the obscurity of origin and the veiled nature of the end—in short, of a certain kind of ignorance—are all necessary factors in the very nature of self-realization of the finite person in the historical decisions of freedom”.

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His parabolic teaching is presented as deliberately obscure (Mark 4:10-12; Matt. 13:10-17). This material led William Wrede to postulate the “Messianic Secret”. For Wrede, this theme was not part of Jesus’ historical ministry but was added by the church to explain why Jesus did not appear to be the Messiah during his life. Since Wrede’s book, New Testament scholarship has had to say something about the obscurity of Jesus’ identity in the Synoptics, viewing it as either an element in Jesus’ historical ministry or as an element added by Mark and adapted by the other Synoptic evangelists.

The obscurity of Jesus’ identity plays an important role in Pannenberg’s christology. He agrees with Cullmann and others that the political connotations of a claim to be the Messiah meant that Jesus would have been misunderstood if he made such a claim, but holds that the obscurity of Jesus’ identity rests on deeper christological grounds. Pannenberg states that Jesus distinguished himself from the eschatological Son of Man and from the Servant of the Lord. He portrays Jesus as presenting a message about God and God’s rule, not about himself, and claims that this message inevitably made Jesus’ identity ambiguous as “a suspicious half-light fell upon his own figure”. The possibility of offence at Jesus arose from the ambiguity. Ambiguity about Jesus’ identity fits well with Pannenberg’s christology. Jesus’ eschatological message is tied to his identity and both require confirmation by the resurrection.

Pannenberg finds further theological importance in the ambiguity of Jesus’ identity for it also makes the crucifixion a divine act. Jesus was crucified because his message about God’s rule implied something about himself and thus offended those involved in his arrest, trial, and execution. Pannenberg suggests that the obscurity of Jesus’ identity was a necessary part of his life lived in dependence on God and this obscurity led to the offence that culminated in the cross. It is through these connections that Pannenberg links Jesus’ death to his sending by God. Pannenberg does not have to explain the obscurity of Jesus’ identity; it is a basic element of his christology. The lack of clarity

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70 ST 2, 334-36. Pannenberg presents even Mark 14:62 as “perhaps meant to equate Jesus with the Son of Man” (337).
71 ST 2, 343.
of who Jesus is during his historical ministry leads to Jesus becoming the Son of God in the resurrection.

Chalcedonian christology has not found Jesus’ obscurity nearly as difficult to deal with as the question of Jesus’ ignorance. Tuckett explains that the most common explanation of the “secrecy texts” in pre-critical exegesis was “that Jesus wished to reveal his identity to the disciples only gradually so that they might come to a deeper understanding of him”.\(^{72}\) It has also dealt with the obscurity of Jesus’ identity in terms of his state of humiliation. Bavinck provides an example of a thinker who has a classic christology and gives a robust account of Christ’s humiliation. He uses the motif of *kenosis* not to speak of Christ giving up his deity but a humiliation that was part of his vocation and was the Son’s voluntary consecration of his life to God.\(^{73}\) The two approaches to chrestology offer two different ways of handling the material. For Pannenberg it is a key theme in chrestology, while for classical approaches it is incidental to Jesus’ identity, though it can be given a place in an account of his work.

### iii. Jesus’ self-awareness in the Synoptic Gospels

According to Pannenberg, Jesus’ had a growing awareness of unity with God through his life, which did not include awareness of his messianic or divine identity. Pannenberg states that “Jesus has his personal identity solely in being the Son of his heavenly Father”, but that “he cannot have been aware of it from the very outset”.\(^{74}\) In his pre-Easter life, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God was “indirect”.\(^{75}\) Pannenberg gives no explicit treatment of how or when Jesus came to full awareness of his identity. Since he views self-distinction from God as the dynamic of Jesus’ life through to his death, and this prohibits identification with God, he presumably holds that Jesus came to a recognition of his own divine identity in the resurrection. If Jesus had claimed a distinctive sonship before the resurrection, there would have been a basis for the charge

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\(^{74}\) *ST* 2, 389.

\(^{75}\) *ST* 2, 372-73; cf. *JGM*, 324-37.
that Jesus made himself equal to God. Jesus’ identity as the divine Son is not equivalent to his identity as the Messiah, the Son of Man, or the Servant, nor is Jesus’ identity equivalent to his self-awareness. However, in discussing Pannenberg’s christology questions related to Jesus’ historical identity as the Son, the Messiah, the Son of Man and the Servant of the Lord and questions about his self-identification as such all converge. Pannenberg holds that Jesus did not identify himself as any of these in his pre-Easter ministry and each of these claims about Jesus is established by his resurrection. Pannenberg follows what he identifies as “the dominant view of NT exegetes” that Jesus rejected any messianic status, including identification as the eschatological Son of Man, did not claim pre-existence and was only recognised as the Messiah in the light of Easter. He underscores the ambivalence of Jesus’ answer to Caiaphas (Matt. 26:64, 27:11 and Luke 22:70, 23:3) over the more explicit assertion of Mark 14:62. Pannenberg doubts the historicity of Jesus’ use of “the Son” in Matthew 11:27, and in any of his earthly ministry, but defends its attribution to Jesus in the light of Easter. Pannenberg’s view of the historical Jesus’ self-identification coheres with his wider christological claims. For him, it is not to be expected that the human, historical Jesus, who came to his messianic and divine identity in the resurrection, would be aware of these in his pre-Easter ministry.

The view that Jesus did not refer to himself as the Son of Man and had no messianic self-consciousness is no longer a widespread conviction of New Testament scholarship, though it has some defenders. Witherington reports: “that Jesus used the phrase bar enasha to refer to himself is a conclusion widely accepted by scholars”. Wright supports this view, pointing to texts in which Jesus expresses confidence that he and his followers will be vindicated as evidence of Jesus’ self-awareness of being the Son of...
Man. He suggests that scholarship that denies that the historical Jesus made such claims is shaped by presuppositions, not by evidence.\textsuperscript{80} Bird challenges the view that the resurrection established Jesus’ messianic identity, a view that he traces back to Wrede and which has shaped Pannenberg’s christology. Bird argues that there is no necessary logical connection between resurrection and messianic identity and no expectation of a suffering and resurrected Messiah. He argues that divine sonship is “transposed” rather than “triggered” by Jesus’ resurrection, which bring elevation to a “higher rank of sonship” and a “new eschatological function”.\textsuperscript{81} That is, Bird denies that the resurrection is sufficient to establish Jesus’ messianic identity. He argues that Jesus’ identity must be established by his self-identification before his death and resurrection, and that the meaning of his identity develops through his death and resurrection.

Bird’s case depends on establishing that Jesus understood himself as the Messiah during his pre-Easter ministry. He does so in two stages, first demonstrating a range of evidence that Jesus presented himself as the Messiah, and then focussing on the events leading up to the passion. In each case, he examines debate over the authenticity of the various relevant texts and themes. He argues that “Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is “quasi-messianic” and provides a basis for the development of the explicit messianic expectation found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, \textit{1 Enoch}, \textit{4 Ezra} and Revelation.\textsuperscript{82} He then argues that when Jesus uses the phrase it is “a cipher for the eschatological mystery that surrounds his mission” and one which is “pregnant with messianic significance”.\textsuperscript{83} He argues that Luke 4:14-30 and Luke 7:22-23/Matt. 11:4-6 record Jesus presenting himself as the Anointed One of Isaiah (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1) and that there is a strong parallel with a messianic text referring to the same passage in the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicating that Jesus’ claim would have been understood as messianic by contemporaries.\textsuperscript{84} He points out that the implication of Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom, his promise to share the rule of the kingdom (Luke 22:29-30/Matt. 19:28; 20:19-20)
Mark 10:35-45), and the triumphal entry, are a claim to be a royal figure.\(^{85}\) He adds to this evidence the parallels Jesus makes between himself and David and Solomon, and the “I have come” sayings that imply a messianic vocation.\(^ {86}\)

Against this general background, Bird turns to the passion narratives as “the definitive point where the topic of Jesus’s messianic intentions was brought to the surface by the Jerusalem authorities”.\(^ {87}\) Here begins his argument for seeking the authenticity of the confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Mark 8:27-30/Matt. 16:17-19).\(^ {88}\) The triumphal entry and Jesus’ teaching in the temple are claims to be the Messiah, and the reaction of the Jewish authorities shows that they understood them as such.\(^ {89}\) He argues that Jesus deliberately presented his death as “the messianic shepherd who would be struck down in the final days”.\(^ {90}\) He also argues that the charge against Jesus in his trial and the \textit{titulus} over him in his execution imply that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.\(^ {91}\) Pannenberg claims that the accusation of a messianic claim led to Jesus being recognised as Messiah. However, Bird’s argument helps to show that the thesis that the origin of the charge is found in Jesus’ own claims is more persuasive. N. T. Wright offers similar conclusions to those of Bird on the question of Jesus’ self-identification as the Messiah.\(^ {92}\) He presents Jesus as having a clear messianic vocation.\(^ {93}\) Wright not only discerns in Jesus before the resurrection a divine work (representing Yahweh), but

\(^{85}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 104-107.
\(^{86}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 107-14.
\(^{87}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 117.
\(^{88}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 118-21.
\(^{89}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 123-32.
\(^{90}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 132-36.
\(^{91}\) Bird, \textit{Are You the One}, 136-42.
\(^{92}\) Wright and Pannenberg both interact with the German study of the historical Jesus, dealing with Schweitzer, Wrede, Kähler, Bultmann, Käsemann and Jeremias. Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God}, 202ff and 594ff, like Pannenberg, places Jesus in a Jewish eschatological and apocalyptic setting in which the resurrection is crucial in establishing a view of Jesus. Wright commends Pannenberg’s effort to understand Jesus in a Jewish setting (26). On the resurrection see Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God}, 658-59 and N. T. Wright, \textit{The Resurrection of the Son of God} (London: SPCK, 2003), 719-38.
\(^{93}\) Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God}, 539, explains that “Jesus … believed himself to be the focal point of the people of YHWH … he embodied what he had announced. He was the true interpreter of Torah, the true builder of the Temple; the true spokesman for Wisdom … It was a claim to a Messiahship that redefined itself around Jesus’ own kingdom-agenda … He came, as the representative of the people of YHWH, to bring about the end of exile, the renewal of the covenant, the forgiveness of sins.”
also claims that Jesus was conscious of this role and saw his actions as bringing in the kingdom.\textsuperscript{94}

The claim that the historical Jesus was aware of his pre-existence seems far harder to sustain than the claim that he identified himself as the Messiah, at least on the basis of the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels. Gathercole observes that “many commentators and exegetes do not even raise the possibility of seeing pre-existence in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke”.\textsuperscript{95} He argues that a case can be made for Jesus’ own claims to be the pre-existent Son. He focuses on ten texts (Mark 1:24/Luke 4:34; Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:38; Mark 2:17/Matt. 9:13/Luke 5:32; Matt. 5:17; Luke 12:49; Matt. 10:34 /Luke 12:51; Matt. 10:35; Mark 10:45/Matt. 20:28; Luke 19:10) which use ἔρχομαι or a synonym and an expression of purpose, and which imply Jesus’ self-awareness of an origin which transcends the human sphere and argues that these are authentic sayings of Jesus.\textsuperscript{96} He supplements this evidence with corresponding “sending” statements (Matt. 15:24; Luke 4:18, 43), references to the Father as the one who sent Jesus (Mark 9:37 /Luke 9:48; Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16) and less direct material in parables (Luke 14:17; Mark 12:6).\textsuperscript{97} He also argues that Matthew 23:37, in which Jesus remarks on how often he longed to gather Jerusalem, shows “Jesus’ preincarnate longing for Israel’s repentance”.\textsuperscript{98} Gathercole’s work is still recent and has received limited though generally positive reviews.\textsuperscript{99} He has, at least, shown that the Synoptic Gospels allow the possibility of Jesus’ self-consciousness of pre-existence.

The differences between Pannenberg’s account of the historical Jesus and those discussed above reflect a shift in paradigm in the study of the historical Jesus. Pannenberg draws his insights from scholars associated with the so-called ‘New Quest

\textsuperscript{94} Wright, \textit{Jesus and the Victory of God}, 653; Wright says of Jesus’ self-understanding, “He would be the pillar of cloud and fire for the people of the new exodus. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God”.


\textsuperscript{96} Gathercole, \textit{Pre-existent Son}, 87.

\textsuperscript{97} Gathercole, \textit{Pre-existent Son}, 177-89.

\textsuperscript{98} Gathercole, \textit{Pre-existent Son}, 219.

for the historical Jesus’ while more recent scholarship is part of the ‘third quest’. Evans offers a summary of the developments. He concludes that the study of the historical Jesus has come to the view that “the ethnic, social, and religious location of Jesus is firmly a Jewish one”; that Jesus’ mission was to restore Israel and that Jesus’ message of the presence of the kingdom was “an announcement of the restoration of Israel”; that Jesus made clear messianic claims so that “the opinion following the resurrection that Jesus was the Messiah was due to what Jesus himself taught and encouraged his disciples to believe”; and that the passion and resurrection accounts of the Gospels are reliable historical accounts. These conclusions are certainly not unanimous, but Evans’ summary reflects the general development of historical Jesus research in the last generation. Several of the developments in the Third Quest support Pannenberg’s project. He recognises the importance of the Jewish setting of Jesus’ life for an understanding of Jesus. Similarly, the findings that the passion and resurrection accounts are reliable largely confirm Pannenberg’s conclusions. One of the major differences is that Pannenberg, following the New Quest approach, holds that Jesus did not understand himself as the Messiah or as the pre-existent Son of God. Third Quest approaches are generally more confident that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, at least implicitly, if not explicitly. Gathercole shows that a Third Quest approach can even find evidence in the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus alluding to his own pre-existence. The Third Quest puts Pannenberg’s portrait of the Jesus’ ministry on thinner ground.

iv. The transfiguration

The transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13, Luke 9:28-36, Matt. 17:1-13), if treated as a historical event, does not fit comfortably into Pannenberg’s christology for it implies

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101 Craig A. Evans, “Assessing Progress In the Third Quest of the Historical Jesus” *JSHJ* 4, no.1 (Jan 2006): 43, 44, 47 and 49-54. James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: an Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 8-12 outlines the era of “Jesus Research”, as he prefers to call the Third Quest. His own conclusion on the evidence is cautious: “There is evidence that Jesus may have had a messianic consciousness” (110). Martin Hengel, *Studies in early Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 72, concludes that the Jesus “proved by the methods of historical-critical research” was “conducted himself with that … ‘apocalyptic’ right to usher in God’s reign over Israel … and as the ‘Anointed of God’. See James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight eds., *The historical Jesus in recent research* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), for a wide range of views on the study of the Historical Jesus edited from a Third Quest perspective and see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 85.
that Jesus’ identity as the glorious Son is already established before Easter. Chilton argues that the accounts of the transfiguration draw attention to Jesus’ identity at that moment: “eschatological vindication may be intimated by it … but the focus of the transfiguration is not the future … the point is what the bat qôl says at the moment Jesus consciously commences a journey of suffering”. Pannenberg’s passing mention of the event reflects Bultmann’s view that it is a displaced resurrection account, though Pannenberg concedes that it may be an event in Jesus’ life, in which case “we may see it as an anticipatory manifestation of the glorifying that Jesus experienced at his resurrection”.

Lee argues that the account is not a displaced resurrection account since it is “a very different genre”, and its symbolism is not transparent, as would be expected if it was simply “the product of Christian imagination”. She argues that the transfiguration accounts cross two genres—apocalyptic and epiphanic. The apocalyptic fits well with Pannenberg’s approach since it takes the transfiguration as an anticipation of eschatological glory of God’s kingdom. Lee notes that the reference to the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-18 emphasises a revelation which is more than anticipatory.

The transfiguration is not a ‘sneak preview’ of that which did not yet exist … What is disclosed at the transfiguration is Jesus’ true identity as the Son, whose appearance on the mountain stands symbolically, in the author’s mind, for the incarnation and the resurrection. The argument is not simply that Jesus appeared once in an anticipatory way and therefore will appear again at the dismantling and remaking of the world. Rather, the anticipatory appearance is of one who is none other than the Divine Son, the Beloved.

Pannenberg’s view is that Jesus’ identity as the glorious Son comes about in the resurrection and is true in anticipation before that. His account of the historical, human life of Jesus is that no glory is apparent when it is considered in isolation from the

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103 *ST* 3, 626.
resurrection and the eschaton. The transfiguration accounts challenge Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology since they imply that Jesus was already the glorified divine Son whose identity was hidden but did not need to be realised or constituted.

v. *Johannine christology*

If Pannenberg’s account of Jesus’ self-awareness is somewhat curtailed in comparison with the presentation of the Synoptics, the contrast with the Fourth Gospel is stronger. The Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as aware of his identity as the Son (John 5:19 *passim* and as Messiah (John 11:25 *passim*), and his pre-incarnate origin (John 3:12-13; 8:23). Jesus makes strong implicit claims of his own deity (John 8:55; 10:33ff). This fits comfortably with classical christology, for which John was an important source. Pannenberg treats John’s Gospel as testimony to the reality of the risen Christ, but not as evidence for the historical Jesus. Again, the point at issue relates to Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology. For Pannenberg, the claims which the Fourth Gospel makes about Jesus’ identity could not have been made in the midst of his pre-Easter life, since they were not present in the same way that his human, historical life was present, they were present in anticipation. The question, then, is whether the claims of the Fourth Gospel can be considered an account of the historical Jesus.

Recent biblical scholarship presents varied views of the historical reliability of the Johannine picture of Jesus. Casey argues that John’s Gospel is not historically reliable: “Jesus did not walk this earth presenting himself as the pre-existent Son of God, expounding his relationship with the Father, declaring that he is the Way, the

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106 This thesis will refer to ‘the Fourth Gospel’ and ‘John’s Gospel’ and the author and the narrator as ‘John’ without assuming a view about the historical authorship of the Gospel.

107 See Paul Anderson, “Beyond the Shade of the Oak Tree: The Recent Growth of Johannine Studies” *ET 119* (2008): 370-71, for a survey of recent discussion of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel which demonstrates that the matter is far from settled. The establishment of the *John, Jesus, and History Project* in the Society of Biblical Literature is the clearest evidence of this. Even in the mid-1960s R. E. Brown *The Gospel according to John (1-12) Vol 1* (Anchor Bible; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), xlvii, explains, “it has been a commonplace in critical investigation of the historical Jesus that no reliance can be placed on the material found in John … This question deserve reconsideration”. He concludes that “John is based on a solid tradition of the works and words of Jesus [and] … often John gives us correct historical information about Jesus … yet in evaluating the Johannine picture of Jesus, we cannot neglect the inevitable modifications made in the various stages of … composition” (li).
Truth and the Life.” Lincoln states, “there would be little dispute that the Johannine Jesus … speaks of himself in categories that reflect the Fourth Evangelist’s estimate of him and that have been developed … in the context of the ongoing dispute with the synagogue”. On this basis, Lincoln gives no further consideration to the historicity of Jesus’ self-awareness as the Son. Other scholars argue that John’s portrait of Jesus is far more reliable than has been assumed. These scholars recognise that the Johannine presentation is shaped by a post-resurrection view of Jesus and that John’s Jesus speaks in the idiom of the evangelist. However, they argue that the Gospel is based on the recollections of an eyewitness and its portrait of Jesus, including the high christology, reflects the historical reality. The arguments of these scholars show that the view, which Pannenberg adopted on the basis of twentieth century scholarship, cannot be presumed.

Evans offers a constructive response to the scholarly division on the question of John’s historical reliability, which appeals to an externalist non-evidentialist epistemology. He points out that the concept of “historical reliability” is often not well defined. He

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111 C. Stephen Evans, “The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: From What Perspective Should it Be Assessed?” in Gospel of John and Christian Theology, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 91-119. Both Evidentialism and Non-evidentialism agree that knowledge is justified true belief. Evidentialism holds that a belief can only be justified if the knower has sufficient evidence to hold the belief. It is thus an internalist view, since it holds that a knower is able to discern if she has sufficient evidence to hold a belief. An externalist, in contrast, accepts that much knowledge is held without evidence or without a knower being aware if she has sufficient evidence for the belief. This gives rise to a Non-evidentialism which holds that some beliefs can be taken as “basic”. Basic beliefs might include the acceptance of sense perception as well as belief in God. These are held with grounds, but the grounds are not “evidence”. Someone who holds to such a Non-evidentialism must still deal with evidence. In particular, the Non-evidentialist must take seriously any evidence that seems to be a ‘defeater’ of his or her beliefs. C. Stephen Evans, Faith beyond Reason (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 36-52 explains and defends his position further. In his argument about John’s Gospel, Evans suggests treating John’s account as largely historical could be viewed as something like a basic belief, based on a readiness to accept testimony as grounds for belief.
offers as a minimal standard that if “Jesus never said the kind of things John represents him as saying, either publicly or privately” then the book would not be historically reliable. Evans argues that it is epistemologically responsible for the Christian to believe that John is historically reliable in those terms and so to hold that Jesus made claims about himself based on John’s testimony. His non-evidentialist epistemology holds that testimony is reasonable grounds on which to form beliefs, though he includes the work of the Holy Spirit in his account of how such beliefs are formed.\textsuperscript{112} Evans holds that such beliefs have to deal with evidence that seems to falsify them. He therefore does not avoid Casey’s argument against the authenticity of the Johannine portrait of Jesus, however he argues that the case is not convincing and so those who believe the testimony of the Fourth Gospel are not required to change that belief.\textsuperscript{113} The difference between Evans’ position and standard evidentialist accounts is that he is required simply to present arguments that rebut potential defeater arguments rather than establish his view on the basis of evidence.

Perhaps surprisingly, it can be argued that Evans’ approach is compatible with Pannenbergs’s proposal for the relationship of faith and reason examined in Chapter 1. Pannenberg states that the historian holds views that should be treated as hypotheses and tested and he lays out criteria for this testing. He requires claims to have some ground outside of themselves and objects to views in which faith claims are viewed as being their own ground.\textsuperscript{114} Evans’ approach offers a ground for claims—the testimony found in the Gospels, in this case John’s Gospel. Evans also requires that when there is a potential defeater argument or evidence which might falsify beliefs formed on the basis of testimony that this must be considered and either rebutted or accepted. In effect, this is the same process as Pannenberg’s program of falsifying hypotheses. The New Testament scholarship from which Pannenberg draws has an evidentialist epistemology, but Pannenberg himself is not committed to such a model. However, if Evans’ approach were included in Pannenberg’s christology, the anticipatory dimension of christology would be moderated because greater credence would be given to the

\textsuperscript{112} Evans, “Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel”, 106-107.
\textsuperscript{113} Evans, “Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel”, 109-14, presents the main argument in response to Casey; Evans also offers a response from an evidentialist perspective (114-17).
\textsuperscript{114} “Insight and Faith”, \textit{BQT} 2, 29-32.
Johannine presentation of Jesus as already claiming to be “the Son” during his pre-
Easter life. Such moderation of the anticipatory dimension would not require its
removal since John has proleptic themes in his christology, most obvious in Jesus’
declaration that he is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). The statement
anticipates Jesus’ own resurrection, and claims that eschatological resurrection will be
realised in Jesus.  

The New Testament presents Jesus as claiming to be both the Messiah and the Son, and
historical examination cannot easily dismiss that claim. This raises a question over
Pannenberg’s christology. The strength of Pannenberg’s position is that he can present
Jesus’ consistent deference to God as an expression of his filial relationship, and can
include this in Jesus’ deity. The weakness is that Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology,
in which the historical Jesus does not claim these things and in which his path of
sonship requires that he not claim them, does not deal satisfactorily with New
Testament claims that Jesus was the Son of God before Easter, and that he was aware of
this.  

b) Pannenberg and Chalcedon

i. The humanity of Christ as a dogmatic problem

As noted earlier, Pannenberg’s criticism of the Chalcedonian approach is that it does
not adequately allow Jesus’ humanity to come into view. This is a primary reason for
turning to an anticipatory christology. In an influential chapter of his *Theological
Investigations*, Rahner argues similarly that a two-nature model of christology fails to
give a proper place to Jesus’ humanity. He observes that the classic formulations
oppose Monothelitism and assert that the human nature of Christ has “a genuine,
spontaneous, free, spiritual, active centre, a human self-consciousness” which stands as

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115 Brown, *John*, 1:434 states that “in Johannine realised eschatology the gift of life that conquered death
is a present reality in Jesus Christ”.

116 Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
2002), 186, makes similar observations about the difference between Pannenberg’s christology and the
New Testament presentation, concluding that “in spite of his own apocalyptic worldview, Jesus does not
share Pannenberg’s assumption that God’s future vindication is the only grounds for other people’s trust
in him”.

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a creature before God. Yet, he argues, two-nature christology does not imply or support an account of Jesus’ full humanity; it is added as a supplement. According to Rahner, a positive statement about Jesus’ humanity does not come from the inner logic of two-nature christology.

How can the whole complex of Christological dogma be formulated so as to allow the Lord to appear as Messianic Mediator and as true Man, as soon as possible, or at any rate with sufficient clarity? As true Man, who, standing before God on our side in free human obedience, is Mediator, not only in virtue of the ontological union of two natures, but also through his activity, which is directed to God (as obedience to the will of the Father) and cannot be conceived of simply as God’s activity in and through a human nature thought of as purely instrumental, a nature which in relation to the Logos would be, ontologically and morally, purely passive? The ordinary doctrine of two natures just by itself is quite insufficient as a ground from which to derive this insight into Christ’s mediation as something which arises from the inner tendency of the doctrine.

