

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Philosophical Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg

by

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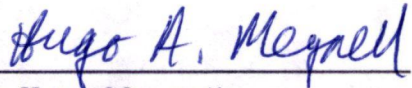
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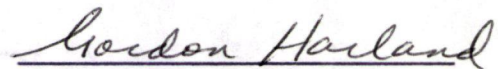
The undersigned certify that we have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Philosophical Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg" submitted by Michael Wayne Bollenbaugh in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the philosophical theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Special attention is paid to three themes which highlight this part of his work. My contention is that if Pannenberg is able to substantiate the validity of his claims in these themes, he compels modern society to rethink its judgement of religious claims. This is especially relevant for ways in which Pannenberg thinks modern Protestantism and skepticism have viewed the truth of religious claims.

In chapter one I explore the way Pannenberg develops the notion that theology is to be cast as both science and philosophy. This chapter is the basis of Pannenberg's "theology of reason." Here he asserts that theology must not immunise its claims from the scrutiny of rational truth. Pannenberg formulates theology in a scientific and philosophic manner in response to the dialectical theology of modern Protestantism. It takes the form of a strong polemic against Schleiermacher, Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich, particularly.

The second chapter is grounded on the foundation of the first. The theme of "Revelation as History" highlights Pannenberg's view that history as an academic discipline can make scientific-like assertions. History is the place where the unity of truth is to be discovered. In spite of a general skepticism about what history can accomplish, Pannenberg thinks it is capable of making assertions based on available evidence. The conclusions to be drawn from the evidence are parallel to scientific assertions because

they rest upon probability and not absolute surety. Related to this problem is the claim that texts must be examined in their historical context to discover their true meaning, and not be interpreted solely by the context of the modern interpreter.

The theme of God as the all-determining reality is the focus of chapter three. Following from the notion of truth's essential unity is the claim that there is a single reality which is investigated to discover truth. Within this context Pannenberg's natural theology is to be discovered. His argument is unlike the classical arguments for God's existence in that it does not proceed from the world to God but rests upon human experience of reality.

The final chapter reflects upon some thinkers who have been critical of Pannenberg's theological claims. Here his theological peers analyse his claims and subject them to critical analysis. In the light of these criticisms Pannenberg has an opportunity to respond and substantiate his system as a genuine theological alternative for the post-Enlightenment world of secularization and technology.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
1. THEOLOGY IN A SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK ..	4
Theology and University Reform	4
Theology as Science	8
The Reality of God as Indirectly Given	22
Theology as Philosophy	24
2. REVELATION AS HISTORY	34
The Unity of the Sciences	37
Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation	48
3. GOD AS THE ALL-DETERMINING REALITY.....	72
Modern Protestantism's Capitulation to Skepticism	72
Pannenberg's Philosophy of Religion	82
The Nature of Human Experience	90

4. PANNENBERG AND HIS PEERS	99
Theology as the Science of God	122
BIBLIOGRAPHY	129
APPENDIX	133

INTRODUCTION

The central task of philosophical theology is to express religious thought in the accepted terms of philosophical inquiry. In this sense philosophical theology is connected to the philosophy of religion. Both are concerned with "clarifying religious beliefs and subjecting them to critical scrutiny."¹ Similarly, philosophical theology seeks a coherent rendering of theological claims not just for the individual who has embraced the religious life but more particularly for the one who has not. It denies that religion "has its own internal standards of rationality" which protects its claims from criticism.² Philosophical theology, like the philosophy of religion attempts to minimize the confusion which often arises in the language of believers.

The fortunes of philosophical theology and the natural theology which some consider to be a part of it, have varied in the twenty-five centuries of the Western philosophical tradition. Yet philosophical and natural theology seem to be permanent fixtures within this tradition. Although some would have it otherwise, there seems to be no danger that truly theological questions will be banished from the philosophical arena.

But certainly there were times in the historical frame when the development of philosophical theology was a simpler task than at present. For example, Aquinas would have found it easier to develop his classical arguments for the existence of God in the milieu of Catholic Europe than a theologian of our post-Enlightenment world of secularization and technology. Philosophical theology would appear to be a more coherent and accredited

¹ Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, eds., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. v.

² Ibid., p. vii.

enterprise in an environment where a particular religious tradition has a consensus in a culture. But this is clearly not the case in contemporary times and applies additional pressure to those who attempt to develop theological tenets in a philosophical frame. The contemporary theologian must be capable of managing the critique of secularization while considering the pluralistic nature of the modern world.

One who has not shunned the difficulty of this task given the present milieu is Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-). He believes it is of the utmost importance to give theological thinking a clear, coherent, and philosophical base. Indeed, his work seems to be one obvious place to begin for anyone who wishes to enter into discussion of philosophical theology in a modern setting. The written material he has produced is replete with themes which focus on the relationship between theology and philosophy. By giving his attention to these concerns, Pannenberg has not created a novelty in the circles of Western philosophy but has reasserted a theme which has existed for two and one-half millenia, but which has fallen into some disrepute as of late.

To a large extent the importance of Pannenberg's thought is found in the polemic he has developed against those whose theological systems have come to be considered normative for contemporary Protestant theology. This is especially evident when we observe Pannenberg engaging such important thinkers as Schleiermacher, Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. Pannenberg tends to group these prominent thinkers together as being representative of the mainstream of modern Protestantism. He is well aware of the vast differences in their systems and that Protestant theology is a

larger enterprise than just these four individuals. But Pannenberg believes there is a common thread which links them together and it is towards them that he directs much of his argumentation.

In the following discussion of Pannenberg's thought I will focus on three fundamental themes which reveal his strong philosophical and methodological approaches. These are: 1) The scientific and philosophical nature of theology; 2) revelation as history; 3) God as the all-determining reality. In all of this it will be of the greatest importance to critique his efforts and to discern to what extent he has been successful in the claims he has made. My contention is that if Pannenberg has shown the philosophical and scientific validity of theological questions (the basis of the subsequent themes discussed here), a major re-evaluation of religious thinking may have to be undertaken by believers and unbelievers alike. The alternatives which Pannenberg presents for contemporary theology are the focus of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

THEOLOGY IN A SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK

It was stated above that philosophical theology and its close relative, natural theology, are centrally concerned with giving descriptive accounts of theology in a linguistic style which makes their claims clear to all who encounter them. There is no utopian assumption that this approach will cause the tenets of theology to be universally embraced but only that philosophical theology will be recognized as a legitimate philosophical pursuit and that there is no pre-emptive judgement against the possible objective truth of its claims just because they are theological in nature. This is Pannenberg's greatest aspiration in his efforts to cast theology in a scientific and philosophical framework.