Rahner’s critique supports Pannenberg’s view that classic christology is not able to present Christ’s humanity in a satisfactory manner. Pannenberg’s own anticipatory proposal allows maximal room for the humanity of Jesus by making the historical life of the human Jesus constitutive for his identity as the Son. Pannenberg’s approach does offer a solution to what has been a persistent problem for classical christology.

**ii. Is Pannenberg an adoptionist?**

Various commentators have wondered if Pannenberg’s focus on the historical, human Jesus is adoptionist. The view that Jesus did not claim divine Sonship during his pre-Easter life and that the resurrection is constitutive for his identity as Son and Messiah would usually indicate an adoptionist christology. If Pannenberg’s christology were adoptionist then it would have to be considered incoherent, since he explicitly rejects

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adoptionism. Pannenberg avoids adoptionism by his appeal to anticipation. Critics may be unconvinced by his metaphysical proposal, but within Pannenberg’s own proposal his christology is not adoptionist. Some claims that Pannenberg’s christology in adoptionist are made of Jesus—God and Man, in which incarnational christology is muted, though even in that work the christology is clearly not adoptionist. Others seem to have missed entirely the anticipatory structure of Pannenberg’s christology.

Molnar has been critical of Pannenberg’s christology, accusing it of being adoptionist. He recognises that Pannenberg affirms pre-existence and incarnation based on the “retroactive” effect of the resurrection. However, he does not register how seriously Pannenberg intends his metaphysic to be taken.

Pannenberg’s assertion that Jesus is ‘retrospectively’ one with God can only mean that the community regards him as one with God in his pre-Easter life. But it can never mean that he really was one with God in the pre-Easter life … because by definition his divinity was his eternal Sonship which is grounded antecedently in his relation to the Father “before all worlds”.

Molnar misconstrues Pannenberg’s meaning. Pannenberg affirms a real incarnation, though cast in different form to classical thought. In view of Pannenberg’s repeated assertions of pre-existence, he cannot be fairly accused of denying the pre-existence of the Son of God. Blocher’s criticism is more precise when he wonders if Pannenberg can affirm genuine pre-existence and a true incarnation. Blocher understands that

122 ST 2, 377. Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 188, comments that it would be “easy to label [Pannenberg’s] account of Jesus’ sonship ‘adoptionistic’ … were it not for Pannenberg’s insistence that there is a reciprocal relationship between the Son and the Father by which the Father also receives his divinity from Jesus the Son”.
123 Gunton, Yesterday, 23, comments that Pannenberg “rejects the Christology of Chalcedon” and claims that in his thought “too much weight falls upon the finite premises, too little on the gospel background [with its] claim that what happened on earth takes its origins in eternity, in the prevenient love of God”. Even in JGM Pannenberg accepts Chalcedon more fully than Gunton acknowledges and in ST he uses incarnational language more freely; see JGM, 132-33. In ST Pannenberg’s method certainly touches on Gunton’s other concern, for he relates Christology very clearly to the love of God, though transposing ‘origin in eternity’ into an eschatological rather than a prevenient notion.
125 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 282-88; cf. Molnar, “Some problems with Pannenberg’s solution”, 315-39, “the Sonship Pannenberg describes cannot be Jesus’ Sonship since it arises from and is determined by the man Jesus’ experiences within history”.
126 Molnar, Incarnation and Resurrection, 287.
Pannenberg’s christology “hinges upon … ontological retroactivity” and that Pannenberg’s account of pre-existence and incarnation depend on the metaphysical claim. Blocher rejects the metaphysical proposal, and so wonders if Pannenberg’s affirmations of pre-existence and incarnation can be considered genuine.\textsuperscript{127} Blocher sees that if Pannenberg’s view of anticipation fails, then his christology is adoptionistic.

\textit{iii. The structure of Pannenberg’s christology}

The claim that Pannenberg’s christology is adoptionist reflects a feature of his christology, even though it misunderstands the feature. Pannenberg describes the identity of the divine Son as constituted by the life of the historical, human Jesus and so makes the human Jesus the acting subject in the life of the divine Son. Bradshaw is critical of Pannenberg’s christology in \textit{Jesus—God and Man}, and comments that “his trinitarian Son lacks an acting subject apart from that of the finite man’s consciousness” and suggests that Pannenberg cannot sustain his position unless he posits the pre-existent Logos.\textsuperscript{128} In \textit{Systematic Theology}, Pannenberg does affirm the pre-existence of the Logos. However, the structure of his christology has not changed from that which Bradshaw criticised. This chapter has argued that Pannenberg’s anticipatory Logos christology continues to make the life of the human, historical Jesus constitutive for the identity of the Son. Bradshaw’s criticism highlights a concern about the structure of Pannenberg’s christology, a structure which depends upon the concept of anticipation.

By making the human Jesus the acting subject in the life of the divine Son, Pannenberg presents a christology which has an inverted version of traditional Lutheran christology. Reflection on this christology and on how it has been critiqued suggests one way in which the structure of Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology can be assessed.

Traditional Lutheran christology emphasises “the mutual participation and exchange of the individual properties of the two natures”.\textsuperscript{129} This \textit{communicatio idiomatum} was

\textsuperscript{128} Bradshaw, \textit{Trinity and Ontology}, 291-93.
expressed most radically in the doctrine of *genus maiestaticum*, which held that the predicates of the Godhead are expressed in human nature (in particular, that Christ’s humanity is ubiquitous). The result of this christology was that Jesus’ humanity lacked a clear expression. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, though himself a Lutheran, is critical of this view: “Lutheran Christology is in the last resort no longer speaking of the real humanity of Christ”. In post-Reformation polemics the *genus maiestaticum* drew the objections of the Reformed for reasons which largely paralleled patristic objections to Monophysitism. The objections in the ancient church sprang not only from scriptural testimony to the human nature of Jesus, but also from the dictum ‘that which is not assumed is not healed’. Reformed theologians held that Lutheran christology risked the same problems. Berkouwer explains Calvin’s soteriological motivation, that “from the gospel he learned that the riches of Christ consisted in the fact that he redeemed us as one of us”. Therefore, he resisted any suggestion that Christ did not remain fully human.

There can be no doubt that Pannenberg’s view allows for a very full expression of the humanity of Christ and cannot be judged to fail the test of ‘that which is not assumed is not healed’. Indeed, one of the primary motivations for his development of an anticipatory christology is the desire to give a full account of Jesus’ humanity. The suggestion here is that Pannenberg’s theology inverts traditional Lutheran christology. Where the *genus maiestaticum* makes it impossible to distinguish the human nature from the divine, Pannenberg’s christology makes it very difficult to discover the divine

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130 Bonhoeffer, *Christology* 93-95.
Son as an acting subject in the human Jesus. It is, then, vulnerable to an inverted version of the Reformed criticisms of Lutheran christology. It can be asked if Pannenberg makes it sufficiently clear that the work of Christ as Saviour is the work of God the Son. The parallel with Lutheran christology is significant because it demonstrates that a christology that is not formally monophysitist is still vulnerable to the same criticisms as a monophysitism. By analogy Pannenberg’s christology is not adoptionist; however by making the human, historical life of Jesus constitutive for the identity of the divine Son it seems that the work of the Son in redemption is only understood as a human work.

Webster observes that it is common for “modern Lutheran christology” not to clearly state that “divinity assumed humanity” with the result that Chalcedonian “union of the natures” becomes a “unity”. He insists that the Chalcedonian position secures the hypostatic unity as “free grace” and presents divinity and humanity as “asymmetrically related”. This asymmetry is that the divine Word is the hypostatic centre of the union, and so the work of reconciliation is a divine one accomplished through human nature in which the Logos is the acting subject. Pannenberg’s christology is open to Webster’s criticism.

The criticism mooted here is a formal criticism relating to the structure of Pannenberg’s christology. It will have material significance if it is shown that Pannenberg’s account of reconciliation falls short of being the work of God the Son. This would be evidence that the structure of Pannenberg’s christology has consequences for his soteriology. That question leads into the discussion of Chapter 6, which will examine Pannenberg’s presentation of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Pannenberg’s christology seeks to express the humanity and divinity of Jesus in a way that relates the two as genuinely complementary. His appeal to ‘anticipation’ allows

him to view Jesus’ human life as the presence of the Son of God, and thus to give full expression to Jesus’ human life and to see this human life as the presence of God. It also means that Jesus’ humanity (his submission and obedience) is constitutive for the identity of the Logos. In these respects, Pannenberg’s christology stands as a challenge to more Chalcedonian approaches, which often fall short of a full appreciation of the historical humanity of Jesus.

This chapter has noted two weaknesses in Pannenberg’s christology, one related directly to the New Testament presentation and one concerning the way in which Pannenberg understands the person of the Son. First, his christology does not deal well with aspects of the New Testament that ascribe to the pre-Easter Jesus the reality and awareness of both divine sonship and a messianic task. Second, because Pannenberg holds that the human Jesus is the acting subject in the identity of the Son, it is not clear that he affirms that reconciliation is a work of the Logos. This question about the structure of Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology is examined further in the following chapter, which considers his doctrine of reconciliation.
Chapter 6  Anticipation in Pannenberg’s Doctrine of Reconciliation

Introduction

Pannenberg’s theology is an account of the God who saves. The final sweeping paragraph of Systematic Theology begins with a summary of universal history “from the beginning of creation by way of reconciliation to the eschatological future of salvation”. Pannenberg’s whole work argues that this history is “the incursion of the eternal future of God to the salvation of creatures” and so “a manifestation of divine love”. The history of God’s active love, especially its future, is the basis for affirming “God’s coming forth from the immanence of divine love” and the “incorporation of creatures … into the unity of the trinitarian life”. The last climactic sentence declares that the unity and distinction of this movement is “the heartbeat of divine love” which in a single heartbeat “encompasses the whole world of creatures”.¹ This closing note in his work shows Pannenberg’s concern for history and his metaphysical proposal fully integrated with the theological themes of creation, reconciliation, and God’s identity. Pannenberg’s primary argument for the claim that all of history is God’s reconciling work is that the life of Jesus is a work of salvation. The whole of history is “the incursion of the eternal future of God to the salvation of creatures” precisely because this occurs in an anticipatory way in the life of Jesus and his resurrection. Conversely, Jesus’ life is reconciliation because it anticipates the eschatological salvation.

This chapter considers Pannenberg’s account of reconciliation. It will focus on the central claim in Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation, that Jesus’ death is reconciling, and show that he makes this claim through an appeal to anticipation. The chapter begins by noting that for Pannenberg the death of Jesus is christological, that is it contributes to Jesus’ identity, and it is redemptive. It then outlines the concerns and questions which shape Pannenberg’s exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation, considers some of the key terms Pannenberg uses and notes the way in which his doctrine integrates three temporal horizons. The chapter argues that Pannenberg’s doctrine presents a series of conditions that make it possible for Jesus’ death to be reconciling and an actualising

¹ ST 3, 646.
condition. It shows how these conditions, understood together, enable Pannenberg to present a trinitarian doctrine of reconciliation. The chapter concludes by returning to the question raised in Chapter 6 of how Pannenberg understands the cross as an act of God the Son and notes the absence of two important themes from his exposition, suggesting that Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation falls short of a full expression of the work of God in the work of Christ.

The work of Christ and the cross

a) The cross as constitutive for Christ’s identity and redemptive

In Pannenberg’s thought, Jesus’ death is part of his identity-forming history as well as of his work of redemption. It sealed Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father: “as Jesus accepted the death that others inflicted on him as the consequence of his sending to bear witness to the rule of God, he thus sealed the self-distinction from God that he proclaimed”.2 At the same time it brought unity with the Father: “only as he let his earthly existence be consumed in service to his mission could Jesus as a creature be one with God”.3 The cross is the climax of the dual movement of distinction-from and unity-with the Father that marked Jesus’ life.

The cross is also the event which lies at the centre of Pannenberg’s account of reconciliation. He states that “the Pauline linking of the slogan ‘reconciliation’ to the death of Christ (Rom. 5:10) shows us why Christian theology has understood the death of Jesus in terms of reconciliation, but it also has seen reconciliation in the light of various interpretations of the death of Jesus Christ”.4 Pannenberg’s own approach shares this dual focus: to understand the doctrine of reconciliation as an exposition of the death of Christ and to show why the death of Christ is to be understood as reconciliation. Understanding the cross as the climactic event that, in anticipation, determines Jesus’ identity and as the event in which God, in anticipation, reconciles the world gives Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation its distinctive note.

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2 ST 2, 434.
3 ST 2, 375.
4 ST 2, 406.
b) The cross and reconciliation: interpretive perspectives

The following section presents three sets of interpretive perspectives that can be found within Pannenberg’s presentation of the doctrine of reconciliation.

i. The cross and reconciliation: concerns and questions

Several concerns lead Pannenberg to relate the theme of reconciliation to the event of the cross. The christological question of the identity of Jesus is one concern. This is intimately related to the claim that the triune God is reconciler of the world. Pannenberg’s goal is to show that God is the one who brings reconciliation through the life of Christ. That is the topic to which Pannenberg turns at the close of his exposition of the work of Christ in which he has established the nature of reconciliation.5 Corinthians 5:19, with its famous statement “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself”, is the most significant text for him in this regard. Pannenberg seeks to demonstrate that the apostolic authors offer an understanding of the cross which is grounded in “the special” or distinctive features “of the event itself”.6 This argument is demanded by his view that the words of Scripture are authoritative insofar as they witness to the historical reality of the events to which they refer.

Pannenberg is concerned with a series of problems that confront the doctrine of reconciliation. He argues that reconciliation must be an account of the death of Jesus, but that over the course of time Christian thought has both narrowed the meaning of the term reconciliation and understood its relation to Jesus’ death in a different sense to the New Testament understanding. The narrowing of the concept involves the loss of the connection between Jesus’ death and present participation in the salvation of God. The other shift is that “in contrast to Paul, for whom God was the subject of the event of reconciliation … the idea could arise that God, having been offended by the sin of Adam, had to be reconciled to humanity by the obedience of the Son, or by the

5 ST 2, 437-54.
6 The term Pannenberg uses, Besonderheit, emphasises the distinctive features of the item under consideration.
sacrificing of his life on the cross”. Pannenberg traces this shift through Western theology, arguing that the view was correlated with the doctrine that Christ was mediator of salvation only in his human nature, so that he offered to God on behalf of sinners the satisfaction that was required by God or he received on behalf of sinners the punishment that was due to them. Pannenberg holds that even where the Reformers stressed mediation as a work of the God-Man this problem was not overcome. According to Pannenberg, it was Socinian criticism and then Enlightenment thought that awoke theology to the reversal of understanding that had occurred. He praises modern Protestant theology for recognising that “the reconciliation of the world by Christ” is “an outworking of the love of God in the face of the opposition of humans who are hostile to God”. However, the same line of thought tended to lose the central place of the cross in God’s reconciliation. Pannenberg follows Kähler in asserting that Christ’s death is not educative or exemplary but “a real overcoming of the misery that consists of our having fallen into sin and death and the related estrangement from God”.

He is also concerned about a more specific question in interpreting the cross, which is whether the reconciling work on the cross can be described as expiation when contemporary thought can no longer think of Jesus’ death in terms of “sacrifice, expiation, and substitution”. Pannenberg aims to show that the Biblical presentation of reconciliation focuses on the cross of Christ, and that the cross can be understood as expiatory, when that term is properly understood. At the same time, he seeks to show how the cross is one part of the triune God’s whole work that brings the creation back to himself.

**ii. Interpreting the cross: the concepts**

In Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation several terms are used to denote important concepts. The two most general concepts are salvation (*Heil*) and reconciliation

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7 *ST* 2, 407.
8 *ST* 2, 410.
9 *ST* 2, 421, refers to G. Friedrich, *Die Verkündigung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), who concludes that explanations of the cross have to be drawn from contemporary ideas.
(Versöhnung), which Pannenberg applies to the whole work of God in history. Salvation, Pannenberg explains, carries the sense of the wholeness or integrity of life indicated by the word *shalom* in the OT, which is the outcome of reconciliation and fellowship with God. The concept of representation (Stellvertretung) is far more specific and is used by Pannenberg to explain the significance of the cross. The term literally means ‘place taking’, that is ‘taking another’s place’. The word was coined in the context of theological discussion and dispute about the significance of Jesus’ death and so refers to vicarious suffering. Janowski concludes that “it always means that one person, by some action of suffering, takes the ‘place’ of others who are not willing or able to take it up themselves”. Although Pannenberg will discuss the term in a more general way occasionally, the notion of vicarious suffering is always one of the connotations of the term ‘representation’ in his discussion. For Pannenberg, Christ does his work of reconciliation by a death in which he stands in for those he reconciles to God.

The notion of expiation (Sühne) is more specific than representation. It deals with questions of guilt and punishment. Pannenberg notes that both Socinian and Kantian critiques raise major objections to the traditional Christian claim that Christ has offered the expiation for sins. Kant argued that an exchange of guilt is impossible, so only the sinner could offer expiation for his or her sin. Pannenberg responds to such critiques and explains Jesus’ death as expiation in the following terms.

In this situation of condemnation and execution, Jesus (whom, through the resurrection, God showed to be innocent) bore death as a consequence for our sin, thereby effecting representation in the concrete form of a change of place between the innocent and the guilty. The innocent suffered the penalty of death, which, as the harmful result of sin, is the fate of those in whose place he died. This vicarious penal suffering, which is rightly described as the vicarious suffering of the wrath of God at sin, rests on the fellowship that Jesus Christ accepted with all of us as sinners and with our fate as

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10 ST 2, 398.
12 Bromiley usually translates Stellvertretung as ‘representation’ rather than ‘substitution’; however, at certain points he uses both words. For example Systematische Theologie 2:468 mentions “den Vorstellungen von Sühne und Stellvertretung”, which Bromiley translates as “the ideas of expiation and representation (or substitution)” offering both English words (ST 2, 422; cf. 419 n.76, 467, and 429). Bromiley also uses the term “vicarious” to translate the adjective stellvertretendes (ST 2, 467).
such.\textsuperscript{13} That is, Jesus is a representative who accepts the human fate of death, which is due to sin, and therefore his death is expiation.

\textit{iii. Interpreting the cross: temporal horizons}

Pannenberg’s thought about reconciliation relates three temporal horizons: Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection in the past; the present inclusion of believers into salvation; and the final consummation of salvation. His exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation involves clarifying the relation of these three horizons. He is committed to showing that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are redemptive. He also takes the New Testament witness to the work of the Spirit and the place of the church with full seriousness. The final paragraph of \textit{Systematic Theology} 3, examined above, emphasises that Pannenberg views the eschaton as the unification of history, which is the outworking of God’s redemptive purpose. His doctrine of reconciliation shows how the three temporal horizons are related and he uses anticipation to do this.

\textit{The cross and expiation}

Pannenberg’s thought about the work of Christ can be unfolded from his claim that the death of Christ is expiation for sins. He summarises his discussion of reconciliation as dealing with “processes for interpreting, receiving, and understanding the death of Christ”.\textsuperscript{14} Within this discussion, the most precise interpretation that Pannenberg offers of Christ’s death is that it is an act of expiation. If we ask, ‘Why is Christ’s death an act of expiation?’, Pannenberg answers at two levels. On the one hand, he demonstrates that it is possible to understand and explain Jesus’ death as expiation for sins and that this possibility arises from the historical circumstance, and thus that event is open to the understanding found in the New Testament and later Christian thought. On the other hand, he also seeks to demonstrate that Jesus’ death is actually expiatory. This chapter argues that in Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation it is the outcome of Jesus’ death

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{ST} 2, 427.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{ST} 2, 437.
in the life of sinner which makes his death actually reconciling and so expiatory. While the others conditions create the possibility of Jesus’ death being expiatory, only this condition being met actualises it as expiatory. The actualising condition is found in and relates to the horizons of the present experience of believers and to the eschaton. The possibility must be present in order to be actualised, but it remains a possibility until actualisation.

a) Conditions of possibility

i. Jesus’ ministry as salvation

In his review of the first section of the chapter on reconciliation Pannenberg states that the section concerns “the systematic function of the Pauline concept of reconciliation”.

In order to use the Pauline conception in a systematic way he must show that it coheres with Jesus’ ministry. If Jesus’ ministry cannot be understood as salvific, his death cannot be expiatory. Pannenberg’s goal is to show that this understanding of Jesus is grounded in history and is not merely the projection of human hopes onto a messianic figure. He shows from passages in the Gospels that Jesus’ message of the kingdom brought the presence of a future salvation that offered the wholeness of life, indicated by the word shalom in the Old Testament. Against this eschatological horizon, Pannenberg holds that Jesus’ primary emphasis was on the presence of salvation. This claim is argued in Jesus—God and Man and is an assumption of the argument in Systematic Theology, which is expressed in phrases such as “the proleptic presence of the salvation of divine rule in the message and work of Jesus”. Jesus’ resurrection is the demonstration that the life and salvation he offers is eschatological. Anticipation of the eschaton in Jesus’ ministry and in the resurrection sets salvation in Jesus’ ministry against the wider backdrop of cosmic redemption.

15 ST 2, 437.
16 ST 2, 397.
17 ST 2, 397-98. JGM, 225-32, offers a longer version of this argument with explicit interaction with New Testament scholarship.
18 ST 2, 402. JGM, 227-28, argues that “Jesus directly granted eschatological salvation”. Salvation is “fulfilment of openness for God”, and “it is already present to those who long for the nearness of God proclaimed by Jesus; it has already come to those who hear and accept Jesus’ messages of the imminent Kingdom of God”.

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ii. Jesus’ message and Paul’s message

In order to show the validity of developing a systematic account of salvation using Paul’s doctrine of reconciliation, Pannenberg must show that the understanding of salvation found in Jesus’ ministry is coherent with Paul’s presentation, when the historical Jesus says little about his death, which is the focus for Paul. He argues that Paul’s emphasis on the cross in reconciliation is explained by the events of the cross and resurrection. When the one who proclaimed the kingdom was crucified and rose again, his death and resurrection had to be understood as related to the promised salvation. Paul could rightly view the salvation that Jesus proclaimed as now accomplished in Jesus’ own death and resurrection.19

iii. Eschatological salvation as rescue from judgement

If Jesus’ death is to be understood as expiation it must be understood as relating to divine judgement, since expiation is a term that refers to guilt and penalty. Pannenberg points out that in contemporary Jewish thought eschatological salvation related to “deliverance in the approaching world judgement”. He concludes that when Jesus spoke of salvation it would have been understood in the same terms. Paul particularly brings the notions of justification and reconciliation to the fore, since they explain how the events of the past bring into the present a reality that lies in the future. Pannenberg’s point is that Paul’s emphasis is a valid development from Jesus’ proclamation.20

iv. The cross as salvation

It would be possible for Jesus’ life and ministry to be one of reconciliation, but for his death to merely be the tragic end to a great life. Pannenberg admits that “not all strata of the primitive Christian tradition view the death of Jesus as a salvation event”.21 Despite this he sees “special significance” in the view that Jesus’ death was expiatory, though

19 ST 2, 400.
20 ST 2, 400.
21 ST 2, 416, refers to the Q document and the work of Friedrich, Verkündigung, 14-21.
not primarily as an expiatory sacrifice. He argues that in Paul’s writings we find the explicit idea of expiation, which is a “change of places” in which Jesus “suffered in our place the death that ought to have been ours” (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:13).22 Several aspects of Jesus’ ministry and its context converge to establish the possibility that Jesus’ death was expiatory.

If Jesus’ death is to be understood as the exchange of the innocent for the guilty it must be the case that Jesus is innocent and yet dies under God’s condemnation.23 Pannenberg points out that Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer and a lawbreaker and would have been presumed to face the eschatological judgement that he himself proclaimed. The claim that Jesus was sinless is established by the resurrection in which God vindicates him, against the claims of the Jewish authorities. Jesus’ condemnation at the hands of his own people and his vindication by God add to the possibility of understanding Jesus’ death as expiatory. Israel, through its leaders, is shown to have opposed God and the one he sent and so to deserve the judgement that he received. In retrospect, it is Jesus who has died in their place. The Jewish context meant that when Jesus was condemned and then raised by God his death could be an expiation for the people of God in the face of the curse of the law, which will finally confront them in the eschatological judgement.24

v. Death for all humanity

Pannenberg also asks how Jesus’ death can be seen as embracing all humanity. Within a Jewish worldview it would be thought that if Jesus died for others, he died for the people of Israel as a whole. Pannenberg argues that the universal scope of Jesus’ death was an expansion of a primary relationship with the Jewish people. An important step in the development of this thought is to see that the Roman authorities were involved in his condemnation as well as the Jewish leadership. So just as the leaders of Israel condemned the one who died for them, the leaders of the Gentiles condemned the one

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22 ST 2, 418.
23 ST 2, 423; cf. JGM, 354-64.
who died for them. The context of Jesus’ death makes it possible that he died for Jews and Gentiles.

vi. Reconciliation as an act of God

Pannenberg devotes considerable discussion to examining the question of whether Christ’s death can be considered God’s act of reconciliation. His aim is “to show that the world must be reconciled to God, not God to the world, and that God’s act in reconciling the world certainly took place in Jesus’ passion”. In this discussion he confronts the problem of the shift in understanding of reconciliation. He argues that for Paul “God was the subject of the event of reconciliation”, that is that God acted to reconcile the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19), and that later theology shifted this so that “God … had to be reconciled to humanity by the obedience of the Son, or by the sacrificing of his life on the cross”. Pannenberg calls for a return to the Pauline view and asserts that “the world is reconciled by God in Christ” so that reconciliation is “an outworking of the love of God in the face of the opposition of humans who are hostile to God”. Parallel to this brief exegetical argument, Pannenberg offers a theological argument based on the resurrection. Since the resurrection, an act of God, gives the crucifixion atoning force and in it “God showed himself to be the Victor over sin and death”, God is the one who acts in reconciliation. The claim that the cross is an act of God toward the world, rather than an act of a human creature toward God, is an important step in establishing Pannenberg’s trinitarian account of reconciliation. It is a claim that rests not on the historical nature of the act of Jesus’ death in itself, but what it was in anticipation of the resurrection.

b) Representation: the actualising condition

If Jesus’ death is to be considered as an expiation, then Pannenberg has to establish that in it Jesus acted as a representative. He argues that Jesus’ death should be considered a
representative act, because others come to be included in it. Thus the flow of Pannenberg’s argument is that Jesus death is only expiatory if it is representative and reconciling, and it is actualised as these when sinners are included in it and so reconciled to God by it. Before the actualisation of Jesus’ death as expiation it already has its identity as such in anticipation. This section outlines more comprehensively how Pannenberg understands such actualisation to occur.

The Socinians and Kant considered it impossible to exchange guilt. Kant reinterprets expiation so that the response of the sinner is the key: the good disposition of a newly righteous individual is exchanged for the previous guilt of that person. To some extent, even those who held that Christ’s death was atoning adopted this solution. Pannenberg seeks to show that the response of recipients makes Jesus’ death an expiation but to show that this depends on Jesus’ representation of them. Kant’s objection to the notion of representation is ontological, he holds that reality does not allow one person to die for another; Pannenberg’s concern about exclusive representation is ethical. A representation that does not include response is unethical, and we would find God’s action toward us “hostile”. Further, since the problem of sin lies in human enmity to God, a unilateral action on God’s side would not bring reconciliation. Pannenberg view is made clear in his criticism of Barth’s view that the cross is “self-contained” and that the apostolic preaching must be sharply distinguished from it. Pannenberg agrees with Kähler that Christ’s death is a “sponsoring representation” which is “orientated to future reception, so that the dedication of our own will to obedience to God is not superfluous but is for the first time made possible”. However, he finds that even Kähler fails to explain how the Son of God can

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32 *ST* 2, 415.

33 *ST* 2, 412-13. See Barth, *CD* IV/1, 76.

34 *ST* 2, 414-15; the phrase “sponsoring representation” is from M. Kähler, *Die Wissenschaft der christlichen Lehre*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1893), §428.
represent sinners as recipients of reconciliation. Pannenberg finds the idea of Jesus’ representative death in Paul’s statements that Christ died “for our sins” and similar expressions (1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 4:25; 8:22; Gal. 3:13; 2:20; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14; 2 Cor. 5:21). He concludes that Paul has a clear concept of “a co-human solidarity in which some represent others”. He offers a theological argument which supports Paul’s view: given that Jesus did not die for his own sin, but that there was a divine necessity that he should die, it must be that Jesus died for the sins of others. This was a natural thought in Judaism and was consistent with Jesus’ message of the love of God.

Pannenberg states that the Pauline idea of representation can only be applied to Jesus’ death in a “complex way”, since “those for whom Jesus died must die themselves”. Jesus’ death was not a straightforward ‘exchange’ in which he dies instead of others, but a death that “preserve them for eternal life in the judgement of God”. So he argues that in 2 Corinthians 5 “participation in the obedient suffering and death of Christ that is mediated in baptism and faith … is the means whereby believers have reconciliation to God through Christ”. That is, Jesus’ death is not actualised as reconciliation or expiation until humans are reconciled to God through it. He points to Paul’s appeal for the Corinthians to be reconciled with God as a demonstration that the “inner telos” of the crucifixion is actual reconciliation. Pannenberg states that the cross has achieved reconciliation “only in anticipation” and that it is the proclamation of the gospel that moves reconciliation “from anticipation to actualisation”.

The difference between the conditions of possibility and the actualising condition become clear at this point in Pannenberg’s discussion. It is the nature of Jesus’ death, determined by its outcome in history, that makes it actually reconciling.

Pannenberg rejects the concept of exclusive representation, which has been held by most traditional accounts, and argues for inclusive representation. In this view of Jesus’ death, “there takes place in him paradigmatically that which is to be repeated in all the

\[35\] ST 2, 419.
\[36\] ST 2, 423.
\[37\] ST 2, 420.
\[38\] ST 2, 413.
members of humanity that he represents”. Barth claims that the “conversion of the world to God has … taken place in Christ” and explicitly rejects the idea that the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ or the call to be reconciled is “an extension of the atonement in the form of something which man himself can decide”. Pannenberg criticises Barth’s position. However, he does not view Sölle’s temporary representation as a sufficient description. In this conception Jesus no longer has a representative role once others come to share his position with him. He holds with Barth that the Son is the “definitive actualizing of our destiny” since the Son is the original of sonship, which all receive through him. Pannenberg’s view differs from Barth in that for him Jesus’ “definitiveness leaves room … for the individuality of others”.

Further support for inclusive representation comes in the fact that it allows an explanation of reconciliation that is not limited to a penal interpretation of the cross. It can interpret the whole course of Christ’s life as the new paradigm for humanity, taking up the New Testament descriptions of Jesus as the second Adam, the image of God and the Son of God. In this understanding of the work of Christ “he is our representative, not as we are now, but as we are to be”. The view of Christ as the representative new Adam is closely related to the incarnation and as such Pannenberg claims it has “shaped the whole history of Christian soteriology”.

Pannenberg’s exposition of the death of Christ as inclusive representative makes use of a conception of death that is shaped by Hegel and Heidegger. He draws from both

39 ST 2, 430. ST 2, 450, states that Jesus vicariously reconciles “in exemplary fashion” in his “acceptance of death [as] the extreme consequence of the self-distinction of the Son from the Father”.

40 Barth, CD IV/1, 76. CD IV/1, 222 says, “What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgement on us human beings by himself taking our place as a human being and in our place undergoing the judgement under which we had passed”. Pannenberg seems to overstate his case against Barth who does not exclude human response. In his exposition of 2 Corinthian 5 Barth writes, “we must insist at once that the initiative and the decisive action in the happening described as atonement are both with God (as in John 3:16). This is not to say that man’s part is only passive: we will see later that there is a proper place for his activity, and what this activity is” (74). Barth’s concession at this point, though more than Pannenberg allows for in his account of Barth, does not meet Pannenberg’s demand for inclusive representation.

41 ST 2, 432, and see Dorothy Sölle, Christ the Representative, trans. D. Lewis (London: SCM Press, 1967), 146. Pannenberg also does not accept Sölle’s claim that Jesus “represented” an absent God; indeed for him, Jesus is not the representative (Vertreter) of God but the mediator (Mittler) of God’s presence because in him the coming kingdom was present.

42 ST 2, 433.

43 ST 2, 430-31.
Hegel and Heidegger the idea that death should be understood in relation to finitude. He states that his view is similar to that of Hegel.\textsuperscript{44} Hegel treats the death of Christ as example and inspiration: “it is not an Other who has been punished in order that there might be punishment”, but “each one for himself must for himself, starting from his own subjectivity and responsibility, do and be what he ought to be”.\textsuperscript{45} While Pannenberg has a similar view to Hegel he emphasises the objective expiation in Christ’s death and distinguishes the human and divine far more fully than Hegel. Heidegger’s idea of death as the absolute marker of the finitude of human life and the point in which \textit{Dasein} may anticipate completion is also in the background of Pannenberg’s thought here. He makes explicit reference to Heidegger’s view of death in \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God} and in his discussion of death in \textit{Systematic Theology}.\textsuperscript{46} Both Hegel and Heidegger, in very different ways, understand death and the acceptance of death as the point at which the finite relates to the infinite. The very fact that Hegel and Heidegger use the motif of death in such different ways suggests that Pannenberg is dealing with a shared theme rather than replicating the thought of either.

According to Pannenberg, Jesus’ death changes the meaning of death for believers. He writes that those who are represented by Christ now die with the possibility “in their death … of attaining to the hope of participating in the new resurrection life.”\textsuperscript{47} This possibility opens up because of the nature of Jesus’ own death. Pannenberg reminds the

\textsuperscript{44} ST 2, 429-30 and 435-36, explicitly note some of the intellectual sources of Pannenberg’s concept of inclusive representation. Primary is the work of P. K. Marheineke (1780–1846) and his \textit{Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft}. The 1827 edition, which Pannenberg cites, was written after Marheineke had reworked his theology in the light of Hegel’s thought. Pannenberg notes that the idea is already found in Hegel and may be traced to G. F. Seiler (1733–1807), \textit{Über den Versöhnungstod Jesu Christi} (1778-1779). Pannenberg says that Ritschl made the same distinction.


\textsuperscript{46} \textit{MIG}, 83-86; ST 2, 273-74; ST 3, 556-58; see also “On Historical and Theological Hermeneutic”, 164-69. There has been considerable debate about Heidegger’s account of death. H. Carel, “Temporal Finitude and Finitude of Possibility: The Double Meaning of Death in Being and Time”, \textit{JPS} 15 no. 4 (Dec. 2007), 548, outlines various analyses and criticisms of Heidegger’s view of death. He argues that for Heidegger death marks both “finitude of possibility” and “temporal finitude” and that “because death could come at any moment, the radical contingency of each individual life becomes apparent, and to acknowledge this is to acknowledge finitude”. Pannenberg draws on Heidegger’s view that death and awareness of death marks \textit{Dasein} as finite and so underlines the contingency of \textit{Dasein}.

\textsuperscript{47} ST 2, 427.
reader that Jesus did not make himself equal to God but lived a life of obedient self-distinction from God. In his life, and climactically in his death, Jesus did not assert his individuality or make himself equal to God. Pannenberg strikes a Heideggerian note as he explains that “death is the seal of finitude”. That is, Jesus accepted his own finitude by submitting to death. Beside this claim is a Hegelian theme that “his death became the seal of his self-distinction and therefore also the proof of unity with God”.48

According to Pannenberg, Jesus’ death is the reverse of the sin that it overcomes. Sin is enmity to God in wanting to be like him, and means that humans cannot have a place alongside God but must fall victim to death. Jesus reconciled sinners to God by accepting the death that others in their rivalry with God forced on him. He offered up his “individuality” and “particularity” to God and in doing so “made room” for the particular existence of others. The outcome, according to Pannenberg, is that now others come to the same point through Jesus’ death and through their acceptance of their own death for the sake of God and the kingdom. They anticipate this death in faith and baptism and so accept their finitude before God and share in the hope of the resurrection in Jesus.49

c) The triune God as reconciler

Pannenberg presents a trinitarian account of reconciliation. He presents the work of reconciliation as the work of the Father and the Son, as the work of Christ as mediator, and as the work of the Spirit.

i. The work of the Father and the Son

Pannenberg has shown that the work of reconciliation is an action of God, and he refers again to the texts that emphasise the giving of the Son by the Father (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Rom. 4:25; 5:10; 8:3, 32; John 3:16). He has also shown that Jesus acted in obedience, so that his death is to be understood as the self-giving of the Son. Again, there is a

48 ST 2, 433.
49 ST 2, 433-34.
series of New Testament texts that presents this perspective (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33). Any apparent tension is resolved relatively simply by insisting that the Son’s self-giving and the Father’s giving “are saying the same thing in different ways” so that, “the obedience of the Son corresponds to the giving up by the Father”.50

There is a complexity for Pannenberg in this. He points out that, historically, Jesus cannot have sought death as the goal of ministry, and asks, How can his death be seen as the Son’s self-giving? His answer is that, because Jesus was raised, his life came to be seen as the coming of the pre-existent Son of God, and so his death was the Son’s self-giving. Pannenberg offers an analysis that makes the duality of the life of Christ more explicit than in most of his statements.

As then, Jesus accepted his approaching death as a fate imposed not merely by his enemies but by God himself, in a deeper sense the Son of God present but concealed in him was at work, making himself an offering in obedience to the Father.51

Pannenberg includes in the account of the action of the Son in reconciliation the horizon of the present experience of believers through the preaching of the gospel.52 The dimension of current experience comes into focus when Pannenberg considers the work of the Spirit.

**ii. The office of Christ**

Pannenberg then turns to the theme of the “office” of Christ, which traditionally has been presented as the *munus triplex* of prophet, priest and king.53 Historically this approach has made a strong distinction between the person of Christ as the God-man and the work of Christ.54 In Pannenberg’s view, this distinction is not viable, for the cross and resurrection are both constitute Christ’s identity and lead to salvation. He is critical of the Reformation and post-Reformation approach of the office of Christ for its “one-sidedly christological objectivism”, which “did not think through the mutual

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50 ST 2, 439.
51 ST 2, 440.
52 ST 2, 441.
53 ST 2, 446, explains that *JGM* rejected the whole discussion of the office on this basis. As noted earlier, Pannenberg has revised this judgement and now finds that as a reflection of the work of the Son the approach has “poetic” value.
54 ST 2, 444.
relation of the work of the ascended Christ and that of the Spirit”.

He accepts that the discussion has secondary value since it recognises the duality of the historical life of Christ and can be used to stress the importance of the present work of reconciliation.

Pannenberg argues that the historical, human life of Jesus cannot be seen as that of a king, or a priest, or even, strictly, a prophet. He can be seen to occupy the munus triplex in the light of the outcome of his life, death, and resurrection. Here the third temporal horizon comes into focus. Pannenberg explains that “statements regarding Jesus as the Reconciler who brings salvation to humanity would not be true without their correlate—saved and reconciled humanity”. The present reality, even with the work of the Spirit, offers “no definitive proof of the truth” of these claims about Jesus; they await conformation in the eschaton.

While Pannenberg makes little explicit reference to the eschaton in the chapter on reconciliation, the appeal to it as the final demonstration of the truth of claims about reconciliation in Christ illustrates that the future horizon remains key to Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation. Given these caveats, Pannenberg makes use of the concept of the office of Mediator to show that the human life of Jesus is, because of the resurrection and the work of the Spirit, the saving work of the Son.

**iii. The completion of reconciliation in the Spirit**

The final dimension of the work of the triune God in reconciliation is the work of the Spirit. The reconciling work of the Spirit is developed in detail in *Systematic Theology* 3. In Volume 2 the main focus is to explain how the Spirit “lifts us above our own finitude”. In the ministry of the Spirit the creaturely capacity to exist ecstatically is liberated and believers are enabled to live their finitude in distinction from and in unity

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55 *ST* 2, 448. This is only partly true. Calvin’s treatment of the threefold office is rich in references to the ongoing work of Christ by the Spirit, *Inst.*, II.xv.1-6, 494-503. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:475-82, who summarizes much of “older protestant dogmatics”, has a section in his consideration of Christ’s state of exaltation which deals with the threefold office. He discusses the work of the Spirit in the continuing work of Christ as prophet and king, and gives a brief reference to the Spirit and Christ’s ongoing priesthood. Where both differ from Pannenberg is that they do not include the ongoing work of reconciliation as part of the expiatory work, and so retain the objectivism of which he is critical.

56 *ST* 2, 443.
with God. Pannenberg concludes that “the Spirit completes our reconciliation with 
God by enabling us through faith in Jesus Christ to accept our own finite existence 
before God”. The Spirit will bring about the unity of all things in the eschaton, and 
participation in Christ by the Spirit now is an anticipation of that unity.

**A critical assessment of Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation**

a) **Review of assessments**

Neie offers one of the few extensive assessments of Pannenberg’s view of the 
atonement and this is based on the presentation in *Jesus—God and Man*. He suggests 
that Pannenberg operates with two criteria to establish theological statements, which are 
that a statement must be based on what is historically known and it must be 
“comprehensible to and compatible with the present day Wirklichkeitsverständnis” 
(understanding of reality). Pannenberg’s argument about metaphysics shows that he is 
willing to challenge contemporary views and does not insist that his theology be 
compatible with contemporary understandings. Neie’s use of the term 
“comprehensible” is a more accurate reflection of Pannenberg’s relation to 
contemporary thought. These two criteria equate to the conditions of possibility in 
Pannenberg’s account of the cross as reconciliation. Neie further comments that for 
Pannenberg’s account of the atonement “its truth must be empirically testable by the 
difference it makes to reality”. Neie does not acknowledge that this statement offers a 
further criterion, the actualising condition, which is not found in the immediate 
historical context of Jesus’ death. Neie finds that Pannenberg has not succeeded in 
establishing his case that Jesus’ death is penal expiation for the sin of humanity. He

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57 Pannenberg uses the term “ecstatic” to denote the way in which the Spirit takes believers outside 
themselves to be “in Christ” and to “participate in the filial relationship of Jesus with the Father”. In both 
*ATP*, 525 and *ST* 2, 196-97, “ecstatic” describes how humans should live in relation to others and the 
widDER environment, including God, rather than in self-obsession. Grenz, *Reason*, 132, describes it as 
“fellowship with God [that] realizes itself concretely in religious trust, in existence extra se”.

58 *ST* 2, 454.

59 *ST* 3, 7-12.

60 Herbert Neie, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Berlin, New 

61 Neie, *Doctrine of the Atonement*, 22, quotes from *JGM*, 250, that if Jesus’ death is expiatory, then it 
must mean that “the common human situation of selfish entanglement in personal concerns designated by 
the term ‘sin’ is thereby transformed”.

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claims that the ideas of the guilt of the Jewish leadership, the transference of guilt and its expiation through vicarious suffering are merely accepted rather than being established.\textsuperscript{62} He further argues that the presentation does not reach the standards of Pannenberg’s own epistemology and that Pannenberg has “let himself be dominated by the biblical kerygma and traditional doctrine”.\textsuperscript{63} Neie finds particular fault with Pannenberg’s argument that Jesus’ death deals with sin because his judges are guilty of blasphemy.\textsuperscript{64} In \textit{Systematic Theology} 2 Pannenberg also appeals to the expectation of eschatological judgement to establish that Jesus’ death is open to a penal interpretation. More significantly, the weight of Pannenberg’s demonstration that Jesus’ death is reconciliation rests on the work of the Spirit and the eschaton. Since Neie has not dealt with that key element of Pannenberg’s presentation, it is not surprising that he finds that Pannenberg has not made his case.

Neie suggests that Pannenberg has not developed the theme of divine suffering sufficiently. He would prefer an approach more like that of Moltmann.\textsuperscript{65} There is little in Pannenberg on the suffering of the Son, let alone the relation of the Father and Spirit to that suffering. He does not have the problem of suffering as one of his interpretive concerns in the doctrine of reconciliation. That problem comes to the fore in his discussion of eschatology, where his emphasis is on God overcoming evil rather than suffering it.\textsuperscript{66} This may be judged a lack in Pannenberg’s approach, especially in light of twentieth century questions about suffering and Moltmann’s influential proposal in \textit{The Crucified God}. Taylor counters Neie’s criticism by stressing that Pannenberg’s view of reconciliation is a process rather than a single event, even an event of divine suffering.\textsuperscript{67}

Grenz judges that most of the earlier criticisms of Pannenberg’s soteriology have been answered in \textit{Systematic Theology} 2. He raises the question whether Pannenberg allows

\begin{itemize}
\item[62] Neie, \textit{Doctrine of the Atonement}, 144.
\item[64] Neie, \textit{Doctrine of the Atonement}, 136-40.
\item[65] Neie, \textit{Doctrine of the Atonement}, 216-27.
\item[66] ST 3, 630-42.
\end{itemize}
sufficient emphasis on Christian’s “present experiences of Christ”. Our survey shows that while Pannenberg does not turn to such experiences to provide the basic material for his doctrine he has a clear role for present experience, for only a present experience of reconciliation actualises the death of Jesus as reconciliation. Mostert is positive about Pannenberg’s account of reconciliation. He views it as giving a proper emphasis to the scope of reconciliation, the now–not yet tension and the relation of the Kingdom of God to the work of the triune God.

b) Muted themes in Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation

One area of Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation that has received little comment is the way his anticipatory christology shapes his account of reconciliation. Compared to the account of the work of Christ that can be given based on classic christology, there are significant New Testament themes that receive no obvious place in Pannenberg’s account. His anticipatory christology is a partial explanation for the muting of these themes.

In a traditional christology, the distinction made between the two natures in the one person is applied to the work of Christ. The Son is understood as working in and through the human nature with which he is united. This conceptual structure enables the traditional view to affirm that the work of Christ is a fully divine and fully human work to which each nature contributes its distinctive element. Pannenberg’s christology abstains from an account of the person of Christ in terms of a hypostatic union of two natures, as we have seen instead he articulates his christology in terms of the human historical Jesus who, in anticipation of the eschaton, is the divine Son. As noted earlier, he is critical of explanations that speak of the Son acting through the human nature. Pannenberg presents reconciliation as an act of God that brings sinners back into fellowship with him. Yet, for him this work of God is a human work, which is a divine work on the basis of anticipation. That is, he can claim that “the human and historical level of the history of Jesus is transparent to the presence of the incarnate Son of God.

68 Grenz, Reasons, 199.
concealed in it” only on the basis that the resurrection establishes Jesus identity.\textsuperscript{70} Similarly, since death is the act in which the human Jesus fully accepts finitude, it is reconciliation when that acceptance of finitude takes place in other lives. The correlate of this account of the work of Christ is that reconciliation is actualised in the response of sinners.

Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation is different to traditional positions. The question is whether this reformulated account of the death of Christ is an advance over classical views. This section argues that Pannenberg’s approach fails to include two important New Testament themes in the doctrine of reconciliation and that these are better expressed in two-nature Christology. This section argues that the New Testament presents the work of Christ as a completed work, and that it views the effectiveness of Christ’s death as resting, in part, on the difference between it and the death of believers. Neither of these affirmations is given clear expression in Pannenberg’s account.

\textit{i. The work of Christ as a completed work}

The argument of this section highlights the New Testament presentation of Christ’s death as a completed work. In developing this argument it is important to note that there are texts that relate Jesus’ death and resurrection to the completed work of reconciliation in the return of sinners to God (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:18). That is the tendency of 2 Corinthians 5, the passage which dominates Pannenberg’s thought, where Paul moves from God’s reconciling the world to himself in Christ to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). A view such as that of Barth’s, that the cross and resurrection completed reconciliation, in all aspects, is not true to the important New Testament texts. However, recognising that the response of sinners is part of the New Testament account of reconciliation is not equivalent to saying that the response is that which actualises the cross as reconciliation. Instead it is better to say that the work of Christ enables a response on the basis of its achievement.

Many texts emphasise the completeness of reconciliation in the cross and resurrection.

\textsuperscript{70} ST 1, 448.
The book of Hebrews illustrates the point. The writer opens his letter describing the Son who sat down at the right hand of God “having made purification” (Heb. 1:3). The verb ποιησάμενος is an aorist participle linked to an aorist verb (ἐκάθισεν). Given that the verb is punctiliar in meaning and that the image draws on the priest who offers purification but then must remain standing, it appears that the participle has a perfective aspect implying that the act of purification is completed before the Son is seated.71 Wallace suggests that in this case the aorist has both a temporal and causal sense, indicating that it is because the Son had completed the task of making purification that he is seated.72

Starting from this opening statement, the completeness of the sacrificial work of Christ is a prominent theme in Hebrews. Lindars notes that although the writer must explain how the atonement affects sinners by removing the consciousness of sin, “nevertheless atonement has certain requirements, and these must be fulfilled in Jesus”.73 Lindars suggests that one reason for the writer choosing the Day of Atonement as a basis for the presentation of Jesus’ death is found in the Jewish understanding that the Day removed the burden of sin for which individual atonement had not been made. He quotes from the Mishnah (Yoma 8:8-9) a passage that throws more light on our question. There the Mishnah teaches that repentance effects atonement for lesser transgressions, but that only Yom Kippur deals with graver offences. It also implies that for such transgression there is nothing that the sinner can do to appease God, even after the sacrifice.74

The use of the Day of Atonement to explain Jesus’ death highlights the stress on the completeness of atonement. Hebrews also uses the adverb ἐφαπαξ to describe Jesus’ self-offering (Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). In each case the writer is making the point that, unlike the sacrifices of the earthly tabernacle that had to be repeated, Jesus’ offering requires no repetition because it has dealt with sin.