Theology and University Reform

Practical necessity is the initial reason given for making this rather bold step. Pannenberg observes that nearly all academic disciplines revolve around a scientific and philosophical language which permits general access to the central content of each discipline. If theology is unable to adopt this model for its own task it will be cloistered away from the public arena. Theological claims then take on an exclusivist flavour making contact with other academic disciplines all but impossible.

This represents a serious threat to the ongoing viability of theology as an academic discipline within the realm of the university curriculum,

according to Pannenberg. Under existing conditions theological faculties have a place in educational institutions only because of existing practice.³ Presently, theology might be viewed as a medieval leftover or even an aberration of the educational philosophy governing almost all universities.

If the university is a place of free inquiry and interchange of ideas then certainly a method of communication which makes the concerns and claims of all academic disciplines available to the general inquirer is in order. When theology does not align itself with this basic educational philosophy its continued existence is at best precarious, according to Pannenberg.

To this point much of what Pannenberg has said on theology as an academic discipline may appear as a pseudo-problem for many North American universities. This is because many of them are purely secular in nature and thus lack theological faculties. But a part of the European university structure (of which Pannenberg is a product) is a tradition which dates back to the founding of universities there. Originally they were organized around a faculty of theology which had pre-eminence over all other disciplines. The very existence of the university relied upon the resources and the influence of the Church in this period. In the process of secularization and the emergence of the religiously neutral states the university's ties to the Church were loosened if not broken outright. Yet faculties of theology continued to be a part of the university curriculum because of their original organizational structure.

In the view of Pannenberg these traditions will not be strong enough to sustain the ongoing legitimacy of theology as a genuine academic pursuit.

³Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 4.

Theology must find the resources to formulate its claims in scientific and philosophical language on a par with the remaining academic disciplines if it is to have a real franchise in the university environment. This is exactly what Pannenberg hopes to do for theology in his work i.e. to propose a scientific and philosophical underpinning for theology. Pannenberg views his work in this area as an effort in educational reform for the universities of Europe.

However, merely registering one's concern for the possible demise of a cherished institution is not by itself an adequate argument for its continued existence. If Pannenberg had nothing more to say than revealing his anxiety about the extinction of theology from the university scene his line of reasoning would prove to be nothing more than mere emotionalism. Alone, this concern does not show that theology is worthy of its status within the university curriculum. If theology is unable to align itself with the basic educational methodology of the university there are genuine reasons to worry about its continued existence there. But as a matter of fact, Pannenberg is quite careful to give a detailed account of theology's appearance if its basic content were to be formulated in a scientific and philosophical fashion.

My own judgement of the argument presented by Pannenberg is that it seems to have a double set of consequences. On the one hand, if theology cannot be structured in a scientific fashion similar to other disciplines then the reasons for its continued existence in the university system are questionable. This side of the issue is particularly applicable to universities where theology has traditionally been a part of its curriculum. On the other

hand, if Pannenberg is able to demonstrate that theology can be formulated in a scientific fashion and is able "to establish an external relation to other disciplines on the basis of their scientific character"⁴ then theology should continue as a legitimate academic discipline in the university structure. Further, universities which have not included theology as a part of their educational curriculum would be obliged to develop theological faculties. Arguments against this line of reasoning which rest upon the secular nature of the university as reasons to exclude theology are inadequate since in Pannenberg's model for theology the basic scientific requirements for the discipline are met. It may be that the development of Religious Studies faculties in some universities is a partial response to this problem.

In Pannenberg's view theology must consider "its own internal organisation"⁵ as well as its external link with other academic disciplines. As Pannenberg says:

The plurality of subsidiary disciplines within theology makes it necessary to ask what is the specifically theological feature which links these disciplines. Conversely a conception of theology in general ought to be able to show what extent its internal organisation into the disciplines of exegesis, church history, dogmatics, and practical theology can be defended as necessary or at least rational, or to what extent the existing divisions of theology should be critically re-examined in the light of the concept of theology, particularly as regards their mutual relations to their understanding of method.⁶

Only when theology is viewed as a science are we able to get a clear picture of the disciplines which lie within the realm of theology. Pannenberg

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

believes his view has implications which stretch beyond the realm of the merely theoretical into being imminently practical. It helps in making decisions about the composition of a theological faculty and the skills which are necessary for one to claim competence in theology.⁷ In a related matter, Pannenberg wonders why disciplines like biblical exegesis, church history, etc. are to be considered theological in the first place, since other disciplines might conceivably handle them. Are each of these disciplines considered to be part of theology because the church must meet its requirements for trained personnel or does there exist a "unifying factor" derived from the nature of theology itself?⁸ These are the central concerns which Pannenberg believes theology must pursue to grasp its true identity. Accordingly, "It has become apparent that the question of how far theology is a science is presupposed in the question of the relation of theology to the university and the set of sciences taught there."⁹

Theology as Science

In terms of the order Pannenberg handles the twin issues of "theology as science" and "theology as philosophy" it is the former which is dealt with first. Therefore, they will be handled in that order here as well.

Pannenberg knows that this is a problem of immense proportions since the attack upon theology as science is double pronged. Not only has it been questioned by theology itself but it has also been questioned by the forces of the general philosophy of science. As will become clear the discussion which surrounds this two-fronted attack grows in importance as the nature of

⁷Ibid., p. 6.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Pannenberg's thought is examined. So much of what he says is polemical and in reaction to these developments that they must be considered in this discussion of Pannenberg.

If what Pannenberg calls a general philosophy of science has been critical of theological claims, what features must theology take on if it is to meet the demands of science? To answer this question Pannenberg turns to the philosophy of science developed by Sir Karl Popper. Not only has Popper's work been particularly effective against the empiricist demands of logical positivism but he has also hammered out a system open to the speculative concerns akin to theology.

Perhaps with a brief review of Popper's philosophy of science it will become clear what Pannenberg has in mind in the application of the scientific methodology to theology.

For the sake of preliminary, Popper's view of standard scientific procedure is as follows:



with P1 being the initial problem requiring investigation, TS the trial solution, EE error ejection (that which does not coincide with the accepted statements of science) and P2 the solution which in turn is prolific with new problems.

The title of Popper's most famous book, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, is implicit irony and may be tongue in cheek. Popper says, "My view may be expressed by saying that every discovery contains an 'irrational element', of 'creative intuition,' in Bergson's sense." Quoting Einstein, he says, "There is no logical path leading to theselaws. They can only be reached by

intuition, based on something like the intellectual love of the objects of experience."¹⁰

According to Popper, scientific knowledge grows by forming anticipations, both justified and unjustified, by guesses, by tentative solutions to our problems. These he calls conjectures, which are always controlled by attempted refutations. He says, "The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability."¹¹

To Popper, theories are nets in which we "catch the world" and ordinary language is full of theories. Throughout his work Popper emphasizes criticism to determine the theories best suited to survive. He seeks those theories that can be immediately falsified and those which have survival capability.

Popper identifies the problem in the progress of knowledge as a lack of an adequate criterion of demarcation between science and non-science. He stood in opposition to the Vienna Circle which saw verification as the criterion. For them, however, the demarcation was between meaningful and meaningless statements.

According to Popper verification and induction go hand in hand. His criticism of induction is parallel to Hume's, which points out that one cannot make an infinite judgement over a finite range of experience since experience tells us about no universals. For instance, one could verify *ad nauseum* Newtonian physics, but such verification would not establish any universal claim for a particular theory.

¹⁰Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., Inc., 1968) p. 32.

¹¹Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., Inc., 1968), p. 37.

Popper thinks the problem of induction is fundamental for the philosophy of science.¹² He believes that any "attempt to justify the practice of induction by an appeal to experience must lead to an infinite regress."¹³ Popper's contention with inductivists does not arise because he sees induction as an invalid means of discovery or theory formation but because of the extreme confidence placed upon induction for hypothesis selection. He sees this as a psychological rather than a philosophical explanation for scientific statements.¹⁴ Pannenberg remarks that Popper's criticisms of induction were not new, but the argument based on it against the verification principle was.¹⁵

Popper has proposed another route for science to avoid stumbling over Hume's problem; that route being falsification. Popper does not see falsification as a replacement for the verification principle. In fact many of the logical positivists' arguments against Popper rest on this misinterpretation.

To give a simple example of the important differences between Popper and the logical positivists, the statement, "God exists," might be used. To the logical positivist this statement is meaningless because there is no known way to verify it. Popper on the other hand would say that this statement does have meaning and may even be true. Since there is no known way to falsify it, it is not a scientific statement, but its non-scientific status does not empty it of meaning. Popper is attempting to show that falsification is more

¹²Ibid., p. 42.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Pannenberg, pp. 37-38.

important scientifically than verification, since the former will have holistic ramifications upon a theory, whereas verification can only verify a particular instance.

When the discussion inevitably turns to the realm of metaphysics Popper refers to it as pseudo-science but never as meaningless.¹⁶ He characterizes positivism's attempt to destroy metaphysics as a kind of anxiety. Popper believes the price to be paid for this is the destruction of natural science along with metaphysics. Popper says he is "inclined to think scientific discovery is impossible without faith in ideas which are of a purely speculative kind, and sometimes quite hazy; a faith which is completely unwarranted from the point of view of science, and which to that extent, is metaphysical."¹⁷ This fits Popper's belief that all scientific propositions are theory soaked and anticipatory in nature.

Popper thinks metaphysics is important because it helps to organize a picture of the world. It assists us in forming cosmologies. From this standpoint it is clear that Popper is against the language analysts who think that all philosophical problems maybe reduced to that of linguistic usage or word meaning. All thinking men, according to Popper, are interested in the problem of cosmology, "the problem of understanding the world, including ourselves, and our knowledge as part of the world."¹⁸ Accordingly, all science is cosmology in Popper's view.

As Pannenberg points out, Popper believes his views have a much wider relevance than just the physical sciences. The social sciences also

¹⁶Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, pp. 253-292.

¹⁷Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, p. 436.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 15. Cf. Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., Inc., 1964), p. 130ff.

develop theories which, like all scientific hypotheses, are open to testing and falsification.¹⁹ Popper attempts to show that his philosophy of science could serve as the very basis of the democratic society. The concept of the "open society" is one in which all views remain open to criticism and are modified on the basis of the best available evidence.²⁰ The open society and genuine science alike refuse to retreat into philosophical dogmatism and continue to make their views available to possible future falsification. Here the features of Popper's philosophy of science which Pannenberg thinks might be useful for an understanding of theology as science are found.

For Pannenberg, theological statements should be formulated like scientific hypotheses, tested by rational means, and open to possible falsification. Thus theological statements are accepted on a provisional basis similar to scientific hypotheses in Popper's model of the philosophy of science. If this model is adopted by theology it could then be considered as an academic discipline among other disciplines, which are studied scientifically.

Pannenberg thinks theology, instead of adapting itself to the scientific nature of all other academia, has collapsed in on itself to escape the criticisms of science generally. At this point Pannenberg begins his strong polemic against the major thinkers who have directed Protestant theology since Schleiermacher. It is important that Pannenberg's attack on Protestant theology be considered in some detail since his own thought emerges from his polemic against modern protestantism.

¹⁹Pannenberg, p. 43.

²⁰Cf. Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2: *Hegel and Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

Specifically, he picks up the criticisms of W.W. Bartley and Hans Albert who see Protestant theology as suffering from a "retreat to commitment."²¹ Bartley, who was a student of Karl Popper, is particularly harsh on Barth and Tillich, but thinks his criticisms are relevant to other Protestant thinkers as well.²² Both, claims Bartley, have an underlying irrationalism which protects their claims from criticism. Barth does this by making faith a commitment to the Word of God revealed in Christ while Tillich makes a similar move with his "Protestant principle."²³ Pannenberg is thoroughly convinced by the arguments of Bartley. He says, "One gains the right to be irrational at the expense of losing one's right to criticise."²⁴ Pannenberg sees this as an applicable criticism to the thread of modern Protestant thought which begins with Schleiermacher and moves historically to the contemporary thinkers of Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich. According to Pannenberg they are the main culprits in the undermining of the scientific credibility of theology.

Hans Albert criticizes theology in a manner similar to Bartley when he points to its irrational commitment but develops his argument in two other important ways. First, he says theology is not a critical enterprise at all but a hermeneutical one. For him all hermeneutic is opposed to criticism since it attempts to interpret texts instead of running the risk of destroying them by criticism.²⁵ He holds up Bultmann's methodology of demythologisation as an example. Albert even suspects "non-theological supporters of hermeneutical

²¹Pannenberg, p. 44.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 45.