71 Constantine R. Campbell, Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 86-87, 125-27.
74 Lindars, Hebrews, 84-85.
Pannenberg’s comment on Hebrews fall short of grasping the theme of the completeness of the work of Christ; so he suggests that “such statements [which speak of Christ’ work as complete] anticipate the actual process of the setting aside of humanity’s sins”. He appeals to the phrase χωρὶς ἀμορτίας in Hebrews 9:25, following Wilckens’ suggestion that it means that Christ will return when sin is finally set aside. However the explanation that Pannenberg himself gives in the footnote, “in contrast to his first coming, he will no longer have to deal with sin”, shows that the phrase does not obviously imply that dealing with sin will be ongoing in the sense of actualising Christ’s atonement until his return. Attridge offers the more straightforward suggestion that “Christ’s second coming will not have the atoning function of the first: it will be apart from sin in its aims and effects”. His comment that Hebrews stresses “not merely the once-for-allness and definitiveness of the sacrificial death of Jesus” but also “the ongoing intercession of the risen Lord” is beside the point. The New Testament has a wider account of reconciliation than simply the cross and one that does include the response of those who are redeemed. That does not mean that the response of sinners actualises Jesus’ death as expiation. Hebrews 10:14 states that “by a single offering” Jesus “has perfected” (τέτελείωκεν) for all time those who are sanctified (τοὺς ἁγιαζόμενος). Attridge comments that the perfect tense with the present substantive participle “nuances the relationship” between perfection and sanctity, “suggesting that the appropriation of the enduring effects of Christ’s act is an ongoing reality”. The pattern of Hebrews is an accomplished work appropriated by believers.

Because Pannenberg’s christology relates the divine and human in Christ via temporal relationships, the death and resurrection of Christ are also model human actions, which require the actualisation which occurs when they are taken into other human lives. They are truly divine actions on a different temporal level. Pannenberg’s christology cannot sustain an account of the work of Christ as a completed work in a way that includes the theme of the book of Hebrews. The two-nature distinction made in classic accounts articulates more fully the dual reality of the work of Christ as a divine–human work.

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76 Attridge, Hebrews, 281.
In Pannenberg’s account, Jesus’ death is effective because of its similarity to the death of sinners. As noted earlier, Pannenberg understands Christ’s death, in terms taken from both Heidegger and Hegel, as an acceptance of finitude. In reconciliation this acceptance is repeated in other lives. By contrast the New Testament stresses both the similarity and dissimilarity of Jesus’ death and the death of sinners. The similarity lies in two areas. Jesus shares in the fate of all humanity, so Hebrews 2:14 declares that Jesus shared in flesh and blood like those he saves. Believers also come to share in what Jesus has won, both in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20; 3:3). There is an important shared aspect in the New Testament presentation of Jesus’ death. Nevertheless, several New Testament texts also differentiate between the nature of Jesus’ death and that of believers. For example, Hebrews 2:9 states that Jesus tasted death for all and that by his death he destroyed the devil “who has the power of death” and freed “those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death”. That is, Jesus has gone through death as one placed under the power of death so that all those who come after him no longer experience that power. This difference helps to explain why Jesus feared death (Matt. 26:38-39; Mark 14:33; Luke 12:50; 22:40-44; John 12:27; Heb. 5:7) in a way believers do not (Phil. 1:20-23).

The New Testament testifies that for believers death is already defeated, even though they may still die physically (John 5:24; Rom. 5:17; 6:23; 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:55-56; Col. 3:3-4; Heb. 2:9, 14-15; 1 John 3:14). Ian MacFarland highlights this difference between Jesus death and the death of believers, arguing that “because it has been claimed by Christ, death now becomes the gateway to life”. He develops his argument by an examination of Paul’s presentation of baptism as a participation in Jesus’ death. For Pannenberg baptism is the beginning point of a life that anticipates full inclusion into Jesus’ obedient death (Rom. 6:5). In contrast, MacFarland argues that baptism does not look forward to physical death, but looks back to Jesus’ death. He observes that “Paul nowhere claims that martyrdom—let alone crucifixion—is necessary or even normative for Christians; moreover his chief interest in Romans 6 is not how we died, but the way
we live”.\textsuperscript{77} The point is not that Pannenberg views martyrdom as normative, but that his view of the actualisation of expiation in the inclusion of the death of sinners along with Jesus’ death risks reversing the logic of Romans 6. Paul’s view is that sinners now live as dead to sin because Jesus “died to sin, once for all”; not that Jesus died to sin because sinners now die with him.

\textit{iii. The hypostatic union and the affirmation of God’s gracious action}

This sounding of the New Testament presentation of reconciliation suggests that Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology restricts the expression he can give to God’s gracious action in the work of Christ. This is not to deny that he presents the work of Christ as human and divine. He is insistent that “God is the acting subject in this expiatory action”, and claims that his orientation to the question gives a fuller expression to that reality.\textsuperscript{78} In assessing Pannenberg’s claim, it is important to note that in his account God is the acting subject not in the human, historical action itself, but in anticipation of the response of believers. In contrast, a two-nature christology, which views Jesus’ death as the unique death of the incarnate Logos, can view that death as one which is redemptive because of its unique aspects. The traditional conception of the hypostatic union provides a basis for an understanding of the reconciling work of Christ as that of the Son who, given by the Father, graciously takes up humanity and offers himself for sinners. It more clearly articulates the gracious work of God in the work Christ. Chapter 6 concluded by wondering if Pannenberg’s anticipatory christology could provide him with a basis on which to give a full account of the work of Christ as divine action, particularly as an action of the Logos. Despite Pannenberg’s claim, it seems that it does not.

MacFarland proposes three rules for a doctrine of the atonement: it must not identify, co-ordinate or make superfluous either human or divine activity. This set of rules seems to present a reasonable test for a doctrine of atonement, and one that highlights the concern expressed here about Pannenberg’s view. Pannenberg’s account of the cross


\textsuperscript{78} \textit{ST} 2, 412.
risks contravening the first two of these rules. In his account the action of the Son and the human Jesus in the cross are identified (though his eschatological ontology means that he can do so without the compromise of the ontological distinction of God and creation of which MacFarland warns). MacFarland explains that human and divine activity are co-ordinated when it is suggested that one activity completes or complements the other. He insists that “God and human beings always operate on different planes”. Pannenberg co-ordinates the divine and human actions by making the response of sinners the actualising condition for the cross to be expiation.

Mcfarland deals with the place of human response. He contends that this must not be suppressed, but must be conceived as operating on a different plane to that of God’s action. He proposes to describe reconciliation in a similar way to Pannenberg: “God’s work of reconciliation may be viewed as a process by which human beings inspired by the Spirit speak back to the Father”. That is, he includes human response in the account of reconciliation. Rather than finding this response directly in the reconciled, McFarland turns to the Logos. He suggests that the economic pattern of the incarnate Word responding to the Father reflects the relations of the ontological Trinity. The Spirit is the one who “perfects the inner dynamic of the divine life by hearing and responding to the Word spoken by the Father”, and in the economy the Spirit enables the incarnate Word to so respond. Thus he concludes that the human response is already established in the life of Christ, and others are then included in this.

Insofar as the inner structure of the divine life is one in which the Word spoken from all eternity by the Father is affirmed in its unity with the Father by the Holy Spirit, in the incarnation of the Word … is the necessary condition of human beings sharing in God’s triune communion. The communion is realized first in Jesus … thereby opening the way for other human beings to share in that same affirmation through him.

MacFarland can give fuller emphasis than Pannenberg to the completion of reconciliation in the death of Christ because he does not conceive it as an act in which the divine identity of the Son is established, in anticipation, by the human Jesus. By retaining a two-nature account of christology he can affirm the need for response as

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fully as Pannenberg does, without viewing the death of Jesus as requiring that response in order to be actualised as reconciliation and expiation.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Pannenberg’s presentation of the death of Jesus as expiatory, an important element of his doctrine of reconciliation. His exposition shows that when Jesus’ death is related to the resurrection, the present work of the Spirit and the consummation of that work in the eschaton, it can be understood as an act of expiation as part of the work of the trinitarian God to reconcile the world to himself. In arguing for this, Pannenberg makes the reconciliation of sinners as they come to share in submission to God and acceptance of finitude in death, the condition under which Jesus’ death becomes reconciling. This actualising condition depends on Pannenberg’s view of anticipation and introduces a troubling element into his soteriology. Rather than making sinners’ response dependent on the achievement of Christ, Pannenberg proposes a reciprocal relationship in which the response depends on Christ’s death and the achievement of Christ’s work depends on the response of sinners. With these two elements in such a reciprocal relationship, Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation cannot fully express the gracious nature of the act of God the Son in the work of Christ. This result raises a significant question about Pannenberg’s use of anticipation.
Chapter 7  Anticipation in Pannenberg’s Doctrine of God

Introduction

Previous chapters have shown that the doctrine of God is the central concern of Pannenberg’s theology. According to Pannenberg, the great challenge theology faces is to give reasons for the truth of God; the governing perspective of theology is to view all things sub ratione Dei and the argument that the triune God is the true Infinite stretches across his work. Jenson goes so far as to suggests that it is Pannenberg’s view of Trinity that has led to his Christology. 1 Jenson’s claim is hard to sustain chronologically, since Jesus—God and Man significantly predates Pannenberg’s explicitly trinitarian thought and Taylor outlines “a development and increasing prominence of the Trinity in Pannenberg’s theology”. 2 Yet Pannenberg’s doctrine of God certainly integrates his theological project. This chapter notes the dogmatic concerns that shape Pannenberg’s doctrine of God, examines his presentation of the doctrine of God as a response to these concerns and considers the role that ‘anticipation’ has in this area. This consideration leads into the heart of Pannenberg’s thought and so to the most significant questions for his project.

Pannenberg’s concerns in the doctrine of God

Pannenberg’s reformulation of the doctrine of God responds to four major concerns: the need to relate to modern rather than classical concepts; unsolved problems in the traditional doctrine of God; the need to ground the doctrine of God in revelation; and the anthropological concern that the idea of God should illuminate human existence. 3 Pannenberg claims the relation of the immanent and economic Trinity as the key to dealing adequately with these concerns. 4

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1 Jenson, “Jesus”, 196.
2 Iain Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 5-6.
3 Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 75 suggests two “main concerns” in Pannenberg’s doctrine of God—the desire to understand God’s being eschatologically and problems with the classic doctrine of God. See also Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 179-80 and Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 12-13.
4 Grenz, Reason, 44-46.
a) The relational turn

Chapter 4 showed that Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal is a response to the ‘relational turn’ in philosophy. He offers a relational reconfiguration of a trinitarian doctrine of God and his metaphysical proposal assists in this. He includes God’s work in history in his account of God’s being, an approach that reflects his concern for relationality. He aims to make his doctrine of God show that “the events of history in some way bear on the identity of his eternal essence”.\(^5\)

b) Problems in the traditional doctrine of God

Pannenberg believes that the trinitarian tradition stands in need of reformulation, for which task the relational turn offers appropriate resources. He identifies four major problems that show that the doctrine of God must be reformulated. The first three of these are points at which the traditional doctrine of God proves to be internally incoherent. The fourth problem is incoherence between human religious experience and the Christian doctrine of God.

i. The relation of unity and triunity

One problem that Pannenberg identifies is the relation of unity and triunity in the doctrine of God. He claims that theology has failed to successfully deal with the challenges of subordinationism, tritheism, and modalism, each of which challenges the claim that the one God is triune.\(^6\) Pannenberg claims that pre-Nicene Christian thought differentiated the three persons of the Trinity on grounds that appealed to different functions or realms of activity. He assesses this approach as a form of subordinationism.\(^7\) In contrast, Athanasius and the Cappadocians emphasised the participation of all three hypostases in the work of God and found the distinctions between them in the inner relations of Father, Son and Spirit. Pannenberg suggests that this approach risked falling into tri-theism.\(^8\) Later discussions (Augustine, Aquinas, Hegel and Barth) that assume the unity of God and derive the doctrine of the Trinity from this unity risk being modalist.\(^9\)

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\(^{5}\) ST 1, 334.
\(^{7}\) ST 1, 274.
\(^{8}\) ST 1, 271-79.
\(^{9}\) ST 1, 282-89, 295-98.
Pannenberg acclaims Athanasius’ idea of distinct persons whose relations constitute their identities as a lasting insight, but one which was not fully developed by Athanasius or by others.¹⁰

   ii. The unity of the immanent and economic Trinity
Pannenberg identifies a similar problem in the question of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity.¹¹ There has been a strong tendency in Christian theology to isolate ‘God in himself’ and ‘God revealed’. So Pannenberg argues that, after the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, “the thought of the eternal and essential Trinity broke loose from its historical moorings and tended to be seen ... as untouched by the course of history ... and therefore also inaccessible to all creaturely knowledge”.¹² Although Christian theology has never intended to deny the reality of God’s relation to his creation, there is a danger that an eternal, unchanging divine essence may have this implication.¹³ Pannenberg claims that the opposite problem has emerged in the 20th century, following Rahner’s axiom of the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity.¹⁴ The total identification of the economic and immanent Trinity is the path of process theology and the “absorption of the immanent Trinity in the economic”.¹⁵ Pannenberg resists process thought applied to God’s own existence and insists that theology must still speak of God’s eternal essence.

   iii. The relation of the attributes and essence of God
Pannenberg identifies a third aspect of theology’s struggle with unity and diversity in the relation of the attributes and essence of God. He claims that theology, using traditional metaphysics, has not been able to relate the multiplicity of attributes to an essential, infinite unity. One line of thought treats the distinctions between the attributes as real, in

¹⁰ ST 1, 278.
¹¹ ST 1, 307-78, 367.
¹² ST 1, 332. Torrance, Trinitarian Faith, 146, expresses the opposite view, that “the great conviction expressed in the Church’s confession [Nicaea] of the oneness of the Son with the Father arose out of the evangelical and doxological approach ... they had to make explicit, in exact and accurate ways, the relation of the Son in being and act to the Father, in order to conserve the very essence of the Gospel of God’s saving and redeeming work in Jesus Christ”.
¹⁴ See Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, 4:94.
¹⁵ ST 1, 331.
which case they must be distinguished from the divine essence lest they threaten this unity. Alternatively, the distinctions are only conceptual, in which case there is an undefined unity of essence. Pannenberg suggests that the question of the essence and attributes of God is “suspended in the history of theology” and presents this as evidence that “the traditional doctrine of God’s essence and attributes leads into ... a dead end”. He also claims that in the traditional account essence has been distinguished from relations on the basis of God’s transcendence when, in fact, transcendence is itself a relation. His point can be seen by considering the fact that in classic theology transcendence is a divine attribute of God and is an assertion of God’s independence from creation. In contrast, if relations are taken as primary, then transcendence will be seen as a relation between God and creation, and in some sense this relation will determine God’s identity.

iv. Anthropological concerns
Pannenberg’s concern that theology must relate to human experience and cast light on it has been prominent throughout the exposition of his thought in this thesis. It is present in his doctrine of God as well. In particular, he claims that theology must offer a doctrine of God that does not entail a “denial of [human] freedom”, but shows that God’s existence is the basis of freedom. His argument is that there is an indisputable human experience of freedom, which is the basis for religious life. He asserts that classical theism fails to account for this.

In the case of the classical conception of God … it is not possible to assert that it must be understood as the condition of human freedom. It is even questionable whether it can be reconciled with freedom, as is indeed shown by the medieval discussion about the relationship of divine foreknowledge and predestination to human freedom.

This means, according to Pannenberg, that “it is scarcely possible for theology to avoid re-examining the way it speaks about the being of God”.

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16 ST 1, 360-63.
17 ST 1, 360 and 364.
18 ST 1, 367.
19 “Anthropology and the Question of God”, 92. “Speaking about God”, 107-115 and ST 2, 416, have further discussion of human freedom in reference to the idea of God.
20 “Anthropology and the Question of God”, 93.
c) The doctrine of God and revelation

Pannenberg is also concerned to ground the doctrine of God in revelation. He dismisses speculative derivations of God’s triunity: “to find a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity 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”.\(^{21}\) Thus the revelation in Christ must be the source of a doctrine of God. This is consistent with Pannenberg’s methodology, in which religious tradition supplies the material for theology, which philosophical criticism then tests and clarifies.

Pannenberg works from the historical revelation of Jesus and the relationships discovered there. He spends very little time arguing for the historicity of various events in salvation history. He also appeals to a passage such as 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, which cannot be verified historically.\(^{22}\) This can give an appearance of proof texting to his doctrine of God. However, every aspect of biblical teaching to which he appeals is a matter of relations of the persons of the Trinity in the economy of salvation, so his study is grounded in history in that sense. Presumably, the reason Pannenberg does not argue for the historicity of the various events that he draws into the doctrine of God is that he is concerned primarily with demonstrating the conceptual coherence of his account and its relation to the revelation in Jesus, while the resurrection functions as the anticipatory confirmation of the revelation in Jesus.

Pannenberg’s concerns about history, relationality, and the economic Trinity converge in this discussion. Theological tradition has treated references to the ‘generation’ of the Son (John 1:14, 3:16; Luke 3:22) and the ‘procession’ of the Spirit (John 15:26, 20:22) as insights into the immanent Trinity.\(^{23}\) Pannenberg argues that modern exegesis shows that all such texts are in fact dealing with the economy: Jesus’ historical, human life and the ministry of the Spirit. The only path to knowledge of God-in-himself is through this historical revelation: “one can know the inter-trinitarian distinctions and relations, the inner life of God, only through the revelation of the Son, not through the different

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\(^{21}\) ST I, 299. This has obvious connections to the ‘relational turn’. Pannenberg is part of a wider stream of modern theology attempting to relate God’s Triune being to salvation history; see Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 197-98 and Taylor, Pannenberg on the Triune God, 23-26.

\(^{22}\) ST I, 312.

\(^{23}\) ST I, 305 notes Aquinas, Summa, 1.43.2.
spheres of the operation of the one God in the world.”

Working from the concrete relations revealed in salvation history runs counter to a long held rule of the Western church, based on a commitment to divine unity: that the works of God ad extra are undivided. Pannenberg questions this rule, though he does not return to the theological method of the second and third centuries, which distinguished the persons on the basis of spheres of operation. Rather, he appeals to immanent relations, determined in salvation history.

**Pannenberg’s reformulated trinitarianism**

* a) The triune God in economic mutual self-distinction

Pannenberg expounds revelation in Christ in terms of the “mutual self-distinction” of Father, Son and Spirit. He argues that all “active relations” have a place in the “richly structured nexus of relationship” of trinitarian life. Pannenberg presents acts of God that have traditionally been viewed as economic as being constitutive for both the distinctions between the persons and of their deity. The following acts are treated as constitutive for God: the Father hands over the Kingdom to the Son and receives it back; the Son obeys the Father and honours him as God; the Spirit confirms, raises, and extols the Son; the Father gives the Spirit to the Son; the Spirit sheds abroad the Father’s love.

Olson has called the claim that God’s deity is established in his economic lordship, that is that God’s being is his rule, “Pannenberg’s Principle”.

Trinitarian and anti-trinitarian thinkers have viewed the submission of Jesus and his unity with the Father as opposing aspects of New Testament revelation that require some resolution. Christian orthodoxy has usually resolved the tension by applying the two sets of texts differently, appealing to two-state or two-nature Christology or to the economic Trinity. Thus, it is argued that the Son submits to the Father in his state of humiliation, or

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24 ST 1, 273, 306.
26 ST 1, 271, asks: “Might it not be that this rule itself stands in need of revision? We need not surrender the basic truth that the Father, Son and Spirit work together ... because we accept the possibility of distinguishing the persons in these works.”
27 ST 1, 320.
29 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 199.
in his human nature more generally, or in the work of the Trinity \textit{ad extra}, but not in the immanent Trinity. Anti-trinitarians have found the irrationality of the doctrine of the Trinity in just this tension, arguing that since the Son submits to the Father he cannot be regarded as equal with the Father. Chapter 6 showed that Pannenberg argues that Jesus’ self-distinction from, and unity with, the Father should be held together as constituting the relation of the Son to the Father.\footnote{He appeals to John 8:50, 10:30, 17:1, and 16:14 to argue that in the very act of obedient submission Jesus showed his unity with the Father.} He claims that orthodox theology was “missing the point” of texts which spoke of the Son’s submission.\footnote{ST 1, 310 cf. ST 2, 385-89.}

Pannenberg treats these relations as truly mutual, so that the Father-Son relation is constitutive for the Father as well the Son. He extends Athanasius’ argument that the Father could not be Father without the Son, asserting that not only is the Father’s fatherhood found in relation to the Son, but so is his deity.\footnote{ST 1, 322.} On Pannenberg’s definition, the lordship of the Father, mediated by the Son (Phil 2:9-11, 1 Cor. 15:24-25), “goes hand in hand with” deity. So deity itself “has its place already in the intratrinitarian life of God, in the reciprocity of the relation between the Son, who freely subjects himself to the lordship of the Father, and the Father, who hands over his lordship to the Son”. In addition he states that “the monarchy of the Father is itself mediated by the trinitarian relations.”\footnote{ST 1, 313, 325.}

Pannenberg’s assertion that the relationship of the Father with the Son constitutes the deity of the Father is a contrast with the more general view that the monarchy of the Father is foundational for the relations of the Trinity.\footnote{So Gregory of Nazianzus \textit{On Holy Baptism} XL.41, \textit{NPNF} 2 VII, 375, states there is “One God because of the monarchia”; John of Damascus \textit{On the Orthodox Faith} I.8 \textit{NPNF} 2 IX, 9, explains that “the Father is without cause and unborn … the Son is derived from the Father …, and the Holy Spirit likewise”; Calvin, \textit{Inst} I.xiii.18, 142-3, affirms “to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things”.} Jenson identifies this as one of Pannenberg’s innovations in the doctrine of God.\footnote{Jenson, “Jesus in the Trinity”, 199.} Mostert confirms that this “is a departure from the classical doctrine of the priority of the Father over the Son and the Spirit”.\footnote{Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 82.} Bradshaw shows that in anthropology, christology, and theology proper
Pannenberg “wishes to do away with the notion of the core ego as the ultimate substratum of reality”; rather, Pannenberg holds that persons are who they are because of mutual relations. He concludes, “Pannenberg avoids the Scylla of substance and the Charybdis of subjectivity, and seeks instead to describe God’s being as his history of dialectical threefoldness, and this is his ‘person’”.\(^{37}\) Bradshaw’s description falters at the point where he makes ‘person’ a description of Pannenberg’s view of God, when in *Systematic Theology* Pannenberg goes to enormous lengths to distinguish three persons in God.\(^{38}\)

\[\textit{b) Divine unity}\]

For Pannenberg, God’s unity is not obvious and must be explicated by theology. This is the reverse of the traditional view that is more likely to consider distinctions in God as problematic. Pannenberg argues that in any form of natural theology the diversity in, and fragmentation of, the cosmos count against the assumption of divine unity. If there is a single Absolute who determines all reality, it would be expected that an account of the unity of the cosmos would be easily developed. Pannenberg’s philosophical context underscores for him that it is nigh on impossible to provide such an account. He also argues that the New Testament speaks clearly of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but not so clearly of their unity as one God. The unity of God is the final topic of Pannenberg’s doctrine of God since the claim can only be justified at the end of his discussion. This sets the scene for further clarification and exploration of the idea of God’s unity in the following volumes of *Systematic Theology* that deal with God’s work in creation, redemption and consummation.\(^{39}\) Pannenberg argues that the unity of God “cannot be seen in detachment from his revelation and ... the economy of salvation”.\(^{40}\) He appeals to Luther’s dialectic of *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus* to explicate the reality that, while the trinitarian distinctions are revealed, “the unity of the trinitarian God himself is still hidden in the process of history”.\(^{41}\) This does not mean that we can


\(^{38}\) See Olson “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 186-88, for a discussion of Pannenberg’s Christological development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

\(^{39}\) *ST* 1, 445ff cf. Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 81.

\(^{40}\) *ST* 1, 327.

\(^{41}\) *ST* 1, 340.
say nothing about God’s unity, but that it must be understood through the economic Trinity and asserted in anticipation.

Olson predicts a critical response to “Pannenberg’s Principle” and claims that it “does not seem to have the force of any inner-systematic necessity” in his thought and that it could be restated as follows: “that the glorification of the unity of the Father and the Son occurs through the work of the Spirit”.42 That is, Olson is not convinced that Pannenberg should posit a close relation between God’s lordship over all reality and his being (including his unity). Olson suggests that all that Pannenberg’s system requires is a glorification or revelation of the unity of God in the economy. However, this discussion of Pannenberg’s account of divine unity shows there is a clear “inner-systematic necessity” for Pannenberg to treat divine unity as problematic. This stems from his commitment to revelation in history as the way in which the Trinity is mutually self-constituted. Before history is consummated, reality is diverse and fragmented, so cannot be held to testify to or constitute God’s unity.