²⁵Ibid., p. 47

theory in the human or social sciences as all being crypto-theologians."²⁶ Albert's criticisms of the hermeneutical tradition in general rest upon Popper's principle of critical examination.²⁷ Secondly, theology has attempted to rescue the idea of God by employing a technique of immunisation.²⁸ Albert thinks that the idea of God has been rendered redundant by the advent of natural science but that theology has tried to alter the concept of God to protect it from the criticisms of science.²⁹ This is similar to Popper's conventional stratagem where theories are continually modified so as to permit them to escape refutation by falsification.³⁰

With only minor reservations Pannenberg accepts the arguments put forth by Bartley and Albert. For him they point out a fundamental tactical mistake made by theologians i.e. the systematic withdrawing of theological claims from the arena of free inquiry and questioning. Not only does such a ploy destroy theology's claim to be a genuine academic discipline but leaves theology completely divorced from life. Pannenberg thinks it is important to take seriously the questions raised by Bartley and Albert and to defend the idea of God in a rationally critical fashion.

To gain a deeper understanding of Pannenberg's concern for what he considers to be the mistaken actions of Protestant theologians his arguments against his former teacher, Karl Barth, will be focused on. As Pannenberg recognizes, "Karl Barth with his own particular determination has impressed a whole generation with the idea that theology is about God and his

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 48

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

revelation and not primarily the science of the Christian religion."³¹

Pannenberg knows that one of the most important points of division between Catholic and Protestant thinkers has been the possibility of the natural knowledge of God.³² For Barth natural theology and natural knowledge of God are the chief enemies of his theology of revelation, according to Pannenberg.³³ This should not come as a surprise since Protestant theology has been, since the time of Luther, if not hostile, at least ambivalent to the development of natural theology. There are few Protestant theologians who have developed natural theology on the scale of Anselm or Aquinas. The point is that the die was cast early in Protestantism against the serious formation of natural theology. According to Pannenberg, "Barth's attack upon 'natural theology' formed the climax and conclusion of growing criticism in Protestant theology since Schleiermacher and Ritschl of the traditional philosophical doctrine of God and its use in theology."³⁴ Therefore the only place for the natural knowledge of God is its attachment to a study of the historical religions, an abstract concept which is merely derivative of and secondary to them..³⁵

Pannenberg makes clear what he has in mind when he says there is a need for theology to be cast in a scientific framework. He refers to a lecture by H. Scholz entitled, "How Can an Evangelical Theology be a Science?" Here Scholz lays down three postulates termed 'minimum conditions,' which are

³¹ Ibid., p. 265.

³² Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 99.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

criteria for any claims to have scientific status.

1)The Postulate of Propositions. This postulate holds that contradictions must be ruled out, or any and all statements are allowable and the distinction between truth and untruth will disappear.³⁶ There is rough compatibility here to what is found in the most basic axioms of Aristotelian logic, eg. A cannot be equal to non A.

2) The Postulate of Coherence. It is essential for all propositions to be related to a single field of study. Scholz says, "We can speak of a science only if it concentrates on one aspect of reality. All propositions belonging to one and the same science must be capable of formulation as statements about this aspect of reality."³⁷ Pannenberg says that Schleiermacher's view of theology fails here because it does not recognize that theology has a single subject. Instead, Schleiermacher wishes to unite the various theological disciplines for the purposes of practical theology. These practical concerns fragment theology to the degree that it loses sight of its scientific underpinning. This is why he says that theology must be viewed as the science of God.³⁸ When theology is viewed as the science of God it then has its own internal organisation.

3) The Postulate of Control. This postulate maintains that all propositions are subject to testing and open examination. To Pannenberg, Popper's philosophy of science (critical rationalism) is the best model of the postulate of control.

³⁶Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 270.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

Pannenberg claims Barth rejected these postulates as having any bearing on theology because they only serve to betray it.³⁹ Quoting Barth, "We cannot give an inch without betraying theology, for every concession here would mean surrendering the theme of theology."⁴⁰ Thus Scholz is justified, says Pannenberg, in his claim that we cannot regard theology as a science but only as a "personal confession of faith exempt from all earthly questioning." Though Barth disagrees with Scholz's assessment, saying that theology is indeed a science because it is a human search for truth, Pannenberg wants to know how this is possible:

What does a self consistent path to knowledge mean if the universal validity of the principle of non-contradiction is rejected? And what does the capacity to be accountable to everyone mean when the control postulate is flatly declared unacceptable?⁴¹

A characteristic of Barth's theology is that revelation cannot be rationally justified. While he claims theology is the science of God and his revelation, Barth takes God and his word as the only possible position God can hold in relationship to the human inquirer, for God is never in any sense object but is always subject. This is why Pannenberg has termed Barth's theology a "positivism of revelation." Just as the logical positivists reduced all meaningful statements to those which could be verified, Barth has reduced meaningful theological statements to those which begin with God's revelation. All significant talk of God must start with his word and faith, according to Barth. But Pannenberg complains that this avoids the issue of

³⁹Ibid., p. 271.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 272.

human experience and thinking,⁴² the foundation of any true science.

Pannenberg thinks Barth's central theological claims have not only endangered the scientific status of theology but have undermined the "priority of God and his revelation over human beings," the very thing Barth thinks he is rescuing.⁴³ Here Pannenberg reserves his harshest words for Barthian thinking. He says:

Barth's description of the obedience of faith shows,....., that a positive theory of revelation is not only no an alternative to subjectivism in theology, but is in fact the furthest extreme of subjectivism made into a theological position. Whereas other attempts to give theology a foundation in human terms sought support from common arguments, Barth's apparently 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.⁴⁴

For Pannenberg, Barth's theology and its intimate connection to modern Protestantism represents nothing more than an authoritarian position, closed to critical inquiry and questioning. In this condition theology cannot even come close to making scientific claims.

To this point Pannenberg has only generated a large polemic against Protestant theology and its non-scientific nature. It is noteworthy that he has shown little fear in engaging one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Protestant thinking. But he has not told us in a specific way how theology might become scientific. Though he has said that theological claims must be open to critical inquiry and questioning, Pannenberg has not shown what theological statements would look like if they were truly

⁴²ibid., p. 266.

⁴³ibid., p. 272.

⁴⁴ibid., p. 273.

scientific.

This can only occur when theology is viewed as the science of God and takes him as its object. At first Pannenberg's claim seems to be fraught with the same problem he has railed against in dialectical theology's confrontation with positivism. He says, "Is not God under suspicion of being no more than a concept of faith, a religious idea from a period of human history which we have not left behind?"

To avoid this problem Pannenberg says we must view the idea of God as a question which is open and inconclusive. This means discussion about God forms hypothetical statements about him. Above all we must avoid the temptation to solidify the idea of God into a rigid dogma.⁴⁵ He says, It is in this sense that God can be regarded as the object of theology within the context of the current discussion i.e., first as a problem but equally as the thematic point of reference for all its investigations."⁴⁶

The above statements are reminiscent of the design which Popper had for scientific claims. Each proposition is viewed as a hypothesis which is submitted as a possible explanation of the evidence at hand. Scientific claims are seen as problems open to critical investigation and challenge. This is why, in Pannenberg's view, the idea of God cannot be seen as a dogma. Dogmas by definition are not open to critical inquiry and therefore are not scientific. If theology, in its quest to become scientific, views its claims about the object of its investigation (God) to be dogmatic in nature, its quest will be very short lived.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 299.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Pannenberg views the postulates for science as laid down by H. Scholz a convenient place to begin establishing the scientific status of theology.⁴⁷ Though refinement of these postulates is required, Pannenberg believes that their demands are basically intact for all of science, including scientific theology.

For theological assertions to meet these minimum requirements introduces great difficulties for theologians. Pannenberg attempts to show how theological assertions could meet the demands of Scholz's postulates. He thinks theology will have its greatest difficulty in meeting the first of these, but that the answer is to be found in connection with postulates two and three. He says:

An assertion is clearly verifiable only if the state of affairs asserted can be distinguished from and compared with the assertion. Equally the possibility of being distinguished from statements about it is a necessary condition for a single state of affairs or field of study to be regarded as the object of a number of statements (which must correspondingly be consistent with each other).

Our assumption that the unity of theology's field of study follows from the fact that it is concerned with all reality *sub ratione Dei* now turns out to be itself dependent on the possibility of distinguishing God as the object of theology from religious and theological statements about him. The only way in which this possibility can be established is if the reality of God (if it is to be asserted) is shown to be implicit, as the all-determining reality, in all finite reality, and in particular in the contexts of meaning of all events and states of affairs, which are made explicit in the anticipatory experiences of the totality of reality.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 326

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 330.

The Reality of God as Indirectly Given

Pannenberg claims that the reality of God is *co-given* in other objects of experience in an indirect fashion.⁴⁹ All objects of experience are to be seen as possible traces of the divine. As Pannenberg says, "If God is to be understood as the all-determining reality, everything must be shown to be determined by this reality and to be ultimately unintelligible without it."⁵⁰ What he means is that all experiential objects are viewed not in abstract isolation but in unbroken continuity with the entirety of reality. Therefore, "theology as the science of God would mean the study of the totality of the real from the point of view of the reality which ultimately determines it both as a whole and in its parts."⁵¹ Everything which exists should be shown by theology to be a trace of the divine reality.⁵²

Pannenberg thinks this is one of the ways in which theology is able to meet the demands of the postulate of verification established by Scholz. It does so because scientific assertions are able to meet the rigours of verification not only by factual content but also by logic or implication.⁵³

A point made by Mortimer Adler in his very readable book entitled *How to Think About God* helps to clarify what Pannenberg means by the notion "by implication." He says that scientists deal with objects which lie outside the realm of experience on a regular basis. Objects such as electrons, mesons, black holes, protons, and in psychology the unconscious are not

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 301.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 302.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 303.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 333.

empirical concepts in the ordinary sense but are theoretical constructs⁵⁴ known to us indirectly. They are known to us indirectly by our experience with other objects. Their objective reality is, in Pannenberg's sense, co-given with all other objects. They are a part of a total reality which is the backdrop for all objects of experience, whose existence is postulated as a theoretical construct.

Adler's claim is that God can also be thought of as a theoretical construct, an object of speculation beyond the range of direct empirical experience. As Adler says:

....if modern scientists can legitimately and validly deal with objects that lie wholly outside the range of ordinary common experience because they cannot be directly perceived by us, and are able to do so by means of notions that are theoretical constructs rather than empirical concepts, then theologians cannot be dismissed as being engaged in illegitimate and invalid speculation when they also deal with objects that lie outside the range of ordinary or common experience, and also do so by means of notions that are theoretical rather than empirical concepts.⁵⁵

In a strikingly similar statement Pannenberg says, "... theology statements are hypotheses about the truth and/or untruth of constructions of religious awareness..."⁵⁶ Just as theoretical constructs about objects that are not directly perceptible (mesons, protons, etc.) best explain existing phenomena, theoretical constructs about God deliver the best explanation concerning the meaning of reality as a whole, according to Pannenberg. The reality of God is an implication of the wholeness of reality.

⁵⁴Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Think About God* (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., Inc., 1980), p. 65ff.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁶Pannenberg, *Theology and Philosophy of Science*, p. 333.

The above arguments represent the avenues explored by Pannenberg to establish the scientific nature of theology. He also believes it is equally important to argue for the philosophical aspects of theology.

Theology as Philosophy

By attempting to formulate theology in a scientific and philosophical fashion Pannenberg is not placing theology in two separate categories which are unrelated. Rather he is seeking to give expression to theological assertions in the kind of language which makes theology and its claims directly accessible to all persons. The enterprises of science and philosophy are the vehicles employed by Pannenberg because they describe the ways which human beings typically investigate problems. Therefore, theology should endeavour to fit these frameworks and not seek exclusivity outside them. Pannenberg brings science and philosophy together to create a theology of reason which recognizes the validity of empirical investigation, speculative assertions, and a unified field of truth. Pannenberg wishes to dismantle theological systems which purport to have their own internal rationality, which protects them from criticism and challenge.

Pannenberg directs a vigorous criticism against Protestantism for insulating its claims from the scientific and philosophical arenas. The general opaqueness of Protestant theological claims, which Pannenberg sees as intentionally devised by theologians like Barth, undermines their objective credibility and the possibility of mounting a real investigation into them. It is in reaction to these developments that Pannenberg has formulated his philosophical theology. Now that there is some familiarity

with the scientific aspects of Pannenberg's theology it is necessary to see how it is shaped into a philosophical mode.

In ways which are similar to "theology as science" Pannenberg searches for points of contact between theology and philosophy. He believes he has found them in showing the similarities between philosophical and theological assertions. He argues that theology and philosophy aspire to the common goal of explaining reality as a whole.

As in most of Pannenberg's arguments, his pursuit and criticism of modern Protestantism is relentless. He says that Protestantism has reacted to the Enlightenment's theme of intellectual emancipation by taking on "dualist definitions of the relationship of theology to philosophy."⁵⁷ However this was not the case for Catholic theology since it had assimilated the philosophy of Aristotle in the middle ages. From its beginnings Catholicism has had a clear working relationship with philosophical questions, though for mistaken reasons, according to Pannenberg. He argues that Enlightenment thinkers first attacked Catholicism's reliance upon Aristotle before raising questions about Church doctrine. But in the case of Protestantism the earliest modern criticism challenged the authority of revelation, which was found in the inerrant, inspired canon of the scripture.⁵⁸ This meant that the challenge of the Enlightenment was able to attack the heart of Protestantism more quickly than Catholic theology.