The distinctives of Pannenberg’s approach can be seen in his treatment of the person of the Spirit, which he approaches via economic relations: the Spirit raised and glorified the Son completing the revelation of the Father.43 Pannenberg holds that this economic action constitutes the unity of the Spirit with the Father and the Son and differentiates the Spirit who acts as a subject toward Father and Son. Pannenberg argues that the Spirit is the one who unites Father and Son, glorifies Father and Son in “their indissoluble fellowship” and “belongs to them both.” He concludes that “we have a self-distinction which constitutes the Spirit a separate person from the Father and the Son and relates him to both”.44

Having recognised the Spirit as the unity of Father and Son, while also a separate person, Pannenberg can identify the divine essence as “Spirit”: the “unity and perfection of

42 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 202-203.
43 See Olson “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 189 for a review of Pannenberg’s trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit.
44 ST 1, 314-19, quote is from p.315. ST 1, 316, affirms the Augustinian insight that the Spirit is the love that unites Father and Son, but insists that the Spirit is also a person, “for there is no place for self-distinction of the Spirit ... if he is viewed merely as the ‘we’ of their communion”. He insists that the filioque clause has no basis, for it appeals exclusively to relations of origin (317-18).
divine life” in which the identity of each person is mediated by relations with the other persons and in this “self-giving to the others, each of the persons is fully identical with itself”.⁴⁵ Pannenberg argues that the trinitarian persons are dependent on the Spirit, who binds them together. In this context, Pannenberg makes his suggestion that the Spirit can be conceptualised as a force field. As a field, God’s essence is not particular to a subject, but each divine person is a manifestation of the field. “The idea ... sees the divine Spirit who unites the three persons as proceeding from the Father, received by the Son, and common to both, so that precisely in this way he is the force field of their fellowship that is distinct from the both”.⁴⁶ Because the Spirit is life giving, God is the living God. So the Spirit is both the essence of God and a person in triune fellowship. Pannenberg then points out that the characteristic work of the Spirit in the world is an expression of his place in the relations within the Trinity. Economically the Spirit is the “life force that proceeds from God”, while immanently the Spirit is the life of God.⁴⁷ In Pannenberg’s account this parallel is not merely analogical; rather, the Spirit is the immanent life of God because he is the God who brings life to all creation.

In this way Pannenberg develops an account of God’s unity which is trinitarian and thoroughly economic. The unity of the Father and Son is constituted by economic acts and this constitutes the Spirit, and is constituted by the Spirit. The work of the Spirit in the world is to overcome differences and create fellowship and life.⁴⁸ So Pannenberg insists that theology must “ascribe to the third Person of the Trinity both the positive relation, in the sense of the fellowship of what is distinct, and also the associated dynamic [of constituting or establishing unity], whether in the trinitarian life of God or in creation”.⁴⁹

Pannenberg’s conception of mutual relations must not be confused with ‘equivalent’ relations, for ‘self-distinction’ does not mean exactly the same thing for each of the three persons.

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⁴⁵ ST 1, 371ff, quote from p.377.
⁴⁶ ST 1, 383. From modern physics he draws the concept of a field that is “independent of matter and defined only by [its] relations to space-time”.
⁴⁷ ST 1, 373. Pannenberg argues that the Spirit is the biblical ruach / pneuma which is associated with force and life, and “Spirit” embraces the ideas of God’s knowledge (his presence to all creation) and power and word. This, he claims, offers a far better conception than the classic view of God as nous with reason and intellect based on the Platonic equivalence of pneuma and nous.
⁴⁸ ST 2, 76-84.
⁴⁹ ST 2, 84.
persons.\textsuperscript{50} Monarchy is ascribed to the Father, while the Son is the “locus of the monarchy of the Father”\textsuperscript{51}. The Spirit is the condition and medium of fellowship between Father and Son.\textsuperscript{52} Each of these relations, which refer together to the distinctions, attributes, deity, and unity of the persons, is found in the concrete relations of salvation history. Thus Pannenberg presents a doctrine of the Trinity in which the deity, distinctive identity and unity of each of the persons is constituted in and through the others.\textsuperscript{53} It is only through the history of reconciliation united in the eschaton that God is constituted in his triune existence. Yet because that history is anticipatory of the eschaton it is true that God is the Father, Son, and Spirit in perfect unity.

Olson is unconvinced by Pannenberg’s trinitarianism and questions whether Pannenberg has avoided tritheism in his account of the Trinity. He recognises that Pannenberg’s proposal depends on an appeal to eschatological ontology. He notes the parallel between Pannenberg’s view and Hodgson’s social Trinity, but discerns that what distinguishes Pannenberg from Hodgson is his “eschatological reservation of the divine unity”. That is Pannenberg, on the basis of eschatology, affirms an eternal unity that Hodgson does not. Olson correctly notes that the acceptance or rejection of this eschatological approach will form a dividing line among Pannenberg’s interpreters.\textsuperscript{54}

c) Divine action

According to Pannenberg, the conception of God as “three centres of action” bound in unity by their action is the bridge between God’s outward activity and his inner being. God’s action on the world and his relation to the world mediate a self-relation for God. Pannenberg takes this to be a general truth since an action involves the actor in a relation with that which is acted upon, so the object of the action also mediates a self-relation for

\textsuperscript{50} ST 1, 321.
\textsuperscript{51} ST 1, 322-25, ST 2, 372-79, states that “the relation of the Son to the Father is characterised 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”.
\textsuperscript{52} ST 1, 316.
\textsuperscript{53} Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 191, explains “that means that each of the three persons must be understood as related to each other as \textit{others} and as distinct from themselves. It does not mean that they should be conceived individualistically ... rather, they are constituted as distinct persons by their inner trinitarian relations, although these cannot be reduced to mere relations or origin”.
\textsuperscript{54} Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 195. See L. Hodgson, \textit{The Doctrine of the Trinity} (New York: Scribner, 1944).
the actor. He gives priority to God’s action stating that “the one God is the acting God even before he is already the living God”. Properly conceptualising the relation between God and his actions is essential if Pannenberg is to sustain his claim that the immanent Trinity is constituted through the economic.

Pannenberg considers the goal-directed actions of God in creation and history, identifying two goals of God’s action in creation. The first is a complex one, embracing all history: God “incorporates his creatures into the eternal fellowship of the Son with the Father through the Spirit”. The second is the revelation of God’s deity. These goals are reciprocal, since the incorporation of creatures into fellowship with God establishes God’s deity; and creatures can only be united with the one who is the true Infinite. Pannenberg insists that God’s action in history must not be thought of in terms of the model of a finite being whose goals anticipate a future different to the present, and control of the course of events. This model will result in either a God who “seeks control”, or who exercises totalitarian rule over a predetermined history. Rather, Pannenberg claims that history can be viewed as trinitarian action in which the monarchy of the Father is mediated by the Son and Spirit, who enable the creatures to share in divine fellowship. In this unity (both divine and creaturely) God’s action can be ascribed to the one God (the divine essence), and this unity is the triunity of Father, Son and Spirit. This allows Pannenberg to speak of the attributes of God as both qualities of God’s outward actions and constitutive of divine essence, and to affirm that the attributes belong to both the persons and to God’s essence. In this account there is no question of whether attributes should be referred to the economy, the divine persons, or the divine essence; they refer to all three. These relations are fully realised as eternal relations, and because Pannenberg’s view of eternity is ‘simultaneity’, he can conceptualise trinitarian relations as ‘dynamic’—moving simultaneously in distinction and unity.

55 ST 1, 389.
56 See Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology, 208-209.
57 ST 1, 389.
58 ST 1, 387 characterises God’s action as “a repetition or reiteration of his eternal deity in his relation to the world”.
59 ST 1, 388.
60 ST 1, 389. Mostert, God and the Future, 80-81, shows how this conception of divine action is an expression of Pannenberg’s view that God acts ‘from the future’.
61 ST 1, 391.
Toward the end of his presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity, Pannenberg presents a fairly complete conceptualisation of the triune God. He claims to have shown that theology should “understand the trinitarian persons, without derivation from a divine essence that differs from them, as centres of action of the one movement which embraces and permeates them all—the movement of the divine Spirit who has his existence only in them”. The appeal to ‘self-differentiation’ allows Pannenberg to meet all three of his concerns: it makes relations constitutive of essence, it moves toward a new conception of divine unity and is grounded in the event of revelation. Once elucidated, the concept has its own persuasive force within Pannenberg’s thought.

**d) Immanent and economic Trinity**

Pannenberg relates his doctrine of God to the discussion of the economic and immanent Trinity initiated by Rahner. Rahner claimed that the God we know in salvation is the true eternal God, though he gives the immanent Trinity an ontological priority over the economic. Pannenberg makes a stronger claim: that “who God is” rests on the economy of salvation and that events in salvation history are “constitutive” and “decisive” for God’s being. Pannenberg’s discussion of the immanent Trinity focuses on the mutual

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62 ST 1, 385, original emphasis. Grenz, *Reason*, 49, has an apposite summary, “Pannenberg offers a radical reinterpretation of self-differentiation ... namely, that the essence of person lies in the act of giving oneself to one’s counterpart and thereby gaining one’s identity from the other”.

63 ST 1, 307, and see 328ff. See Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 39-43. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian tradition: a history of the development of doctrine*, vol 5. *Christian doctrine and modern culture (since 1700)* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 198, traces a reversal of the relationship, so that during the 19th century much theology came to see that the immanent Trinity rested on the economic, where previously the immanent was the “presupposition” of other doctrines.

64 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London, Burns & Oates, 1970). 48, writes “it is a fact of salvation history that we know about the Trinity because the Father’s Word has entered our history and has given us his Spirit”. So also “the procession of the Son as self-communication of the divine reality is two things at once ... first of all, for us, the economic, free self-communication of the divine reality to Jesus ... also the necessary ‘immanent’ self-communication of the divine reality ... the ‘immanent’ self-communication becomes perceptible, and its meaning, although remaining mysterious, becomes intelligible, in the ‘economic’ self-communication” (64). He considers “the ‘economic’ Trinity is grounded in the ‘Immanent’ Trinity” (101). C. M. LaCugna “Reconceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation” *SJT* 38 no. 1 (1985), 13, traces the careful unity-and-distinction of Rahner’s God-in-relation model. On the one hand, “the God who is known in his/her relations to us is the very God who is divine by being (internally) self-related, and vice versa. God in se IS already God pro nobis”. On the other hand, the economic/immanent distinction is made “(a) to uphold divine freedom, (b) to avoid equating God with the world and (c) to avoid agnostic or nominalist perspectives which despair of any real knowledge of God”. Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 197-98, explains that Moltmann, Jüngel and Jenson have adopted a strong version of Rahner’s rule that takes “the inner trinitarian life of God as a salvation-historical process”.

65 ST 1, 329, argues that God “has made himself dependent upon the course of history”; Bradshaw, *Trinity*
self-distinction of the persons; the discussion of the economic Trinity deals with historical actions and relations. He holds these two together as closely as possible, via the appeal to anticipation. That is, God’s identity constituted in the economy, and finally in the eschaton, is God’s eternal being, because what comes about in the end has always been so in anticipation.

Pannenberg argues that if the relations of the persons are not determined by history, but are already determined in terms of origin and simply revealed in salvation history, then the doctrine of the Trinity will appeal to static and non-mutual relations as the basis for God’s unity and deity. If history is removed from the presentation, then the description of the triune life will collapse. On the other hand, if history is not the action of God who is fully involved, then it will no longer be salvation history. For only as an expression of real involvement of God with his creation can it be the “revelation of divine love” which “will finally lead ... to participation in his glory.” Remove economic mutual self-distinction of the persons of the Trinity and salvation history is only history, and not even that, for without its final horizon it will no longer be a ‘history’ but only unrelated events.

**Becoming and eternity**

Although he builds his doctrine of God on the idea of the mutual self-distinction of the persons of the Trinity, Pannenberg claims that he does not identify the economic and immanent Trinity in such a way that there is no eternal essence. He rejects a view of “a divine becoming in history.” He can sustain this claim because of his eschatological ontology. Without the eschatological ontology economic constitution of God’s identity would be a ‘becoming’, but with the appeal to anticipation Pannenberg can hold that God as he is constituted in the economy, at the same time already exists eternally. Pannenberg can even state that if God’s identity is viewed solely from the viewpoint of the economy then there is a ‘becoming’ in God.

If eternity and time coincide only in the eschatological consummation of history, then from the standpoint of the history of God that moves toward this

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*and Ontology*, 205, comments that Pannenberg has “boldly sought to integrate Trinity with universal history and creation”.

66 *ST* 3, 642-44.

67 *ST* 1, 331 cf. *TKG* 56, and “Speaking of God”, 110 and see Bradshaw, *Trinity and Ontology*, 42.
consummation there is room for becoming in God himself, namely in the relation on the immanent and economic Trinity, and in this frame it is possible to say of God that he himself became something that he previously was not when he became man in his Son.  

Yet Pannenberg’s doctrine of God is not explained simply from the historical “frame”, and so he does not affirm a divine becoming in history as the full account of God’s being.

Grenz defends Pannenberg against Olson’s claims that tying God’s self-actualization to history is Hegelian and that it undermines the “graciousness of God’s redemptive activity in the history of Jesus Christ”. Grenz argues that in Systematic Theology Pannenberg makes it very clear that he is not a process theologian since he holds that God is causa sui and “is not completed by the world process as a ’me’ not yet given to the active ‘I’ ”. According to Grenz, Pannenberg avoids process theology because, for him, “the process of God’s self-actualisation in the world is but the revelation in the history of the world of the eternal self-actualisation of God found in the intratrinitarian life”. Grenz is correct to draw attention to the difference between Pannenberg’s proposal and a process metaphysic. However, Grenz’s defence relies on a simplification. Pannenberg’s doctrine of God’s actualisation cannot be described as “but the revelation in history” of an eternal reality. For Pannenberg, that which is revealed depends for its existence on the process of history that reveals it. His position requires closer scrutiny than is offered by either Olson’s criticism or Grenz’s defence.

a) ‘Anticipation’ and essence

Pannenberg affirms that the “consummation of salvation history” is the “consummation of the trinitarian life of God” and that “the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity”. In contrast, to Rahner he refers to a ‘decision’ about God’s being in history as that is consummated. In contrast to Moltmann, he maintains that God is not dependent on

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68 ST 1, 438 states, and see pp. 422-48.
69 Grenz, Reasons, 186.
70 ST 1, 330. Pannenberg’s view can be compared to Moltmann whose view of history is more open, lacking the dialectic between present and future, see Olson, “Trinity and Eschatology”, 223.
Olson contrasts the weaker version of Rahner’s Rule (held by Rahner and Kasper) with the strong version (held by Moltmann, Jüngel and Jenson) and comments that Pannenberg holds to neither.

Pannenberg is not entirely satisfied with either one of these two interpretations ... what is needed ... he suggests, is an idea of God which is able to grasp in a single concept two sets of seemingly contradictory truths: on the one hand the transcendence of the divine essence and God’s eternal self-identity, and on the other hand God’s real presence in the world and the debatableness of his reality in the process of history such that only the fulfilment of history finally decides the truth of his reality.72

By means of his temporalised essentialism, Pannenberg asserts that the eternal God is constituted in the self-distinctions of salvation history. His view is that God’s essence is constituted in the event of revelation, that is in the relations of the persons of the Trinity as they are expressed in history. God’s essence, determined eschatologically, is both eternal and anticipated in history.73 In Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism individual “moments of existence” form an incomplete series and their “essence” is “defined only in anticipation of the completed sequence”.74 This is true for God as it is for other reality.

Just as in our understanding of eternity the Easter event is not merely the basis of the knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth even in his earthly form was the eternal Son of God, but also decides that he was this by giving retrospective confirmation, so the deity of the God whom Jesus proclaimed is definitively and irrefutably manifested by the eschatological consummation of his kingdom and the conflict between atheism and belief is finally settled thereby, with repercussion for all eternity, for talk about God by its very nature implies the concept of eternity.75

71 ST 2, 57 declares, “It is inappropriate to use teleological language of God’s love, language which subjects God’s action to a goal that is not yet present for this omnipotent will but must be reached by employing means. 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 ... It is only on the condition of God’s participation in the life of his creatures ... that we can speak of a differentiation of subject, goal, and object in divine action”.

72 Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 198-99.

73 Bradshaw, Trinity and Ontology, 205ff, offers a fine summary of the way Pannenberg uses his view of God as future to relate God to the world without teaching a “purely economic trinitarianism which would makes a relation to the world necessary for God”. Olson, “Pannenberg’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, 199-200, states that for Pannenberg “the immanent Trinity is eschatological and can only be presently confessed as anticipation of the final fulfilment”.

74 ST 1, 357-58.

75 ST 1, 331.
b) Time and eternity

Chapter 4 showed that Pannenberg’s accounts for relation of time and eternity by the relation of the triune God to time. His temporalised essentialism has a theological foundation because it is an expression of how the triune God relates to creation as the true Infinite bringing all things to eschatological unity. Having now explored Pannenberg’s doctrine of God more directly, what follows will note the way in which Pannenberg’s eschatological ontology allows him to articulate a doctrine of God which affirms the importance of history for the transcendent God.

Pannenberg conceives of God as “his own future”, in a similar way to Thomas Aquinas’ view that *Deus est suum esse*. The mutual relations of the trinitarian persons mediate this future, as the actions in the economy of salvation have an eschatological orientation, and are possessed by God as his own. God possesses history in eternal simultaneity, for “God is not subject to the march of time”, so God’s future constitutes his present. Since the trinitarian relations are constituted by the events of salvation history, Pannenberg can describe the economy of salvation moving toward and constituting the future for God and creation. The economy has the same significance for both God and creation, with the crucial distinction that God holds all time together in eternity, so that his future is already present for him. The significance of the future for God and his actions explains why Pannenberg can differentiate God from a finite actor. A finite actor anticipates a goal subjectively, but the acting God has no gap between the conception of the goal and achievement, for his eternity brings all time into simultaneity. Pannenberg does not

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76 “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 69, states, “the Son is the future of the Father, because it is the Son who establishes the kingdom of the Father ... the Spirit is the future of the Son, since it is the Spirit who raises Jesus ... the Father is the future of both, the Son and the Spirit, since it is the Father’s kingdom they bring about by their joint activities”.

77 “Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God”, 69 cf. ST 1, 410. Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 79-80, comments that ST represents a development in Pannenberg’s thought from an earlier emphasis on God as ‘pure futurity’ to understanding this in terms of God’s eternity. He suggests that this “represents the replacement of a programmatic (even polemic) line of thought with a more careful working out of the Christian doctrine of God”, though this “represents no substantial change in Pannenberg’s thought”. It is a maturing in his thought, and should be viewed as clarification. Clayton, “Anticipation and Theological Method”, 124, points out that this clarification means that Pannenberg has stepped back from the radical position expressed in that God “in a restricted but important sense ... does not yet exist” (quote from TKG, 56).

78 J. Cobb “Pannenberg and Process Theology” in *TWP*, 54-73, confirms that it is Pannenberg’s view of the future which sets him apart from process theology when he comments that because Pannenberg “holds that our historical destiny is assured” he cannot fully affirm human freedom (68).
describe God as looking ahead to a future goal; instead he speaks of the opposite: the world in its consummation is “the mode of time that stands closest to God’s eternity”, so “the goal” is in fact “nearer to God than its commencement”, and the action of God is his kingdom breaking in “from the future”. The future is the point of unity of all reality because in it God’s lordship is established.

The lordship of God will set up righteousness and peace in the world and give human life the totality for which each of us yearns. In the future of the divine rule the life of creation will be renewed for participation in the eternity of God. In it eternity comes together with time. It is the place of eternity itself in time, the place of God in his relation to the world, the starting point of his action in the irruption of his future for his creatures, the source of the mighty workings of the Spirit.

Pannenberg’s notion of ‘mutual self-distinction’ gives a dynamic conception of the Trinity that explains why God’s eternity is simultaneity, rather than timelessness. Only because divine eternity is Father, Son, and Spirit in mutual relation, moving together in distinction from one another, and constituted in their own identities through their unity realised in God’s life with his creation, can eternity hold all time. This is “the way in which the divine love declares itself”.

For Pannenberg the mediation of time and eternity through the relation of the immanent and economic Trinity allows for the existence of plurality in the life of God. The God who is realised in the real relations of history cannot be solitary or static. This also provides the basis for the plurality of creatures and their sharing in the eternal glory of God; for if history is in fact the self-realisation of God, then from the start creation already shares in the life of God.

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79 ST 1, 390.
80 ST 1, 408-409.
81 ST 1, 405, states, “the Bible stresses God’s transcendence over changing time [and]... a real relation of God to time ... This is only possible if the reality of God is not understood as undifferentiated identity but as intrinsically differentiated unity”.
82 Mostert, “From Eschatology to Trinity”, 70, “if we imagine the simultaneous possession of life as a whole in a solitary subject, all temporal distinction would evaporate, and together with that the quality of life itself ... it is only in the Trinitarian life of the one God that the Plotinian description of eternity in terms of the wholeness of life is realised”.

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Divine attributes

In Pannenberg’s project the divine attributes can only be discussed within an understanding of the unity of the immanent and economic Trinity as constitutive of God’s eternal essence. 85 Pannenberg identifies two types of attributes: those that define the word “God” (arrived at by philosophical reflection on the Infinite) and “those that are ascribed to God on the basis of his action” (known from revelation). 86 His goal is to show that the two approaches correspond and that the triune God is the ‘true Infinite’. The first group are formal characteristics that, for Pannenberg, test a doctrine of God. If a doctrine of God cannot show that the God of which it speaks has these attributes, it is inadequate. The other group can be expressed as a single attribute—“love”, which is “the concrete form of the divine essence”. 87 The triune God is the true Infinite because he is the God of love.

a) Definitional attributes

The definitional attributes of God are holiness, eternity, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Chapter 4 explained Pannenberg’s argument that the holy triune God is the true Infinite who is immanent to, and transcendent over, all reality. That chapter and the present one have shown Pannenberg’s understanding of God’s eternity. Pannenberg presents the other two attributes in a similar way.

Pannenberg defines omnipresence as the claim that God “is present to all things at the place of their existence”, because he “permeates and comprehends all things” (Jer. 23:24). Alongside this understanding Pannenberg sets the need for a certain ‘distance’ between God and creation in order to allow for creaturely (especially human) freedom.

85 ST 1, 397-48.
86 ST 1, 392. ST 1, 393-44 explains that the first group of attributes are general (i.e. infinity, omnipresence, omniscience, eternity, omnipotence), the others are revealed (kindness, mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, patience). The general attributes are part of the ‘general idea of God’ from which philosophical reflection may determine ‘minimal conditions’ for valid talk about God. It is not till ‘the infinite’ has been understood in the light of revelation that theology reaches any idea of God’s essence: “the concept of the Infinite ... will first be linked to a series of closely related attributes. To these shall add statements about the attributes that are disclosed in God’s revelation and that obviously relate structurally to the concept of the Infinite ... Finally, the statement that God is love will prove to be the concrete form of the divine essence...” (396).
87 ST 1, 396.
He suggests that in the Scripture God’s presence is located in heaven (1 Tim. 6:16; Ps. 103:19; Matt. 6:9 passim) in order to show that God allows “his earthly creatures room to live their own lives”. Yet it is only as God is present that creatures have life and existence (Ps. 104:29-30; Job 33:4; Ps. 139:7). So as with eternity, omnipresence involves both immanence and transcendence. The resolution of this tension between God’s immanence and transcendence is found in Pannenberg’s thought in two important concepts. The first is that God’s omnipresence is due to the eschaton, in which will be found the unity of all things with God. Thus, Pannenberg can argue that even as creatures develop in their own time and space they, in anticipation, have their existence in perfect unity with God. This appeal to the eschaton and anticipation does not, in itself, explain how God can be both immanent and transcendent, to explain this Pannenberg turns to the doctrine of the Trinity, which can “clarify the unity and tension between transcendence and immanence.”

This doctrine allows Christian faith to know God as the transcendent Father and the God who is present in the Son and the Spirit in the economy. That is, it is God’s acts in the economy, which determine the inner relations of the trine God, that also constitute his omnipresence. Once more it is apparent that Pannenberg’s view that the outworking of God’s saving rule in history is constitutive for his identity provides the framework in which he develops an account of the divine attributes.

Pannenberg holds that divine omnipotence depends on omnipresence and that God’s power over all things shows what his presence by the Spirit actually means. He describes God’s power as unlimited (Job 42:2, Rom. 1:20; Jer. 32:17; Isa. 45:7-12), but not as “the abstract idea of unlimited power”. If the immanent Trinity is identical with the economic, then God’s power cannot be opposed to his creatures. Pannenberg finds that this accords with the biblical presentation that even in wrath and judgement God’s acts are oriented to the life of his creatures (Jer. 32:26-38). He claims that God acts in freedom, but his action is always that of the Creator who aims “at the consummation of his creation.”