Though Protestantism has not always ignored the relevance of philosophy for theology it has traditionally restricted its use. Liberal theology of the nineteenth century, says Pannenberg, has used philosophical

⁵⁷Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p.117.

⁵⁸Ibid.

concepts to systematically describe the nature of religious experience.⁵⁹ But what has been more characteristic of Protestantism has been its tendency to restrict "the theological relevance of the questions posed by philosophy to the themes of a practical philosophy, to man as ethically constituted,..."⁶⁰ He gives as an early example the thought of Philip Melanchthon, but recognizes that the greatest influence on this theme is to be found in Kant. Of course, Pannenberg, thinks that the relationship between philosophy and theology is much larger than just the realm of ethical concern. He says, "The concentration of religion upon questions of ethics can be regarded as a distinctive characteristic of the Protestant theological tradition as a whole."⁶¹

By criticising the tendency to reduce the contact between theology and philosophy to ethical concerns Pannenberg has not only engaged protestantism and Kant, but the contemporary thinker, R.B. Braithwaite. Braithwaite has adopted the Verificationist Principle as developed by the logical positivists and has attempted to apply it against religious statements. The fundamental problem for religious belief according to Braithwaite, is that it must answer the question of how its claims are to be known.⁶² Without answering this question religious statements have no ascertainable meaning. The upshot is that Braithwaite thinks the Verificationist Principle has completely overthrown the meaningfulness (verifiability) of religious belief in any scientific sense. That is, he does not think religious statements

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 118.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁶²R.B. Braithwaite, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief," in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 73.

fall into one of his three classes of "truth-value testing." These are: 1) Statements about particular matters of empirical fact; 2) Scientific hypotheses and other general empirical statements; 3) The logically necessary statements of logic and mathematics.⁶³

Braithwaite's claims are an extreme form of reductionism and undoubtedly Pannenberg would be at odds with these criticisms of religious belief. From the above exposition of Pannenberg's work it would seem that he thinks he has met tests two and three of Braithwaite's demands.

But does Braithwaite see any category which the statements of religious belief fall into which would yield their meaning? His answer is that they are to be classed with moral statements because religious assertions like moral ones share the basic characteristic of unverifiability. Therefore, when one makes a religious statement he or she is expressing their ethical commitment. Moral statements are useful in guiding conduct, therefore they have an important use, according Braithwaite.⁶⁴

Pannenberg believes it is indefensible to minimize the "positive contacts between theology and philosophical thought to the field of ethical problems."⁶⁵ This is because theological claims reach further than mere ethical themes. "They call for an understanding of reality as a whole."⁶⁶ To account for man's ethical being and purpose requires us to return to first principles and see the relationship to the distinctive features of man's nature in general. This "cannot be made clear without discussing the position of

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 77.

⁶⁵Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 122.

⁶⁶Ibid.

man in the cosmos."⁶⁷

In response to the Enlightenment, Pannenberg believes it is important for theology to rid itself of authoritarianism in all forms. Questions surrounding the nature of God, the inspiration of scripture, and the main features of revelation are not permitted to become dogmas whose status is established in an a priori fashion. They must remain as open questions which can be modified with new discoveries. Pannenberg puts himself at odds with what has been considered a mainstay in Protestant thinking: the notion of the divinely inspired and inerrant scriptures possessing a sure foundation of truth. Pannenberg thinks such dogmas violate the scientific status of theological assertions and remove them from philosophical questioning. According to Pannenberg this is what has caused theology to retreat "into the ethical problems of individual existence" and to abandon "questions concerning the understanding of the world."⁶⁸

Pannenberg thinks the modern world has been marked by a failure to produce an open, critical process between theologians and philosophers.⁶⁹ He blames this failure upon forces in each camp. Theology has often seen philosophy as a vehicle by which disbelief and skepticism are expressed. On the other hand philosophy has had genuine worries about the authoritarian nature of theology, which has often closed its claims to rational discussion. The breaking down of these prejudices so as to generate an environment of critical dialogue will create mutual benefits for both theology and philosophy, says Pannenberg.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 125.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 137.

It has been mentioned that Panenberg thinks the meeting ground for theology and philosophy is to be found in their traditional goals of giving description to the nature of reality as a whole. This is Pannenberg's notion of God as the "all-determining reality" and is the foundation of this part of the discussion. In formulating this idea he says that the reality of God is co-given in all objects in an indirect fashion and without this all-determining reality, reality itself is unintelligible.⁷⁰ The implications for theology as science for this part of Pannenberg's discussion have been noted.

Pannenberg does not mean God is an object independent of others, each being known in isolated abstraction; but that God is known when each object is seen in continuity with others.⁷¹ It is at this point, says Pannenberg, that the connection between philosophy and theology becomes apparent since philosophy "is not concerned with this or that being in its particularity, or with one area of reality which can be separated from each other; it is concerned with the being of beings, or with reality in general."⁷²

For Pannenberg gaining a sense of the "all-determining reality" provides a unifying principle of the world of objects. God as this reality is the unity which unites all things.⁷³ Pannenberg says, "This is clearest in the traditional fundamental philosophy of ontological metaphysics, which received its classical form from Aristotle."⁷⁴ Further, it seems every philosophical system, ancient and modern, implies a theory of reality. This involves a double question: 1) what is the unity of existing things and 2)

⁷⁰Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 303.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 130.

⁷⁴Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 303.

what is it that forces all existing things into a unity as a single reality?⁷⁵

It is when philosophy begins to ask these kinds of questions that it reaches the ultimate question of God. Yet philosophy will self-destruct if it refuses to follow this course and ask these questions "since the claims of its assertions about the nature of experience and reality in general always also imply assumptions about reality as a whole."⁷⁶ Further, it is impossible to conceive of reality as a whole without at the same time conceiving of something which lies outside of it.⁷⁷ Pannenberg thinks this external, all-determining reality we are compelled to conceive of, implies the existence of God.

Pannenberg knows that such argumentation does not provide an ironclad argument for the existence of God. He admits the provisional nature of this discussion and adds:

The reality of God is always present only in subjective anticipations of the totality of reality, in models of the totality of meaning presupposed in all particular experience. These models, however are historic, which means they are subject to confirmation or refutation by subjective experience.⁷⁸

Pannenberg's claim, therefore, is that man cannot adequately account for himself in his subjectivity without the postulate of God.⁷⁹

To summarise, it is critical for theology to participate in the whole range of philosophical discussion, including the individual branches of knowledge,

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 304.