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88 ST 1, 412-13
89 ST 1, 411.
90 ST 1, 415.
91 ST 1, 416. He views abstract omnipotence as that which negates all other power and rules in opposition to what is ruled and so is bound to its own antithesis (415).
92 ST 1, 418.
The theme of divine judgement introduces an ambiguity in Pannenberg’s account of omnipotence. God creates independent beings, which are still dependent on his power for existence, and if they turn away from him they fall into nothingness. This negative confirmation of God’s power also expresses a kind of impotence, for if it should happen then Creator’s goal is thwarted. Only salvation can fully show his true omnipotence. At one level, Pannenberg resolves this ambiguity, since the eternal Son, in self-distinction from the Father “takes the place of the creature and becomes man so as to overcome the assertion of the creatures independence … without violating its independence”. Divine love is the mode in which his power is brought to bear on all of creation. What this account does not resolve is how biblical references to divine judgement are to be understood. This question recurs, with greater force, in Pannenberg’s exposition of God’s love.

b) Relational attributes: love

Pannenberg treats the relational attributes as “aspects of the comprehensive statement that God is love”. God’s love for the world is the essential content of the history of Jesus, so the economy of salvation is an expression of God’s love. His treatment of the Trinity established the claim that the Spirit is the essence of God and the love between Father and Son. The statement “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16) is the fullest statement of God’s nature. Love as the essence of the triune life, both immanently and economically, frames Pannenberg’s presentation of the attributes of God. God’s goodness, grace, mercy, righteousness, faithfulness, patience and wisdom are concrete forms of God’s love, expressed by the Spirit. He traces each of these through their biblical presentation. For each attribute, he argues that it is an aspect of God’s commitment to his one work, which appears in the creation, preservation, redemption, and consummation of all his

93 ST 1, 420-22, explains that as the Son receives his life and deity in subjection to the Father, so the creation receives independent life only in submission to the power of the Creator.
94 ST 1, 441.
95 ST 1, 422.
96 ST 1, 424. Love not only binds the Trinity in unity, but establishes each person: “Each of the three persons is ec-statically related to one or both of the others and has its personal distinctiveness or selfhood in this relation” (428). In the treatment of love as an attribute (rather than in his discussion of divine unity) Pannenberg gives the fullest and most carefully nuanced account of the Triune relationships, tracing the fellowship between each of the persons, each in their unique self-differentiation (428-30).
creation. The few explicit references Pannenberg makes to the doctrine of divine simplicity in his doctrine of God are in the context of exposition of the history of the doctrine. He holds it partially responsible for the difficulty of relating attributes to the divine essence because it has implied that any multiplicity in God must be only apparent. Classical Christianity affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity because it held “there is also no real distinction between God as subject of his attributes and his attributes” so “each attribute is identical to every other one”. Pannenberg’s account of the attributes of God as aspects of God’s love answers the same concerns. God in his essence is love, and all his attributes may be understood as economic expressions of that love.

Reciprocally, God’s act of love in his relation to the world mediates his identity as the God of love. Though the word ‘anticipation’ is rarely used, the concept pervades the discussion since each of God’s attributes are anticipations of the eschatological embrace of all creation in the love of God.

Pannenberg’s insistence that God’s attributes are expressions of his love and anticipate the consummation leads him to exclude wrath from the attributes. He does not deny the reality of wrath, but relativises it as “a sudden emotional outburst” and an expression of God’s holiness against what is unclean. Pannenberg warns against muting the doctrine of God’s wrath, but states that by the proper articulation of the relation of judgement and salvation it is possible to affirm the realisation of God’s purpose to reconcile all things in Christ without taking a deterministic view of election or denying “the eternal gravity of sin and guilt”. His proposal for a non-deterministic view hinges on an appeal to the future outcome, rather than to any prior determination, as the deciding factor in an account of providence. He integrates judgement and salvation by stating that when eternity enters time it does so predominantly as a purifying judgement. In this judgement “lives necessarily perish of the inner contradictions of their existence”, or would do so if

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97 ST 1, 432-44.
99 ST 1, 440, has explicit use of ‘anticipation’ in the discussion of wisdom, in which wisdom is the historical plan of salvation (1 Cor. 2:7) revealed “in anticipation of the outcome of history”.
100 ST 1, 439.
101 ST 3, 453.
God were not the faithful Creator and hence Redeemer, as well as Judge. Elements of life that have been lived in alienation from and in enmity to God will have no eschatological unity with God and will have to disappear, or at least be transformed. Pannenberg allows that some “who persist irreconcilably in turning aside from God” may be destroyed since “nothing may remain when the fire of divine glory has purged away all that is incompatible with God’s presence”. This is, however, “a borderline case”. The predominant emphasis is the work the Son and the Spirit to purify and unite creation. That is, wrath is not an attribute of God since it is not present in the eschaton. Wrath is the historical manifestation of the God of love who purifies creation to bring all things into unity.

Pannenberg’s discussion of the doctrine of God shows why his account can not include wrath as a divine attribute. God’s unity is “the self-identity of the truth of God which his faithfulness in historical action demonstrates”. It is realised in reconciliation by love “which embraces the world and bridges the gulf between God and the world”. God’s unity is “the unity of the true Infinite which transcends the antithesis to what is distinct from it.” This can only be fully shown in the consummation. Pannenberg argues that conceptually this unity is anticipated in the doctrine of Trinity. Each of the aspects of God’s infinity are shown to embrace and redeem the creation, so that the triune God is the true Infinite in whom there is a “unity that transcends the antithesis” between finite and infinite, without removing that distinction. Such a conception of God allows for judgement as God’s purifying love, but cannot affirm wrath as a divine attribute.

How satisfactory is Pannenberg’s account of divine wrath? His argument that wrath is an expression of divine love is surely correct. As Hans Boersma argues, “just as divine hospitality requires at least some violence to make it flourish, so also God’s love requires that he become angry when his love is violated”. Boersma views love as the primary

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102 ST 1, 610-11.  
103 ST 1, 620.  
104 ST 1, 444.  
105 ST 1, 445.  
106 ST 1, 442, states that until then “the world and humanity as they are do not fully correspond to the loving will of the Creator”.  
107 ST 1, 446, insists that the question of God’s unity cannot be solved along Hegelian lines, for the unity of the infinite and finite in a single thought must expunge the difference between them.
attribute of God and states that “God is love, not wrath” and gives “an absolute primacy … of hospitality over violence”. Yet Pannenberg goes beyond a statement that love is a primary attribute and wrath secondary and economic when he argues that wrath is not an attribute of God at all. The reason for Pannenberg stating this is apparent: because the divine nature is constituted by the economy, then Pannenberg cannot view wrath as a secondary or economic attribute of God, because no such category may exist. It is not clear that this view will allow Pannenberg to integrate fully the biblical witness to divine wrath.

Boersma recognises the difficulty of incorporating wrath into an account of the attributes of the God of love and notes the fear that the primacy of love in God be compromised by a dualism. However, he calls for an approach which allows even this element of Scripture to have a place in a theology: “fears of such a dualist understanding of God should not tempt us into ignoring the biblical expressions of God’s wrath”. Has Pannenberg fallen into such a temptation? Perhaps not, for even when he affirms that “God constantly turns back to patience with his people”, he warns that “if God’s pardoning love is despised, patience can take the form of waiting for the last judgement, for which evildoers heap up their wicked deeds”. Yet if this judgement is to have any outcome other than purification, then, as we have seen, the account of the economy as the expression of God’s love and power in reconciliation is compromised.

Mattes highlights the question for Pannenberg when he comments that Pannenberg “unwind[s] the tensions of certain Lutheran paradoxes”. He refers to the dialectics in Luther’s thought between grace and wrath (‘gospel’ and ‘law’) in God’s relation to the world and asks “Can we not agree with Luther … that the outworking of God’s rule in the cosmos entails perhaps an economy of death?” He suggests that “if … wrath as an alien work can be seen as a legitimate aspect of God’s quest to establish the divine rule in the cosmos”,

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109 G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 256, observes that many theodicies have a “common failure to reckon with the real and concrete wrath of God, as it is revealed in Scripture”. He argues that any attempt to “get rid of the idea of Divine wrath … thrusts imically at the entire revelation of God”, and gives a summary of the importance of the theme of wrath in biblical revelation (258-61).
111 *ST* 1, 440.
112 *ST* 1, 420.
then Luther’s dialectic “could be a helpful corrective to Pannenberg’s metaphysics”. Luther affirmed God’s grace to creation and yet recognised that God acted in judgement and adopted the language of Isaiah to call God’s judgement an “alien work” (Isa. 28:21). For Pannenberg, however, the presence of an alien work in history compromises the way in which history constitutes the identity of God as the triune Infinite of holy love. Pannenberg allows for the end of some creatures more than Mattes indicates, but his metaphysic cannot include what Mattes calls “an economy of death”. Mattes points up the problematic element of Pannenberg’s thought in this area. The Bible speaks more fully of wrath and judgement than Pannenberg allows and, to the extent that he does affirm them, they introduce an ambiguity into his thought. The recognition of the loss of creatures as a “borderline” event highlights the ambiguity surrounding these themes.

Lösel directs attention to a similar concern. He claims that Pannenberg’s “teleological, —and indeed, agonistic—reading of the history of religion as a progressive revelation of the Triune God” must leave an expectation of a growing acceptance of Christian claims, an expectation Lösel finds to be unsustainable. Lösel overstates Pannenberg’s claim. It is not that Christianity will triumph in the historical process. Pannenberg assumes an ongoing pluralism, but claims that “the increasing unity of religion in religious history, in spite of plurality, corresponds to the unity of the divine reality which is coming to light in this history”. This does suggest an expectation of a growing acceptance of revelation in Christ since the full revelation of God in Christ will be the basis for an “increasing unity of religion”. Such a development is not necessarily a “triumph” for Christianity. Even the weaker claim of ‘growing acceptance’ is sufficiently strong to provide a basis for Lösel’s criticism of Pannenberg, as outlined below.

Lösel appeals to a *theologia crucis*, arguing that the New Testament expectation is that

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113 Mark Mattes, “Pannenberg’s Achievement: An analysis and Assessment of his ‘Systematic Theology’” *CTM* 26 (Feb 1999): 60.
114 Lösel, “Pannenberg’s Response to the Challenge of Religious Pluralism”, 515. Lösel points out that it may be difficult to sustain empirically. He also comments that Pannenberg curiously assumes that “God reveals God’s self … through an ongoing historical conflict against God’s very self, even if this conflict is caused by finite human (mis)conceptions of the infinite divine mystery” (517). In this he echoes Jüngel’s critique of Pannenberg. This does not, however, fully reflect Pannenberg’s stress that “religious ideas can be in tension with their object” and “all... forms of religious practice are ambivalent” and a “kind of perversion of the religious relationship lies in the basic form of the religious perception” (*ST* 1, 175, 183). These are all aspects of diversity and uncertainty that Pannenberg holds will only be resolved in the eschaton. See further “Religions from the Perspective of Christian Theology”, 96-97.
115 *ST* 1, 171.
the “world does not respond to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ by becoming increasingly Christian, but rather, by stepping up its resistance”. Lösel assertion about the expectation of the New Testament writers refers only to 1 Corinthians 1:23, but this could be expanded (Matt. 10:22; John 15:18-23; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 2:18-19; Rev. 13:3). This criticism points to the fact that in Pannenberg’s view the historical process cannot involve a progressive turning from God by creatures who will ultimately show themselves to be sinners and remain under judgement. Pannenberg’s view assumes that history shows a movement toward the recognition of Jesus as God’s self-revelation. For Pannenberg the final recognition of Jesus is found in the eschaton. The eschatological recognition cannot be a reversal of the historical development, for Pannenberg holds that the content of the eschaton is established in history. Lösel’s point is underlined by the fact that the New Testament suggests a sharper distinction between the two ages in which the universal recognition of Jesus as Lord brings judgement as well as consummation upon the old age (Phil. 2:10-11; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 6:16).

Conclusion

Pannenberg’s doctrine of God is complex and impressively thorough. As an effort to explore and defend the triune reality of God against philosophical and theological objections it must rank with Aquinas’ Summa Theologica and Barth’s Church Dogmatics as one of the great pieces of thinking on God. As Mostert judges, “it is likely that he will be recognised as one of the great teachers and defenders of the Christian faith of the twentieth century”. Particularly impressive is Pannenberg’s ability to argue defensively at the same time as offering new constructions and new perspectives on the doctrine of God.

Anticipation is basic to Pannenberg’s exposition of the doctrine of God, for it allows him to relate the multiplicity of temporal reality to divine eternity. Multiplicity is found at every point of temporal experience. Pannenberg’s philosophical milieu presents him with the question of how the one infinite God can truly be the source and goal of such a diverse reality. His answer is to understand all history as the work of a mutually self-

117 Mostert, God and the Future, 238.
differentiating triune God, so that all diversity is seen as the work of the one God who exists always in unity and distinction. In the face of obvious diversity and little apparent unity, Pannenberg’s claim would seem unfounded, except that he appeals to the eschaton as the point at which true ‘unity in distinction’ is found. At the same time he claims that we must see that essence, both creaturely and divine, is grounded in the eschaton, has been present all along. All reality in its diversity is already, in anticipation, bound in ‘unity in distinction’ in the love of God. This is Pannenberg’s Christian ontology; proclaiming the love of God for all creation, revealed in Christ, completed in the Spirit, consummated in the eschatological and eternal life of Father, Son and Spirit. In order to show this, Pannenberg must argue that all reality is an expression of God’s loving commitment to his creation.118

Chapter 3 noted that Pannenberg’s response to the end of metaphysics is very different to that of Postmetaphysical theology. According to Carlson, Postmetaphysical theology conceives of divine love “exercised primordially through the paternal distance wherein separation alone allows for filial relation”.119 That is, it is the absence of God from life that marks the act of divine love, granting freedom to creatures. Pannenberg holds that self-distinction of God from creation is necessary for creation to be itself and to develop in freedom. However his version of self-distinction is not a denial of God’s presence but is always oriented to the eschatological unity-in-distinction in which God’s love is fully known. Pannenberg’s claim is that present historical reality may seem to exist in the apparent absence of God, but that the entry of eternity into time in the eschaton brings all reality into the glorious presence of God, and it is from this consummation of reality that all things have their identity in God. So Pannenberg’s account is not one of absence alone, but one in which God’s absence is his act of self-distinction which, in the eschaton, is sublated into a relation of unity-in-distinction of God and creation. This chapter has shown that Pannenberg’s claim about the eschatological unity of creation and God is complementary to his claim that God’s identity is established in the economy of reconciliation.

Taylor reflects on Pannenberg’s account of the immanent Trinity constituted in the

118 ST 1, 432-41.
119 Carlson, “Postmetaphysical Theology”, 62.
economy. He suspects this is “problematic” and that it “does tie the hands of the trinitarian God per se” because the reconciliation of all things becomes a requirement of God. He suggests that Pannenberg seems to avoid the problematic implications when he says, “God is the same in his eternal essence as he reveals himself to be historically”, but claims that Pannenberg is “on thinner ground”, when he states that the events “decide” God’s deity. In fact, Pannenberg is not qualifying his position when he refers to the revelation of God in history; for him what is revealed is that which is decided in the economy, the decision and the revelation are one and the same. Taylor argues that the problem in Pannenberg’s approach springs from his “not being trinitarian enough at a key point in this theological system”. Taylor’s criticism is that Pannenberg fails to have a fully trinitarian epistemology, as shown in his doctrine of revelation, and is too committed to critical study of the “historical Jesus” as a basis for his theology. It is not clear from Taylor’s discussion that Pannenberg’s commitment to the being of God decided in history leads to a problematic doctrine of the Trinity. The discussion of earlier chapters of this thesis has also shown that Pannenberg’s christology from below is integrated with his Trinitarian doctrine.

Our discussion has drawn attention to an ambivalence that comes from Pannenberg’s Principle with its appeal to anticipation. The reason that the idea of God’s wrath creates an ambivalence in his thought is that he holds history and God’s being in a close and reciprocal relation. Thus, if some creatures are lost in judgement, then it is hard to conceive all history as the anticipation of the holy love of God. If history is the anticipation of God’s love, then it cannot have in it “an economy of death”, at most the loss of creatures must be considered “borderline” cases. Yet even this formulation highlights the ambiguity in Pannenberg’s thought and raises the question of whether he has given an account of God’s “strange work” which sufficiently reflects its important in the biblical presentation.

The question of how well Pannenberg’s doctrine of God reflects biblical texts leads to the next, and final, area in which Pannenberg’s use of anticipation will be examined. His

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120 Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 42.
121 Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, 42-34.
concept of anticipation is drawn from New Testament eschatology, and the next chapter will consider how the motif is developed from the New Testament material.
**Chapter 8  Biblical Eschatology and Anticipation in Pannenberg’s Thought**

**Introduction**

Pannenberg’s view of anticipation and his eschatological ontology are explicitly grounded in the claim that the future kingdom of God was present proleptically in Jesus’ ministry and in his resurrection. Pannenberg’s proposal transposes the ‘now–not yet’ tension in the New Testament into an account of ontology. This tension was articulated in twentieth century biblical scholarship, which argued that the New Testament always has an eschatological horizon and that the ‘now–not yet’ tension runs all the way through it.¹ The final step in our assessment of Pannenberg’s thought is to compare his viewpoint with that found in key New Testament texts and to ask if the differences between them have theological significance. Seeking the differences between Pannenberg’s concept of anticipation and New Testament eschatology does not deny that the two have a great deal in common. Indeed it is because Pannenberg develops his concept on the basis of New Testament eschatology that a comparison is both possible and informative. The following discussion will argue that, in contrast to Pannenberg, New Testament eschatology has an ‘achievement–consummation’ schema. The New Testament writers assume this tension rather than explicating it, which means that much of the New Testament can be read in the terms Pannenberg suggests. Conversely, Pannenberg allows for very strong statements of the ‘eschatological present’, though always in the light of consummation (that is anticipatorily), so again the difference between the two is not always obvious. An assessment of this dimension of Pannenberg’s approach requires a very careful reading of the New Testament. This chapter begins by clarifying three methodological questions that could give rise to objections to the arguments which are presented later in the chapter. It will then analyse Pannenberg’s view of anticipation in terms of how he relates the present and the future. It will argue that his view is one of anticipation followed by

¹ For classic discussions see Werner Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (London: SCM, 1957); Reginald H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1954); Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London, SCM: 1963) and *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1971); George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). This view has continued to be affirmed by more recent scholars; so Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 459, concludes, “it is basic to early Christianity that the Jewish hope has already been fulfilled. But the very shape of this belief demanded that there be another hope, a hope yet to come”.
actualisation. It will then examine the eschatology of the Synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel and Paul’s writings and argue that in each case there is a pattern of achievement followed by consummation. It will conclude that this difference, while subtle, creates a significant difference between Pannenberg’s presentation and that of the New Testament texts.

**Methodological questions**

* a) Variety in New Testament texts

It could be objected that we cannot consider ‘the eschatology of the New Testament’ since there is no consistency between New Testament texts on this matter. Three factors indicate the viability of the method adopted here. First, it is a commonplace in New Testament scholarship to treat the ‘now–not yet’ tension as a feature of the thought of all, or most, of the New Testament. The most recent thorough defence of this view is Thomas Schreiner’s *New Testament Theology*, which treats the tensions between the already and the not-yet as the organising principle for his work. He argues that the same tension can be found in all parts of the New Testament.

The authors address the theme in a variety of ways, and hence there is not a set terminology … Still in every case we find that God has begun to fulfill his promises in Jesus Christ, and yet believers still await the completion of what God has promised.²

Second, the discussion that follows acknowledges diversity between New Testament writers. It examines the Synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel and Paul’s writings separately and notes differences between them, and argues that the eschatology of John’s Gospel is a particular challenge to Pannenberg’s account. Third, the argument presented here is not that the eschatology of the New Testament texts is uniform, but that in three very significant parts of the corpus there is a common pattern of relation of the future kingdom with present experience. This will be demonstrated, not simply assumed.

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b) New Testament thought forms and systematic theology

A second objection that can be foreseen is a claim that the approach taken in this chapter assumes that theology is bound to the thought forms of the New Testament. If such a view were adopted it would conflict with Pannenberg’s own method. Primarily, Pannenberg holds that the value of the New Testament is in its testimony to the revelation of Jesus, which is understood in the light of historical-critical study and not simply from the text of the New Testament. McGrath argues for the significance of the Gospels as “witnesses and expressions of faith” in explicit contrast to Pannenberg’s treatment of them.\(^3\) That is, McGrath does not want to focus only on the history that the Gospels reveal but also on the actual expressions and thought forms in which the Gospels present this history. He treats the Gospel writers as theologians as well as historians, and seeks to accept their theological contribution as well as their historical witness. The contrast between this approach and Pannenberg’s should not be overdrawn. Chapters 2 and 4 both noted that in practice Pannenberg applies historical criticism conservatively and works closely with the text of Scripture as he develops his thought. Chapter 2 of this thesis argued that Pannenberg’s hermeneutical practice is, in fact, more attuned to the thought forms of the biblical texts than his formal commitment suggests. It also presented a justification for this, which could be developed through an extension of Pannenberg’s thought.

It could be argued that contemporary theology is not at all tied to the thought forms of the New Testament writers. This perspective would claim that Pannenberg has validly drawn on elements of the New Testament thought forms, in this case the eschatological tension, and has made use of it in a very different intellectual milieu. Moreover, there is a strong case to be made that concepts found in Scripture are transformed when deployed in new ways and new contexts and this is the inevitable effect of theological interpretation and is not to be considered invalid. Such claims make an important point. Pannenberg is not required to reduplicate biblical language or thought forms. However,\(^3\) Alister E. McGrath, “Christology and Soteriology: A Response to Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Critique of the Soteriological Approach to Christology”, TZ 42 no.3 (1986): 228. Pannenberg would contest McGrath’s claim that theology should “simply assert that there is an axiomatic correlation between the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ” (234, original emphasis). For Pannenberg such a claim needs to be established.
there is still a proper place for the consideration of how Pannenberg’s position relates to New Testament thought forms. First, Pannenberg’s own basis for the assessment of theology is that “statements in theology are to be judged not substantiated if and only if … they cannot be shown to express implications of biblical traditions”⁴. This criterion invites an assessment of the way Pannenberg has developed biblical concepts. A further and related reason is that Pannenberg claims that his use of anticipation draws on the apocalyptic thought reflected in the New Testament. He is not claiming to demythologise these thought forms, so it is valid to ask how well his account reflects New Testament eschatology. The final reason is that this examination will show that Pannenberg’s approach has not incorporated several very important elements of New Testament eschatology, and will suggest that this is because he develops the concept of anticipation with a predominant concern for metaphysics.

c) Polarised descriptions

A further possible objection to the argument of the chapter is that describing Pannenberg’s view as ‘anticipation-actualisation’ and the New Testament eschatological schema as ‘achievement–consummation’ exaggerates the contrast between the two. The descriptions are chosen in order to highlight the difference. However, as already noted, the two approaches have a great deal in common and the descriptions are not intended to conceal this. The argument of the chapter does not depend on merely giving the two approaches different titles but on the demonstration of a genuine difference between the two. The existence of a genuine difference between them will be shown in the fact that Pannenberg deals with particular New Testament texts and themes in ways which shift the ‘weight’ onto the eschaton. At points where the New Testament texts understand the kingdom as present on the basis of what God achieves in history, Pannenberg interprets events so that what is present depends primarily on what will be achieved in the eschaton. Although the difference is subtle, this chapter argues that it is one of theological significance.

⁴ TPS, 345.
Pannenberg’s schema: anticipation–actualisation

Pannenberg’s theology is structured on a schema of ‘anticipation and actualisation’. This can be most easily discerned by considering the points at which he discusses the mid-twentieth century debate about the eschatological tension in Jesus’ ministry. This debate concerned the tension between the sayings of Jesus about the kingdom as future and those that referred to it as present. Some scholars accepted one or other group of sayings as authentic. In an early article, Pannenberg comments that “the uniqueness of the message of Jesus [is] precisely in this juxtaposition”. He understands the eschatology of the kingdom not as “future extension and completion of that which has broken in [sic] the present”, but that “in the ministry of Jesus the futurity of the Reign of God became a power determining the present”. He claims that in Jesus the kingdom “becomes determinative of the present and therefore becomes present” (so the appearance of Jesus constitutes the arrival of God). That is, the present is what it is because of the future. We have seen that this is also Pannenberg’s view in Systematic Theology.

This emphasis on the future is a key part of Pannenberg’s project. Chapter 5 showed that in his christology Pannenberg views the resurrection as determining the reality of what came before. He argues that Jesus’ identity as Saviour is an aspect of his pre-Easter life only because of the resurrection. Chapter 5 also demonstrated that Pannenberg’s affirmation of the pre-existence of the Son depends on the historical life of Jesus and his resurrection. That is, the pre-existence of the Son is an anticipation of what is actualised in history and finally in the eschaton. In turn, the saving effect of Jesus’ death and resurrection depends on anticipation. Chapter 6 showed that for Pannenberg statements about Jesus as Saviour are only true when their correlate of “saved and reconciled humanity” comes into existence. As such, they “anticipate something that is still open to

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5 A. Schweitzer and Weiss portrayed Jesus as having a (futuristic) ‘consistent eschatology’. Dodd gave definitive form to the view of ‘realised eschatology’. Between these were a series of mediating positions (Kümmel, Jüngel, Jeremias on the German scene), for a helpful summary see Chrys C. Caragounis “Kingdom of God/Heaven”, in DJG, 420-22.
6 TKG, 133.
7 See ST 2, 327-34.
8 ST 2, 345.
9 ST 2, 445 explains, “The historical Jesus … was neither priest nor king nor, in the strict sense, prophet”.

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question in the course of history”. 10 The present work of the Spirit, which brings about the reconciliation is also anticipatory because the Spirit “himself is eschatological reality”. 11 He is the “eschatological gift” and his work is an “eschatological event.” So his work of completion of reconciliation is an “anticipation of the eschatological outpouring of Spirit”. 12

This summary of Pannenberg’s treatment of the eschatological tension shows that in his thought the ‘weight’ rests on the future. Mostert concludes that for Pannenberg “the futurity of the kingdom of God is primary” and “for Pannenberg it is not a question of realised eschatology; the eschaton is still future”. 13 It is the future that is constitutive and it is from the future that the kingdom irrupts. Certainly, the future irrupts into the present and its identity depends on what occurs in history, but Pannenberg repeatedly shows that the reality of the Son’s identity, of reconciliation and of God’s identity can be affirmed because they to exist in the eschaton. Each phase in redemption draws its significance and power from what follows it, that is from that which it anticipates. Diagram C. summarises the relationship between five phases discussed above — the pre-existence of the Son, the historical life of Jesus, the resurrection, the work of the Spirit, and the eschaton. Each phase finds its reality in the next. The dark arrow for the ‘retroactive power’ of the future indicates the primary force in establishing reality. Temporal experience is reflected in the lighter ‘anticipation’ arrow. Pannenberg’s proleptic schema consists of a present anticipation of a future actualisation.