⁷⁷Ibid., 305.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 310.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 308-309.

says Pannenberg.⁸⁰ Instead, theology has often withdrawn from these discussions which has undermined its credibility in determining the genuine nature of reality. This means theology must relate the idea of God to the reality of the world or give up such discussion as ultimately meaningless.⁸¹

Rarely has theology involved itself in the whole range of philosophical topics in the modern world. Pannenberg thinks the reason for this may be because Catholicism limited its philosophical inquiry to a system which it adapted to theological needs, while Protestantism tended to base faith on revelation, and ethical and existential themes.⁸²

Pannenberg does not accept the medieval notion of theology as "true philosophy" since this rejects the ability of non-theological philosophy to formulate truthful assertions.⁸³ If theology and philosophy are to operate in the same reality each must recognize the other's legitimate place in the philosophical arena. Therefore, if any conflict exists between theology and philosophy it "cannot be resolved by according to each other their own particular and separate field of operations."⁸⁴ This means there should not be a "Christian philosophy" which operates as a special form of philosophy competing with other forms.⁸⁵ Pannenberg notes that the conflict between theology and philosophy is an inevitable one but that they come together on the basis of a whole and undivided truth. For example:

⁸⁰Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 121.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 125.

⁸²Ibid., p. 126.

⁸³Ibid., p. 127.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 128.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 128.

But the assertion that the truth about which they (philosophy and theology) disagree is one and the same and forms a common ground in their conflict, and should enable each to recognize the arguments of the other side as of value for its own purpose.⁸⁶

The above arguments developed by Pannenberg are exactly why we should expect to find him opposed to Wittgenstein's notions of the "forms of life" and "language games." To Pannenberg they represent a divided truth and reality, one in which the truthfulness of assertions is determined by the specific language game being employed at the moment. We understand only to the degree with which we are "participating in the form of life in which language is being used in this way," Pannenberg says of Wittgenstein.⁸⁷ But Pannenberg wants to know how this understanding is obtained unless we assume, like Wittgenstein, familiarity with a unitary world-reflecting language along with the various forms of life or language games.⁸⁸

Kai Nielsen has accused Wittgenstein of a peculiar form of fideism in his philosophical developments. He says, "There is no completely extra linguistic or context independent conception of reality in accordance with which we might judge the forms of life."⁸⁹ It seems Wittgenstein has created a compartmentalized picture of reality where each segment has the sole right to judge the truthfulness of its assertions. Pannenberg rejects systems which attempt to operate by their own internal rationality without regard for the unified nature of truth and reality. His arguments about the relationship between theology and philosophy rely upon this foundation. Even though

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 129.

⁸⁷Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 182.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Kai Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism," in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 245.

Nielsen and Pannenberg are at opposite ends of the theological spectrum, they agree that a fragmented view of reality and truth is not a genuine solution in the debate about the truthfulness of assertions. This is why Pannenberg gives such great attention to formulating theological claims in a scientific and philosophical framework.

CHAPTER TWO

REVELATION AS HISTORY

The ways in which Pannenberg characterizes theology as both science and philosophy were elucidated in the opening section of this discussion. His purpose is to guide theology back to the arena of public investigation and inquiry so that its claims have a scientific significance comparable to all academic disciplines. This means that chapter one has served an important foundational role. The explanations given there are absolutely key to everything else Pannenberg has to say. Therefore, this second chapter rests upon the first and has as its central purpose the demonstration of the connections between theology and history as scientific disciplines pointing to revelation.

The main reason "Revelation as History" is related to and flows naturally from the scientific and philosophical character of theology is that Pannenberg attempts to represent history as an investigative procedure that develops assertions which yield the best explanations of historical evidence. This implies a double claim on the part of Pannenberg which he must prove. First, he must show that history belongs with the sciences and, secondly, that "revelatory events" are a part of a history which can be objectively investigated. As historical events are examined for truth value it is apparent that the place of hermeneutics in Pannenberg's thought will come to the forefront.

The phrase "Revelation as History" is the title of a book edited by Pannenberg. He says, in describing the motivation behind this book:

Revelation is no longer described in terms of a supernatural disclosure or of a peculiarly religious experience and religious subjectivity, but in terms of the comprehensive whole of reality, which, however, is not simply given, but is a temporal process of a history that is not yet completed, but open to the future, which is anticipated in the reaching and personal history of Jesus. To speak of revelation in this way does not involve any irreducible claims to authority, but is open to rational discussion and investigation.⁹⁰

Before returning to an expanded development of all that lies behind these statements, it is important to again pickup Pannenberg's polemic against modern Protestantism on this topic.

By challenging the understanding of revelation as a "supernatural disclosure" or a "peculiarly religious experience," Pannenberg resumes his attack against the systems of Barth and Bultmann. He says that a key characterisation of contemporary Protestant theology from most of its wings has been the development of a "pure theology of revelation."⁹¹ Similar to the discussion surrounding the scientific and philosophical nature of theology, Pannenberg thinks that those who compromise what he calls modern Protestantism (e.g. Barth and Bultmann) have purposely ignored the possibility of a natural, non-theological, and non-Christian understanding of God's revelation.⁹² To them, "only what can be founded on the revelation in Christ is valid as a dogmatic statement," according to Pannenberg.⁹³ Their

⁹⁰Wolfhart Pannenberg, ed., *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (London: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. IX.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*

refusal to include *heilsgeschichte* under *geschichte* is a major objection raised by Pannenberg against the theologians of modern Protestantism. For Pannenberg, a theology of revelation must always be based upon a philosophy of religion.⁹⁴

Therefore it comes as no surprise when Pannenberg again makes Barth the object of his deepest criticisms when dealing with the issue of revelation. Pannenberg says that in Barth's scheme of things theology is not viewed as the science of God but as being about God and his revelation.⁹⁵ The only possible starting point for theology is the "word of God" to the exclusion of any natural, scientific, or philosophical knowledge of him. This, says Pannenberg, reveals a "positivism of revelation" in Barth's systematic theology.⁹⁶ Pannenberg says, in a curious manner Barth's view of revelation employs a similar strategy to logical positivism by excluding certain claims from the realm of meaningfulness. For logical positivism it is assertions which do not meet the criteria of the Verification Principle while for Barth it is theological assertions which do not begin with the revelation of God. Like logical positivism, Barth's theology of revelation has a radical nature which slices away any claims which are not suitable for the most basic assumptions of the system.