10 ST 2, 442-43.
11 ST 3, 6. See also ST 2, 383-84, for a discussion of the doctrine of God with regard to Spirit as the unity of Father and Son, and so of economic and immanent Trinity; and ST 3, 622-26, for exposition of the work of the Spirit in the consummation of salvation.
12 ST 3, 7.
13 Mostert, God and the Future, 42, 113.
New Testament schema: achievement–consummation

This section argues that, in contrast to Pannenberg’s ‘anticipation–actualisation’ schema, the New Testament has a schema of achievement–consummation. It will explore four points where this emerges: the presentation of the kingdom in “deeds of power” in the Synoptic Gospels, the wider presentation of Jesus and his work in the Synoptic Gospels, Johannine eschatology, and Pauline eschatology. The discussion will consider how Pannenberg deals with the same texts and themes. Space constrains extending this study to deal with the books of Hebrews and Revelation, which have important contributions to make to the conception of eschatology.

a) The eschatology of the Gospels

i. Synoptic Gospels and deeds of power

According to Schreiner, in the Synoptic Gospels “the kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus’ ministry but not yet consummated”.14 The inauguration involves the accomplishment in and by Jesus of much that was expected in Jewish eschatology. The presentation of Jesus’ deeds of power (δυναμεὶς; see Mark 1:13; cf. 1:39; 3:14-15; 6:12-13; Matt. 4:23) is a theme in the Synoptic Gospels that shows the presence of an inaugurated eschatology. Pannenberg has little to say about Jesus’ pre-Easter works. Systematic Theology and Jesus—God and Man make passing references, and mainly present the

14 Schreiner, New Testament Theology, 79.
claims that miracles could only partially confirm Jesus’ claims.\(^{15}\) The point that requires exploration is not the revelatory value of these works, but the light they throw on the eschatology of the Gospels. In twentieth century discussion Luke 11:20 and Matthew 12:28 became the focus of interest, and particularly the meaning of ἐξήγαγεν in those verses. Does Jesus claim his exorcisms show that the kingdom of God ‘has come’ or that it ‘is about to come’? Pannenberg reflects views that translate the word as ‘is about to come’.\(^ {16}\) This view reflects Schweitzer’s understanding that Jesus has a ‘consistent eschatology’. Although Bultmann, to whom Pannenberg refers, offers an existential understanding of the kingdom, his understanding of eschatological views of the historical Jesus is very close to that of Schweitzer.\(^ {17}\) Wright reports, “exegetes now agree that this [word] denotes the emphatic presence, not just imminent futurity, of the kingdom”.\(^ {18}\) This is not to deny that Jesus’ deeds of power have an aspect of looking forward to the fullness of the kingdom. They are, however, not presented as anticipatory in Pannenberg’s terms, for they are a powerful presence of God’s kingdom which is being established by the presence and works of Jesus. The not-yet dimension of the Synoptic Gospels seems to rest on what it achieved in the ‘now’, while for Pannenberg the ‘now’ has its reality because of the eschaton.

The deeds of power are also significant in the Synoptists’ presentation of Jesus.\(^ {19}\) Blackburn asserts, “the synoptists regard Jesus’ miracles … as one mode of God’s assertion of his royal power, so that while the kingdom in its fullness still lies in the future, it has already become a reality in Jesus’ words and works”.\(^ {20}\) This is reinforced by

\(^{15}\) JGM, 64.

\(^{16}\) JGM refers to Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:7, where Bultmann concludes that a series of texts which emphasise the presence of the kingdom “does not mean that God’s reign is already here; but it does mean that it is dawning”. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 640 refers to Wilhelm Michaelis, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (1949), 2:154, for the particular view that ἐξήγαγεν means “to come ahead of time” and represents “a limiting case of drawing near, that still does not signify presence”.


\(^{19}\) Jesus’ works and powerful words are presented as the reasons people notice him and wonder about his identity (Mark 1:27; 2:12; 4:41; 7:37; Matt. 9:8; Luke 7:16). In Matthew, Jesus’ walking on water leads the disciples to worship him (προσκυνεῖ) and to confess that he is “the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33). When this confession is repeated (Matt. 16:16), it is at least in part because of the impression of the deeds of power. The deeds are certainly the basis for the alternative conclusions reported in Matt. 16:14.

a consideration of Jesus’ exorcisms. The crucial pericope (Mark 3:27; Matt. 12:29) indicates that these should be seen as evidence of the present defeat of Satan in Jesus’ ministry (the tying of the strong man) not as evidence of a future defeat. In Matthew, Jesus’ works identify him as the messianic servant (Matt. 8:17; 12:15-21). In Luke, healings are the work of Jesus who by the Spirit brings “the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:22; cf. 7:20-23). These both relate to a fulfilment of Old Testament eschatological expectations. In all these cases the Gospels claim more than ‘anticipation’.

Witherington represents a widely held conclusion that in Jesus’ miracles people experienced the kingdom, “the basileia in the present means the inbreaking of God’s dynamic saving power”.

Again, it is important to note that the presence of the kingdom still awaits a consummation but that the presence now is the guarantee of the eschatological consummation, rather than the present reality depending on the eschaton.

ii. The presentation of Jesus’ work in the Synoptic Gospel.

The emphasis on achievement in the eschatology of the Synoptics reaches beyond Jesus’ deeds of power and can be seen in wider aspects of the presentation of Jesus’ work. Wright describes Jesus’ view of his death in terms such as “achievement”, “the decisive victory over evil”, “the climax of a career”, “victory in the real messianic battle” and concludes that Jesus’ plan was to act on behalf of, and in place of, the Israel that was failing to be what she was called to be. He argues that Jesus must have seen his death as part of his vocation and as an eschatological event that would bring in the kingdom.

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21 Witherington, Jesus, Paul and the End, 69.
22 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 607-609.
23 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 597, says of Jesus, “He would go ahead of his people, to take upon himself both the fate that they had suffered … and the fate his contemporaries were apparently hell-bent on pulling down on their own heads … this was the way in which Israel would at last be brought through suffering to vindication … this … would be climactic, unique, the one-off moment when Israel’s history and world history would turn their great corner at last, when YHWH’s kingdom would come”. According to Wright, Jesus shared the Jewish expectation of God’s kingdom, not as the end of the space-time universe, but as the ‘this-world’ restoration of Israel. It was “the climax of Israel’s history, involving events for which end-of-the-world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase within space-time history” (208). He contends the expectation, generated by their scriptures, was of Yahweh’s return to his people and the temple and lists Isa. 4:2-6; 24:23; 25:9-10; 35:3-6; 40:3-5, 9-11; 52:7-10; 59:15-17, 19-21; 60:1-3; 62:10-11; 63: 1, 3, 5, 9; 64:1; 66:12, 14-16, 18-19; Ezek. 43:1-7; Hab. 2:7,9; Zech. 2:4-5, 10-12; 8:2-3; 14:1-5, 9, 16; Mal. 3:1-5; Pss. 50:3-4; 96:12-13; 98:8-9 (pp 616-21).
contrast Pannenberg accounts for Jesus’ representation of God in terms of his historical self-distinction from God, which is later recognised as representation on the basis of the resurrection. According to Wright, Jesus expected a vindication (the resurrection) which “would declare that he had in principle succeeded in his task, and that his earlier redefinition of the coming kingdom had pointed to a further task awaiting his followers, that of implementing what he had achieved”. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus’ ministry as one in which eschatological expectations are accomplished so that the kingdom is inaugurated.

Chapter 6 showed that Pannenberg’s use of New Quest christology is a partial explanation for the difference between his view and that of many passages in the New Testament. A similar explanation may be advanced here. The New Testament studies on which Pannenberg relies for his account of the now–not yet tension understand the eschatology of the historical Jesus as a predominantly futurist eschatology. More recent approaches take a closer interest in the inaugurated eschatology of the Gospel writers and argue that this reflects the views of the historical Jesus.

iii. Johannine eschatology

Chapter 5 has already compared Pannenberg’s thought with Johannine christology, in this section the focus is on John’s eschatology, though christology and eschatology are inextricably connected in John. Dodd famously commented on John’s realised eschatology: “All that the church hoped for in the second coming of Christ is already given in its present experience of Christ through the Spirit”. In John, eschatological blessings are present and achievements expected in the eschaton are proclaimed as accomplished and all are focussed in the historical life of Jesus: judgement occurs in Jesus’ ministry (9:35-34; 12:31), eternal life may be experienced (5:26; 6:57), resurrection is present (11:25) and living water is available (4:14). Referring to Jesus’

24 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 660.
25 Charles H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (New York: Willet, Clark; 1937), 121. In the years since, Dodd’s view has been qualified by a recognition that there is a future aspect to John’s eschatology (John 6:39; 14:1-3; 21:22). Brown, John, 2: 626-27, suggests that the original reference of the material in 14:3 was the parousia, though this has been reinterpreted “in terms of the death of a Christian”.

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pre-Easter ministry Allison comments, “One is tempted to say that in John, Jesus is the eschaton, its real content”. This means that “when Jesus came the end came”.26

Dorothy Lee explains that John’s eschatology moves from the “strictly apocalyptic” and “understands that everything representing ultimacy in the Christian faith belongs firmly in the present” so that “no longer is salvation of the future; now it has definitively engaged and transfigured” the present. She claims that “the peculiar shape of Johannine eschatology means that what is forged by the incarnation … that is no longer susceptible to the constraints of time”.27 Even if Lee overstates the realised dimension of John’s eschatology, she makes the point that the ‘weight’ of John’s presentation rests in the “achievement” of the incarnation. Schreiner presents John’s eschatology through a study of the motif of eternal life. He states that “the gift of life in the present age is available only because Jesus is the resurrection and the life” and that “John anchors the believer’s enjoyment of life to the resurrection of Jesus Christ”.28 Schreiner does not discuss how John understands that life is available in the ministry and words of Jesus before the passion (John 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:33, 47; 11:25). The presence of life in Jesus before the passion is in anticipation of the passion, yet it is also on the basis of the presence of the light and life of all in him (John 1:4) and of his reception of the Spirit (John 1:33). That is, John presents the person and ministry of Jesus as already offering eschatological life (ζωης οἰκονομικος). He also presents Jesus’ death as an eschatological achievement, viewing the cross and resurrection together as Jesus’ ‘exaltation’ or ‘glorification’ (3:14; 8:28; 12:32; 13:32; 17:1). It is the moment of “the judgement of this world”, when “the ruler of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31).

Pannenberg comments on John’s eschatology, referring to John 5:24.

The eschatological future and the present of Jesus’ message go together but without absorbing the future in the present. Instead the future is what gives the present its hidden meaning.29

28 Schreiner, New Testament Theology, 84.
29 ST 3, 604.
He is correct to claim that John does not absorb the future into the present, and even that the future continues to inform the meaning of the present. Yet, Pannenberg’s conception of “the future” determining the reality of the present does not capture well the relationship between the present and the future in John’s thought. For example, Pannenberg attributes the words of John 5:24 — “anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life” — to the “Johannine Christ”, leaving open the question of whether the movement from death to life happened in Jesus’ pre-Easter ministry. John’s eschatology reflects an achievement–consummation schema far more than it does Pannenberg’s anticipation–actualisation schema.30

d) Pauline eschatology

The presence of an eschatological tension in Pauline theology is commonly recognised, often termed “realised”, “inaugurated” or “proleptic” eschatology.31 If Paul’s view of the Christian life is that of a “foretaste” of the kingdom, which still awaits its reality, then this supports Pannenberg’s position. If, however, Paul presents the Christian life as already eschatological in itself though not yet complete, this suggests a different view to that of Pannenberg.32

30 It is interesting that Jürgen Moltmann, “God in the World—the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology”, in Gospel of John and Christian Theology, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2008), 369-70, notes a change in his own theology from an emphasis on eschatology and the “God of Hope” to the discovery of ecology and “the indwelling and inhabitable God” and attributes this shift to an engagement with John’s Gospels. He sees his earlier eschatological approach as similar to Pannenberg’s Theology of History. This thesis has argued that Pannenberg’s thought has developed consistently, so Moltmann’s observation is at least suggestive that a greater engagement with John’s Gospel would require a shift in Pannenberg’s approach to eschatology.

31 Andrew T. Lincoln, Paradise Now and Not Yet (Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 197 n.27. The following treatment draws considerably on Lincoln’s work. Lincoln’s work continues to be a point of reference in Pauline scholarship and his conclusions are largely accepted; e.g. Larry J. Kreitzer, “Eschatology” in DPL, 257; Ben Witherington, Paul’s Narrative Thought World: the Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph (Louisville Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 351, n.237; Murray J. Harris, “Resurrection and Life in the Pauline Corpus”, in Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament, ed. R. N. Longenecker, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 170; Richard N. Longenecker, “Is there Development in Paul’s Resurrection Thought”, in Life in the Face of Death, ed. R. Longenecker, 202. Lincoln’s view of the Pauline authorship of Colossians and Ephesians has changed since he wrote Paradise but this is not a pressing issue for this thesis and Colossians and Ephesians will be included in the treatment.

32 See Witherington, Paul’s Narrative Thought World, 131-34, 160-211.
Lincoln draws attention to the significance of the heavenly realm for Paul’s expression of the realised aspect of his eschatology. He argues that in Paul “what is to be revealed at the end can be thought of as already existing”, and that now “the eschatological centre of gravity has moved to the heavenly realm”.  

He argues that when Paul wishes to stress the realised aspect he typically moves to “spatial categories” and appeals to “heavenly realities”. Paul uses the heavenly dimension to express the present enjoyment by believers of the benefits of eschatological salvation. Lincoln opposes any confusion of Paul’s view of the heavenly realm with a timeless conception, but insists that heaven is the place where the exalted Christ now reigns and is the arena of eschatological salvation that still awaits the end of salvation history. He explains his view as follows.

The image should not … leave the impression of the heavenly dimension as a static reality, for it signifies a reality which is, but is yet to come … the heavenly realm is part of the forward-moving history of salvation … it has a dynamic effect on the believing community, as its mother providing life and as a realm of freedom making possible liberation from the bondage of the old age.

In contrast, when Pannenberg uses the idea of heaven in theological discussion he interprets the biblical imagery in metaphysical terms explaining heaven as “the sphere of [God’s] eternal presence which is inaccessible to us” and as “a figure of speech for the eternal presence of God in which he is present to all temporal things”. For Pannenberg eternity is without time flow for it is “eternal present”: “the eternal Today of God … has no need of recollection and expectation. God’s day lasts”. Thus Pannenberg cannot conceive of “heaven” as “part of the forward-moving history of salvation”, for the heavenly eternity it the ontological terminus of history.

Lincoln argues that even when Paul responds to an over-realised eschatology his own
inaugurated eschatology is clear. He shows that 1 Corinthians 15:47-48 views Jesus’ resurrection existence as heavenly and teaches that in union with Jesus by the Spirit believers now participate in that existence and can be called heavenly.\(^{38}\) In Colossians the apostle counters fears of ‘the powers’ by presenting Christ’s triumphant reconciliation of the heavenly powers in his earthly work (Col. 1:19-20; 2:15; 3:1).\(^{39}\) This triumph guarantees salvation and eschatological inheritance (Col. 1:5, 12). Paul assures the Colossian believers that they may put their fears aside.\(^{40}\) This does not remove a future hope (Col. 3:4), but stresses the present reality of that which will be finally revealed. A similar pattern emerges in Ephesians, highlighted by the striking expression of ‘realised eschatology’ that believers have been raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly realm (Eph. 2:6).

When Lincoln speaks of ‘anticipation’ in Paul’s view of the Christian life, he means something rather different to Pannenberg.\(^{41}\) He views the triumph of Christ as already established in the heavenly realm that is contemporaneous with present existence but spatially removed. Christian anticipation is fellowship now in what is already established but is not yet manifest on earth. Lincoln’s view of Paul’s eschatology is that of achievement followed by consummation. Pannenberg sets the achievement of the salvation in the eschaton, which has an anticipatory presence.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that ‘achievement–consummation’ is a better characterisation of the New Testament eschatological tension than is Pannenberg’s ‘anticipation–actualisation’ schema. Vanhoozer observes that “Wolfhart Pannenberg’s eschatologically

\(^{38}\) Lincoln, *Paradise*, 53.

\(^{39}\) Lincoln, *Paradise*, 125; note the allusion to Ps. 110 in Col. 3:1.

\(^{40}\) Lincoln, *Paradise*, 125, explains that “The heavenly realm centres around the one with whom they have been raised and since he is in the position of authority at God’s right hand, nothing can prevent their access to this realm and to God’s presence”. He notes that the different pastoral concern of Colossians means Paul “comes perilously close to the position [of realised eschatology] he passionately fights in 1 Corinthians 15” (133).

\(^{41}\) Lincoln, *Paradise*, 179, comments that, “Paul’s Christian apocalyptic is defined both by the future and by the recent past and is about what happens when the life of the age to come has been made available through Christ’s resurrection and how that life does not remain centred in heaven but works itself out on earth in the present period of history”.

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oriented theology enshrines apocalyptic as the way to understand the whole of scripture”. This is not precisely the case, since it is a particular way of viewing aspects of apocalyptic that provides the basis of Pannenberg’s theology, as evidenced by the fact that Gilbertson uses apocalyptic literature to raise questions about Pannenberg’s account. Vanhoozer also argues that, in contrast to Pannenberg, “a nonreductive orthodoxy … seeks to do justice to the variety of biblical literature and to respond to each literary form according to its own kind”. This is a valid criticism of Pannenberg’s thought. This chapter has shown that there is a significant element of biblical eschatology that is not reflected in Pannenberg’s approach.

Thiselton is far more appreciative of Pannenberg. He claims that in the New Testament “we find strong justification for identifying metacritical or foundational realities with futurity” and that Pannenberg has established this insight as “a principle of hermeneutical theory” which is “not only coherent and intelligible, but deserves to be taken seriously in the widest context”. The argument of this chapter is that Pannenberg has identified futurity with foundational realities too strongly. The New Testament leads us to think that it is not actualisation which lies in the future, but consummation and thus that the present is more than anticipation. While Pannenberg’s proposal is coherent and intelligible and most certainly deserves to be taken seriously, it is not as well grounded in the biblical presentation as would be hoped.

These findings do not falsify Pannenberg’s project. For he is not drawing his theology directly or simply from the Bible. The observations raise a question about Pannenberg’s thought. He has transposed the New Testament eschatological tension into a metaphysical proposal about the relationship of time and eternity. The question is whether in making this transposition Pannenberg has also significantly transformed the structure of New Testament eschatology so that rather than recognising the present ‘achievement’ of the kingdom he sees the kingdom having its reality entirely in the eschaton. Chapter 3 showed that one of the main motivations for this was in order to

43 Thiselton, New Horizons, 338.
develop a metaphysic that could offer a universal interpretation and incorporate the fragmentation of reality highlighted by historicism and the relational turn. The move to incorporate a description of fragmentation has led Pannenberg to reduce the emphasis on what is present in comparison to the New Testament presentation.

Earlier chapters have shown that this is reflected in Pannenberg’s anticipatory accounts of christology and reconciliation. In christology the human, historical Jesus is constitutive for the identity of the Son because the Son’s identity is not affirmed against the historical horizon but in anticipation. In the doctrine of reconciliation the cross is actualised as reconciliation through the work of the Spirit and in the eschaton and is expiatory in anticipation of this actualisation. In each case this is a significant shift from the New Testament presentation. This chapter suggests that the same pattern may be observed in Pannenberg’s development of the motif of anticipation itself. It must be wondered if Pannenberg’s motif of anticipation requires some revision in the light of this study of New Testament eschatology.
Chapter 9  Pannenberg and Anticipation: Assessment

Introduction

The immediate aim of this thesis is to elucidate the function and significance of the motif of anticipation in Pannenberg’s thought. The wider aim is to use the study of anticipation as a perspective from which to view the wide sweep of Pannenberg’s thought, allowing some assessment of it. The previous chapters have shown that anticipation is a key to Pannenberg developing the Grundprinzip of his theology, and this indicates that a study of this theme does allow a comprehensive view of Pannenberg’s project and suggests some areas of assessment. This concluding chapter will summarise the insights gained into Pannenberg’s thought, note the strengths in his thought and his use of anticipation, highlight the questions about his thought which have been raised in the thesis, and suggest how these questions open up new avenues for research in Pannenberg’s thought and in systematic theology in general.

Insights into Pannenberg’s thought

a) Sources

Pannenberg derives the motif of anticipation from several sources: biblical, philosophical, and theological. It is impossible to define one of these as the decisive factor in the development of the motif, for each is mutually related. The motif finds its material ground in the ‘now–not yet’ structure of New Testament eschatology. Pannenberg develops the motif in order to answer philosophical challenges to Christian faith and to assist in solving theological problems. Claims that Pannenberg’s use of anticipation and the associated metaphysical proposal are explained simply as his adoption of Hegelian thought are incorrect.

In Pannenberg’s view the final verification of anticipation will be in the coming of the anticipated eschaton. In the meantime, the truth of the claims which are expressed in the motif must be tested for coherence in his exposition of theology. This approach reflects the general pattern of his theological method. He seeks to relate theological thinking to all aspects of human knowledge to demonstrate that God is indeed the all-determining reality. This means that no aspect of reality is fully understood until it is seen sub ratione Dei. While setting out on such a bold project Pannenberg is very aware of the limits set on any theology. Since God’s revelation is
eschatological, theology can never hope to do more than “see in a mirror dimly”, and anticipate when it “will see face to face” and so “know fully” (1 Cor. 13:12).

b) Understanding anticipation

The chapters considering Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation and metaphysics elucidated the concept of anticipation. For Pannenberg, the anticipation is both epistemological and ontological. Epistemologically, anticipation refers to the preliminary appearance of what will appear fully and truly at the end of the historical process. Ontologically, the concept of anticipation is counterintuitive, since it claims that the essence that comes to light at the end of the historical process has been determinative throughout the process and so was present proleptically. The claim that essence is determined from the future is what Pannenberg means by “the retroactive power of the future”. The metaphysical proposal that includes the concept of anticipation can be called Pannenberg’s temporalised essentialism because he asserts that reality can be understood in terms of all things having an essence (or that is an established identity), but that the relations of each thing constitute the essence through time. Classical essentialism holds that essence is determined from the beginning and is the primary factor in shaping the course of the existence of a thing; for Pannenberg essence is determined at the end of historical development but has a retroactive effect on the whole history.

Chapter 7 showed more fully the ontological ground Pannenberg claims for the concept of anticipation. This ground is found in an account of God’s being as his own future, existing as eternity, which is the future of all reality. God is also understood to be involved with, and present to, the course of history, so much so that the mutual relations of the Father, Son and Spirit are constituted by their economic activity. These two claims, that God is the future of all reality and that God’s own identity is formed in history, provide the basis for Pannenberg’s view that all reality, as it develops and changes in history, will find its final coherence and full identity in unity with God. Further, because of what will come about, reality already has its identity in anticipation. His doctrine that the immanent Trinity is constituted in the economy of salvation is the theological claim that sustains his metaphysical proposal. This again demonstrates the reciprocal relation of theological and metaphysical concerns in his thought.
c) The role of anticipation

This study has shown that the concept of anticipation allows Pannenberg to achieve the aims of his project. Chapter 1 showed that Pannenberg views theology as a science, which takes God as its object of study and so the truth of God as its primary hypothesis and seeks to view all things sub ratione Dei. Giving an account of all reality sub ratione Dei achieves two outcomes for the science of theology: it helps to establish the truth of the claim that God is the true Infinite — that which determines all reality — and it offers an understanding of reality. However, the goal to view all things sub ratione Dei makes history, with its change, relativity, indeterminacy and plurality, an apparent problem. How can such a fragmented reality be something that finds its reality in unity with the Infinite? Classical theism has often answered this question with at least an implicit acceptance of the Platonic distinction between the world of being and the world of becoming, and has held that “temporal categories are foreign to the divine nature”. Chapter 3 showed that Pannenberg’s philosophical milieu highlights the phenomena of change and fragmentation. Pannenberg’s insistence that as a science theology must deal with the best contemporary understandings of reality means that he cannot ‘side-step’ the recognition by philosophy of the historicity of reality. He must give an account of reality that affirms that God is the true Infinite, and that reality develops through history. The notion of anticipation, along with temporalised essentialism, allows Pannenberg to develop such an account. Molnar is wrong to conclude that “the category of anticipation … leads [Pannenberg] to think that pre-Christian, non-Christian and Christian ideas of God speak of the same thing”. Rather anticipation allows Pannenberg to make this claim, since he can portray all ideas of God as anticipatory of God’s self-revelation, or be it that the various ideas anticipate self-revelation with more or less clarity. This claim is not forced on Pannenberg by his metaphysical proposal, instead he seeks to establish it in order to show that the triune God is the true Infinite of which all humans have an unthematised awareness. This is a claim which he must be able to make in order to sustain his

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1 Mostert, *God and the Future*, 21-25, offers six reasons why Pannenberg puts “eschatology into the centre of the theological agenda”: 1) the demand of the Christian faith; 2) its view of salvation; 3) the importance of futurity in modern European thought; 4) the anthropological demand that human existence be viewed as developing; 5) the need for a contemporary statement of Christianity; and 6) the need for realism in what can be achieved in political and social change. All but the sixth can be seen in this review of Pannenberg’s appeal to anticipation, though stated in different ways.

2 Allen, *Philosophy*, 24. Allen is explaining the Platonic tradition, the full quote is: “Because God is eternal, we cannot comprehend the divine in its essence. We may make true statements about God’s relationship to time … and we can make true statements about God’s eternity, but full comprehension is beyond us. Temporal categories are foreign to the divine nature”.

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project.\textsuperscript{3} Peters’ accurate assessment is that the relation between Creator and creation, and thus eternity and time, is the “foundational commitment” for Pannenberg, and that his ontology is built on these commitments.\textsuperscript{4}

In Pannenberg’s thought, the conceptual structure of anticipation and temporalised essentialism allow him to interact with the disciplines of anthropology, history, the history of religions, and the natural sciences. Each of these disciplines highlights the importance of temporality in a description of reality and deals with development, process, and change. To integrate the claims and concerns of these disciplines into his theological account, Pannenberg often makes implicit or explicit use of the idea of anticipation. He also calls on the concept of anticipation in his interaction with philosophy. In this case, the appeal is explicit and prominent. Chapter 3 reviewed Pannenberg’s interaction with the philosophical developments that led to the rise of modernity, the end of metaphysics, and the relational turn. With each thinker he either comments that a proper response to their claims requires a new metaphysical proposal, or he pays particular attention to the aspects of their thought which relate to time and historicity and how those relate to the Infinite and then appropriates from their thought ideas which contribute to his concept of anticipation.

One validation for Pannenberg’s appeal to anticipation is that it proves to be a fruitful theological device. This has been demonstrated at many points through this thesis. Christology is a prime example. Pannenberg’s reliance on history and the divine economy reflects his view that revelation in history is all that is accessible to theology. As noted, this commits him to a christology from below. With other thinkers Christology from below often delivers a view which, by creedal standards, is truncated.\textsuperscript{5} For Pannenberg, the motif of anticipation makes it possible to develop a very full and largely satisfying christology, while starting from below.

\textsuperscript{3} Molnar, \textit{Incarnation and Resurrection}, 332-33. When Molnar asserts, from the position he shares with Barth, that the various ideas of God do not speak of the same thing, he denies, without argument, exactly the point Pannenberg is seeking to establish.\textsuperscript{4} Peters, “Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg”, 128.\textsuperscript{5} Gunton. \textit{Yesterday}, 30, concludes that “a Christology from below which attempts to evade, or postpone consideration of, the explicitly theological talk about Jesus, has not been shown to be successful”. Pannenberg is partially implicated in Gunton’s verdict, though he says that “there are, in Pannenberg’s theology possibilities for what may be called a purified Christology from below”. Pannenberg’s later work has, to some extent, realised the promise which Gunton perceived.
**d) The doctrine of revelation**

Pannenberg stands in a theological tradition in which the claims about the nature and locus of divine revelation had been strongly contested. In part, this is a result of the Enlightenment critique of appeals to authoritative revelation, which render the Scripture principle invalid. Pannenberg’s response to this tradition makes use of anticipation. He draws attention to the fact that divine self-revelation is eschatological, so that present revelation, and reflection on it, can only claim to be proleptic of the eschaton. The proleptic nature of present revelation accounts for the diversity of forms of revelation found in Scripture and explains why that revelation has not settled the question of the truth of God. Until the eschatological revelation such questions can never be settled. The positive element of Pannenberg’s claim is that while revelation is debatable, it is available in anticipatory forms.

Pannenberg makes his claims about the form of revelation on the basis that revelation in Christ has exactly this anticipatory structure. He argues that apocalyptic theology already held that there were proleptic visions of the future, but that in Jesus there is a historical human life in which there is revelation of the eschaton, that is, of the kingdom of God. This claim, in turn, depends on the resurrection of Jesus, without which there is no confirmation of Jesus’ claims about the kingdom. The resurrection itself is an anticipation of the eschaton, and so the whole set of claims that are made on the basis of the resurrection await the eschaton for confirmation.

**e) Christology**

Chapter 5 showed the important role of anticipation in Pannenberg’s christology. It allows him to think of the historical Jesus as the divine Son. Methodologically, Pannenberg’s christology is ‘from below’. For Pannenberg, ontology and epistemology are always mutually related, so ‘from below’ does not simply express an order of knowing but an order of being: history creates identity. Pannenberg’s anticipatory ontology allows him to affirm that the human life of Jesus (including his resurrection) constitutes him as the divine Son of God. Applying his temporalised essentialism, Pannenberg can affirm Jesus’ identity as the eternal Son, and avoid adoptionism. This approach means that his christology has a strong affirmation of the humanity of the historical Jesus and has no need to explain away New Testament features such as Jesus’ ignorance or the obscurity of his identity. He is able to integrate those features directly into his christology and affirm that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God.
Chapter 5 raised questions about Pannenberg’s christology that will be dealt with below. Irrespective of these questions, Pannenberg’s achievement in christology stands as a clear challenge to other thinkers. If they are unwilling to adopt his metaphysic, they should seek to offer an alternative account that affirms Jesus’ historical humanity and his divine identity just as fully as Pannenberg does. For those who seek to remain closer to Chalcedon in their christological formulations, Pannenberg serves as a provocative example, challenging the tendency of classical christology to give a less than full account of the humanity of Christ. Future developments in christology should interact with this aspect of Pannenberg’s account.

f) The doctrine of reconciliation

Pannenberg’s account of theology places a strong emphasis on reconciliation. He claims that the whole of history is “God’s coming forth from the immanence of divine love” and the “incorporation of creatures … into the unity of the trinitarian life”. He shows how this claim can be made on the basis of the work of God in the life and death of Jesus and the work of the Spirit, which flows from Jesus’ ministry. Pannenberg argues that Jesus’ death is expiatory because he “bore death as the consequence of our sin, thereby effecting representation in the concrete form of a change of place between the innocent and the guilty”. He argues that the salvific nature of Jesus’ death depends on the resurrection, the present work of the Spirit and the consummation of that work in the eschaton. That is, in anticipation, it is an act of expiation as part of the work of the triune God to reconcile the world to himself.

One of the impressive aspects of Pannenberg’s doctrine of reconciliation is that it relates the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, in their historical particularity, to the process of all creation coming into unity with God. The emphasis on particularity in an account of redemption with such a wide horizon is unusual. Similarly, Pannenberg’s emphasis on the resurrection and the work of the Spirit as part of the economy of salvation is an important corrective to more traditional accounts which often focus exclusively on the death of Jesus.

6 *ST* 3, 646.
7 *ST* 2, 427.
The doctrine of God is the focal point of all Pannenberg’s thought. In his doctrine of God, anticipation allows him to relate historical diversity to the unity of God, so that the unity and distinction in the immanent triune God are constituted by the mutual distinctions of the economic Trinity. On this basis Pannenberg advances a doctrine of the Trinity in which the persons are centres of action of the one movement that embraces and permeates them and all reality. Along with his account of the unity and distinct identities of the persons of the Trinity, Pannenberg treats the apparent diversity of God’s attributes as the anticipatory expression of God’s loving holiness, his all-embracing eternal infinity. In each of these aspects of the doctrine of God, temporalised essentialism and anticipation allow Pannenberg to offer formulations that overcome longstanding problems in the doctrine of God, without losing important affirmations of divine transcendence, unity, and simplicity.

Two features of Pannenberg’s doctrine of God deserve particular note. One is that he has advanced discussion of Rahner’s Rule. Following Rahner’s rule, he presents a view of the Trinity in which the economic and immanent are viewed as one. He also succeeds in keeping sufficient distinction between the two that the immanent Trinity is not collapsed into the economic. The discussion is advanced by his articulation of these relationships in a careful and coherent way through his appeal to eschatology and anticipation. The close relationship of Pannenberg’s doctrine of God to his metaphysical proposal is also a strength, especially since he retains a distinctively Christian witness to God as triune.

The relation of doctrines

One of the satisfying features of Pannenberg’s thought is the way in which he gives a full and careful exposition of each area of theology that he examines, allowing the distinctive questions from that area to emerge, and yet also showing the careful inter-relation between themes and doctrines. This thesis has dealt with four major areas of concern for Pannenberg, and the careful inter-relating of themes can be illustrated from those areas. The doctrine of God has a certain primacy in Pannenberg’s thought. That is shown in the way the demonstration of the holy, triune God as the true Infinite runs through Pannenberg’s whole work. He is true to the goal of keeping God as the object of theology. Yet the ground of Pannenberg’s doctrine of God is thoroughly christological. His understanding of the nature of God and his exposition of God’s attributes all
flow from his account of the presence of the Son in the human, historical life of Jesus. Reciprocally, Jesus can only be understood in the context of an exposition of a trinitarian doctrine of God in which the economic relations are constitutive of immanent relations.

Pannenberg’s accounts of revelation and reconciliation are thoroughly christological and theological, and are coherent because the economy in which God reveals and reconciles constitutes the divine identity. That is, revelation is God’s self-revelation because reconciliation brings all reality into unity with God. It can not be claimed that Pannenberg’s thought revelation serves reconciliation, nor vice versa. The two are in a carefully articulated, reciprocal relationship, in which God is revealed as he shows himself to be the one in whom all reality finds its unity; and reality is united in the eschatological revelation of God’s being.

**The achievements of Pannenberg’s project**

Pannenberg’s project makes a major contribution to contemporary theology. The summary above notes his achievement in the presentation of specific doctrines. This section will consider more general ways in which he contributes to the project of Christian theology.

**a) The possibility of systematic theology**

The discipline of systematic theology has been under intense question for several generations. The doubts about its validity flow from the factors Pannenberg identifies: the existence of the God about whom theology claims to speak is questioned; the possibility of making coherent claims about such a God and then testing those claims is rejected; it seems highly unlikely that it will prove possible to present any consistent understanding of reality on the basis of the various elements of biblical texts and Christian tradition; and the continual “internal contestation” which characterises theological discussion makes final conclusions unlikely. Pannenberg’s project deals directly with each of these challenges. He accepts that theology must argue for the truth of God, and does so. His recognition of the fragmentation of reality allows him to recognise the difficulty of making coherent claims, given the diversity found in biblical texts, theological tradition and on-going discussions and disputes. His appeal to anticipation allows him to make a

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case for a coherent, though provisional, account of God as the true Infinite. He argues the case for this account in great detail and depth. Webster observes that there have been very few recent “authoritative attempts at comprehensive accounts of the field” of systematic theology which are more than textbooks. Webster identifies the work of Robert Jenson and Pannenberg as the two which have “commanded most attention”. Pannenberg’s project is, as he himself affirms, open to questioning; whatever truth of God is present in it is not present definitively. Yet, his project demonstrates the possibility of the discipline of systematic theology. He shows that it is viable for Christian thought to engage with areas of human experience and show how they may be viewed sub ratione Dei.

b) The need for metaphysics

Pannenberg is convinced that without metaphysics, without an account of reality that includes the claim that there is a true Infinite that transcends and includes all other reality, Christian theology will fail. He does not interact with the claims of postmetaphysical theology, but his position can be set in contrast to such views. Postmetaphysical theology accepts the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology and articulates a theology that acknowledges “the sense in which our ignorance of God … could well signal God’s most overwhelming presence”. Chapters 3 and 7 showed that, though Pannenberg acknowledges similar challenges for theology, his response is a strong contrast. For him, if the idea of God is empty, this must be met with an attempt to understand it in the light of anticipatory knowledge of God’s eschatological revelation. God’s absence cannot, by itself, be construed as the mode of God’s presence. It is only as God’s relation to creation is established in the eschaton that the true meaning of his apparent absence can be understood. Similarly, Pannenberg has no place for a view of the self-revelation of God in which his love is expressed merely through his absence or distance. Pannenberg emphasises that the self-distinction of God from creation is necessary for reconciliation and revelation, however his version of self-distinction is not a denial of God’s presence but is always oriented to the eschatological unity-in-distinction in which God’s love is fully known. Pannenberg makes his case convincingly and shows that for theology to eschew metaphysics is not to create a room for God, but to close off the possibility of knowing God.

10 See ST 3, xvi.
11 Carlson, “Postmetaphysical Theology”, 62.
At the same time, Pannenberg demonstrates ways in which theology is impeded by some of the metaphysical assumptions it has inherited. In all four areas of doctrine we have considered, Pannenberg shows that a classical essentialism has stopped theology from a full appreciation of the historical nature of reality. He therefore offers his metaphysical proposal, which makes far more of historicity, and he reconfigures classic doctrines in a reciprocal relation to this proposal. Pannenberg’s project not only confirms the validity of systematic theology; it shows that the Christian faith implies a metaphysic and that a systematic account of the Christian faith requires the outlining of an understanding of reality at the level of metaphysics. Pannenberg’s project also indicates a way in which such an understanding may be developed.

c) Eschatology and theology

Pannenberg demonstrates the need to integrate eschatology into all theology and the value of doing so. Biblical studies rediscovered eschatology in the twentieth century, and this rediscovery eventually began to have an impact on systematic theology.\textsuperscript{12} Schwarz observes that “Wolfhart Pannenberg was one of the first systematic theologians in the twentieth century to show that the eschatology of Jesus had significance beyond our existential now”.\textsuperscript{13} Along with Pannenberg, and following him, others have also seen the importance of eschatology as a perspective on all theology and not merely as a final locus of a handbook of theology. Fergusson writes,

one of the hallmarks of twentieth century theology has been its insistence that eschatology is a central Christian doctrine and conditions every other article of faith … This eschatological turn determines the treatment of scripture, God, creation, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Christian life.\textsuperscript{14}

Pannenberg has not had the last word in presenting theology in an eschatological mode. He is one of the sources of the eschatological turn and remains a crucial resource in the ongoing discussion. He demonstrates the need to stress that present reality is not a complete reality and to understand it in the light of its consummation and he shows that doctrinal positions can be rethought in fruitful ways from the perspective of eschatology.


\textsuperscript{13} Hans Schwarz, \textit{Eschatology} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 145-46.

d) Responses to postmodernism

Pannenberg’s project shows that a careful consideration of eschatology may allow Christian theology to respond to, and even incorporate, postmodern concerns and themes without abandoning truth claims. Pannenberg’s appeal to anticipation enables him to offer a theological understanding of a reality in a situation in which truth is far from clear. He does not depend on a Cartesian conception of truth claims as clear and indubitable. He takes up the historicism of Dilthey and Heidegger, without having his thought collapse into historical relativism. Chapter 3 noted the contrast between Pannenberg’s response to postmodernism and that of Radical Orthodoxy. Given that both Pannenberg and Radical Orthodoxy deal with Heidegger and the demise of onto-theology (or metaphysics) there is potential for a dialogue between Radical Orthodoxy and the thought of Pannenberg. The extent to which Radical Orthodoxy and Pannenberg diverge in their responses to the thought of Heidegger is a question which could be addressed in future research.\(^{15}\)

There is a criticism of systematic theology that comes from postmodernism, to which Pannenberg has not responded: that systematic theology is a totalising discourse that by its nature falsifies reality and imposes the view of one perspective on all.\(^{16}\) Pannenberg acknowledges that his work “is rooted primarily in the European history of Christian thought” and in a confessional heritage but states that it deals with “simply the truth of Christian doctrine and the Christian confession” and expresses the hope that it will “promote the unity of all Christians in faith in the one Lord”.\(^{17}\) This response is not a defence against the postmodern criticism; it articulates the view which is the target of the criticism that one perspective can produce a unity. However, Pannenberg’s thought is not without the resources to offer a constructive response to this critique. His argument that theology requires a metaphysic of the true Infinite is relevant. His position suggests that, whatever the risks involved, Christian theology cannot abandon its metanarrative. Moreover, Pannenberg’s recognition of the multiplicity and fragmentation of present reality means that his

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\(^{15}\) James K. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 63-77, is apparently the only extensive discussion of Pannenberg from the point of view of Radical Orthodoxy.


\(^{17}\) *ST* 1, xiii.
approach to that metanarrative does not have to be totalising. He allows for a variety of interpretations and perspectives all of which must be recognised as provisional. His account of the history of religions suggests that these different views do not exist independently, but will come into conflict and that it is through this that insights are developed. Pannenberg’s post-foundationalist theological method allows theology to venture positions which will be tested and developed, without declaring all other views false. While Pannenberg has not developed a detailed response to postmodernity, a response could be developed from his position.

Critical questions for Pannenberg’s thought

Murphy has accurately characterised Pannenberg’s project as a “research program”. As such Pannenberg’s claims are open to testing, as he himself declares.

Only by this eschatological consummation of the world does God definitively prove himself to be the true God and Creator of his creatures and also give definitive proof of the truth of his revelation in Jesus Christ. Development of this theme in Christian doctrine has in view such a self-demonstration of God, but it does so only by way of conjectures and hypotheses that always show themselves to be in need of correction. … [T]he definitive truth of God is herein grasped and therefore present—in an eternal present—but only in a provisional form, so that we must not take it to be the definitive truth.

This thesis has suggested two areas in which Pannenberg’s use of anticipation requires revision. The first area is that of the dogmatic formulations which flow from his use of anticipation. The other is the way in which his view of anticipation makes use of the New Testament now-not yet tension. Consideration of these two areas leads back to the question of the relation of fundamental and systematic concerns in his theology.

a) Dogmatic formulations

Chapter 5 raised a question about Pannenberg’s account of christology and Chapter 6 asked a similar question about his doctrine of reconciliation. In christology, Pannenberg views the human, historical life of Jesus as constituting the identity of the divine Son. He does not present a classical two-nature account of the incarnation, and does not think in terms of a hypostatic union established from the beginning of Jesus’ life. Such a construction leaves Pannenberg’s account of the divine and messianic identity of the human, historical Jesus as more anticipatory than does

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18 Murphy, “Lakatosian”, 415-17.
19 ST 3, xvi.
the New Testament. Pannenberg draws on the New Quest into the historical Jesus. Much recent research is more inclined to accept the Gospels’ presentations that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and was even aware of his identity as the Son. The discussion of Pannenberg’s christology also concluded that it is not clear that it presents the work of Christ as Saviour as fully God’s work. These concerns are not incidental to the motif of anticipation, but are the result of conceptualising the human life of Jesus as an anticipatory presence of the Son of God.

Chapter 6 developed the study of christology further by relating it to the doctrine of reconciliation. It was argued that Pannenberg appeals to anticipation in order to view the reconciliation of sinners with God, as they submit to God and accept their finitude in death, the condition that actualises Jesus’ death as expiation. In this view, Jesus’ death is a necessary paradigm for the death of the reconciled. This conception falls short of the New Testament presentations that emphasise the completeness of the work of Christ in his death and resurrection and portray it as similar to and different from the death of sinners. Pannenberg’s position also risks too close an identification of human response with God’s work in Christ and views the response as the completion of that work.

These concerns about Pannenberg’s christology and doctrine of reconciliation both relate to his use of anticipation. In both cases he tends to put emphasis on the resurrection, the work of the Spirit, and the eschaton as the events which constitute the Son’s identity and actualise his death as redemptive. In both cases, this moves the emphasis away from that of important New Testament formulations. This thesis has argued, in both cases, that a classic two-nature christology gives a better account of God’s work in Christ on behalf of sinners.

In the case of the doctrine of God the concern is somewhat different. Chapter 7 argued that because Pannenberg ties the economy so closely to the identity of the immanent Trinity, all events in history must be viewed directly as expressions of God’s nature. This creates an ambivalence in his thought when he comes to treat the idea of God’s wrath. If he allows that some creatures ultimately come under God’s wrath, then it is hard to conceive all history as the realisation of the holy love of God. Alternatively, if he insists that history is the realisation of God’s love, then he must downplay the biblical testimony to the wrath and judgement of God. Pannenberg deals with this ambiguity by treating the loss of creatures as “borderline” cases, a
formulation that highlights the ambiguity. Chapter 7 suggested that if Pannenberg conceived of the economy and God’s identity as less tightly bound to each other, then his thought would be able to accommodate such ambiguity. Such a re-conception would require a revision of his metaphysical proposal, since it would no longer hold the same relation of the eternal God with history.

b) The now–not yet tension

At several points the thesis shows that Pannenberg’s doctrine of revelation does not provide a rationale for a theological method that seeks its material in the biblical texts themselves. Pannenberg’s explicit method is to appeal to critical study of the Gospels for an account of the historical Jesus, and to understand the Gospels as the apostolic and early church reflection on revelation in the historical Jesus. His actual method pays more attention to the biblical text than his doctrine of revelation suggests. His use of the now–not yet tension found in the New Testament brings this issue to the fore.

Chapter 8 argued that Pannenberg’s schema of ‘anticipation–actualisation’ does not match the New Testament now–not yet tension, which is an ‘achievement–consummation’ schema. The Gospels regularly express a greater presence of eschatological expectation in the ministry of Jesus than Pannenberg’s description allows. Jesus’ deeds of power, his life and death inaugurate that kingdom, as well as being proleptic of its consummation. John’s Gospel presents an even more strongly realised eschatology. One of the reasons for the difference between Pannenberg and the Gospels on this count is Pannenberg’s use of scholarship that favoured a consistent eschatology and understood Jesus as proclaiming a wholly future kingdom. The consensus of more recent scholarship is that the historical Jesus and the Synoptists present an inaugurated eschatology. Similarly, Paul understands the realisation of eschatological hopes as already existing in the heavenly places, in which believers participate by the Spirit. For Paul, the heavenlies exist in a time-frame parallel with, or even identical with, the present experience of believers. Pannenberg views eternity as lying in the future of present reality. The consideration of the role of anticipation in Pannenberg’s theological proposals and of his use of the New Testament now–not yet tension, lead to a similar conclusion: the ontological ‘weight’ that temporalised essentialism places on the future is the source of problematic elements in Pannenberg’s theology. A useful area of further research would be a full comparison of
Pannenberg’s account of eternity with the Pauline view of heaven. Such a study could examine further the claims of this thesis that Pannenberg’s thought is more futuristic than that of the New Testament.

c) Theology and philosophy: once more

The discussion of Pannenberg can now return to a reassessment of Shults’ view that in Pannenberg’s thought there is an asymmetric mutuality between philosophy and theology in which theology has priority. The study of Pannenberg’s metaphysical proposal showed that it is grounded in revelation in Christ and is developed in close interaction with theological concerns. Chapter 4 showed that his exposition of temporalised essentialism provides evidence to support Shults’ claim that in Pannenberg’s thought “the ‘from above’ (systematic) move has material primacy and ... asymmetric control over the ‘from below’ (fundamental) move”. The chapter noted that the full test of Shults’ claim comes in an examination of Pannenberg’s exposition of explicitly theological themes. The result of that test, in the following chapters of the thesis, was that the primary role of systematic concerns is not always apparent. The reason that Pannenberg conceives of the future as the locus of the realisation of full identity is because this enables him to incorporate the historicism of Dilthey and Heidegger and still offer a unified account of reality. However, it is this “ontological weight” of the future which introduces a distorting factor into some of his theological formulations.

Olthuis judges that “for Pannenberg it is finally the internal dynamics of his system that speaks the decisive voice and dictates his use of Scripture”. Schwöbel suggests the same thing when he argues that Pannenberg’s description of God as the true Infinite is not drawn from biblical material but is “required” by the claim of a “non-thematic awareness of the Infinite” which is at the heart of his religious epistemology. This epistemology is developed to allow Pannenberg to assert the “universality of Christian truth-claim”. Schwöbel traces problems in Pannenberg’s thought back through his epistemology to its roots in his concerns with fundamental theology. He concludes that Pannenberg’s treatment of God as the true Infinite illustrates that “if the theologian employs non-theological considerations as foundational principles for theology the

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21 Olthuis, “God as true Infinite”, 322-23. Olthuis comes to this conclusion after an analysis of Pannenberg’s treatment of God as the ‘true infinite’. On this point, Olthuis’ conclusions, though expressed in brief, appear to be the same as those of this thesis, though he arrives at them along slightly different lines.
categories developed from the perspective of reason … have a determinative effect for the conceptions of faith from the perspective of faith.”

The conclusion of this thesis is that these concerns about Pannenberg’s thought are partially justified. When Pannenberg’s thought is analysed on the basis of his use of anticipation, it is found that there are points in his project in which his concern to answer the philosophical challenge of the end of metaphysics through an appeal to anticipation gains a certain amount of control over his systematic exposition. Such an observation does not deny the many achievements of his project. Like all theological reflection, Pannenberg’s project is anticipatory, and speaks of God and all things in relation to him, doxologically. Christian theology benefits from Pannenberg’s work, and the problematic elements in his thought are invitations to others to develop his ideas in new ways or to show how his concerns can be answered with alternative approaches. As Pannenberg’s thought produces such responses it underscores the importance of his own contribution to the project of “constructive thought” which seeks to “exemplify how the God of the Bible can be understood as creator and Lord of all reality”.

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22 Schwöbel, “Wolfhart Pannenberg”, 144.
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