Pannenberg's charge against Barth, whom he sees as the central figure of modern protestantism, is as follows:

The Enlightenment questioned anything held on authority which was not subject to proof by reason and experience. If we accept this as a

⁹⁴Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 120.

⁹⁵Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 265.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 265-266.

valid stance, a positive theology of revelation which does not depend on rational argument can rely only on a subjective act of will or an irrational venture of faith. For Barth's word of God....demanding the obedience of faith cannot be unambiguous because it remains at least problematical whether it is God and divine revelation and not merely human convictions. If proof through rational enquiry is ruled out in advance, but for some reason or other we still want to hold the Christian tradition, nothing remains but the wholly uninsured venture of faith.⁹⁷

These developments within modern Protestantism have caused the term revelation to lose "its value in theological usage," according to Pannenberg.⁹⁸

Having briefly examined what Pannenberg perceives to be the fundamental errors made by Protestant theologians in regard to their understanding of revelation, Pannenberg's own view of the relationship between history and revelation will be explained. The theme "revelation as history" implies an opposition to revelation which is found in a theology of existence, the "word of God," or in a positivism of revelation, as in Barth. To the contrary, Pannenberg thinks God's revelation is to be found in the facts of history.⁹⁹

The Unity of the Sciences

Pannenberg knows that the use of terms like the "facts of history" is extremely controversial and that cogent argumentation will be required to support this claim. He begins at a very fundamental level by attempting to show a relationship between the so called "natural sciences" (*naturwissenschaften*) and the "human sciences" (*geisteswissenschaften*).

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 273.

⁹⁸Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 3.

⁹⁹Ibid.

Pannenberg gives a relatively substantial critique of the division between the natural and human sciences in *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*. The main purpose of his argument is to demonstrate the artificial and erroneous nature of this division. But for what purpose? The answer lies in his desire to show that the discipline of history, which is usually viewed as a human science, can make assertions on the basis of historical evidence which are comparable to assertions made in the natural sciences. If the inner logic of history can provide a framework for revelation then a true science of revelation is possible, according to Pannenberg.

In the history of philosophy the division between the human sciences and the natural sciences began with the Cartesian assumption of the basic dualism of nature and mind. Because it was believed that the natural and human sciences described their objects in a fundamentally different manner, it followed that their methodologies were also different.¹⁰⁰ Pannenberg doubts the general accuracy of the distinction of mind and nature and claims that the natural and human sciences are increasingly using the other's methodologies and approaches. He says, "...not only are traditional human sciences using methods regarded as belonging to the natural sciences, but conversely there are also natural sciences which pursue 'historical' investigations." ¹⁰¹ The end result is that the plausibility of a mind's independence of nature is diminished.¹⁰²

Pannenberg makes it clear that there are a number of significant individuals who have been opposed to any division between the natural and

¹⁰⁰Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 116.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid.

human sciences. For the most part this dichotomy is not employed to show any difference of subject matter explored by the sciences, but to emphasize their methodological distinctions.¹⁰³ He mentions the work of H. Rickert who attempted to show this dualism by pointing out the generalising procedures used by the natural sciences and the individualising approach of the historical disciplines.¹⁰⁴ But he says, even Rickert did not view this distinction as being rigid. To give description to the concepts of generalising and individualising used by the natural and human sciences Pannenberg applies the terms "nomothetic" and "ideographic" respectively. This appears to mean that the natural sciences are concerned with formulating general laws which describe the overall nature of reality, while the human sciences attempt to symbolize specific ideas by reference to individual cases. Therefore, the tendency has been to see the natural sciences as autonomous from the human sciences.

Pannenberg says that the most recent discussion on these topics reveals a concern for showing the ways in which the human sciences are increasingly using the methods of the natural sciences, which increases the pressure against the notion of the autonomy of the human sciences from the natural sciences. Of those who have challenged the validity of this division Pannenberg cites the efforts of J. von Kempski, Ernst Topitsch, and E.J. Walter.¹⁰⁵ Most important for Pannenberg is Kempski's claim that even history cannot claim to have a method autonomous autonomy from the

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 119, 121, and 123 respectively.

natural sciences.¹⁰⁶ To support Kempfski's claim he picks up on a comment by J. Huizinga, who says history must be regarded as the "'least autonomous'" of the sciences since the main concern of history is with structure and not its specific elements.¹⁰⁷ Returning to Kempfski, Pannenberg says, "History must ...be regarded as a 'network of actions', and this means structures which historical research must investigate..."¹⁰⁸ Pannenberg adds:

Today it must be stressed...that the distinction between individualising and generalising approaches has nothing to do with the distinction between the human and natural sciences. The basis of the distinction between the two procedures is based on the complementarity of the two aspects of contingency and regularity in all events. Laws or regularities can be found only in the contingent, uniqueness only in contrast to the normal or typical. The association of nomothetical or ideographic methods with the areas of 'nature' and 'mind' or 'culture' respectively contains an element of truth in so far as ideographic methods have any more applications to the study of man because of the greater complexity and individualisation of human beings. But this is not a reason for maintaining a dualism of nature and mind. Today this dualism is unsatisfactory both in itself and as a classification in the sciences....In philosophy of science the opposition is open to objection because it encourages a reification of methodological discrepancies which in fact represent no more than a transitory phase in the development of scientific procedures. The individual sciences, at least the physical ones, are distinguished by their area and depth of study, but this can never give rise to a categorical dichotomy.¹⁰⁹

Pannenberg thinks that theology has welcomed this dichotomy because the natural sciences have attempted to remove theology's place within them. It seemed that theology's only franchise within the sciences was the human

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 124.

sciences. But Pannenberg says, "If theology builds to such an extent on the autonomy of the human sciences and ignore the natural sciences, it may, together with the philosophical tendencies on which it relies, incur the suspicion of making a self-interested attempt to shield the world of man and history from the methods of discovery of natural science."¹¹⁰

Throughtout his argument that there is no legitimate reason to divide the natural and human sciences Pannenberg hints at the place of hermeneutics in the sciences. Traditionally this problem belonged to the realm of the of the human sciences. But now that Pannenberg thinks he has shown a unity rather than a dichotomy in the sciences, he believes one can include discussion of hermeneutics for the natural sciences as well. Though in the past the human sciences have attempted to explain the meaning of the individual as he relates to the whole, heremeneutic can no longer be the private reserve of the human sciences if their separation from the natural sciences no longer exists.¹¹¹

This statement leads naturally to Pannenberg's discussion of the nature of "understanding" and "explanation." Now that the believes he has argued successfully for the unity of the natural and human sciences, Pannenberg wants to show that any division between understanding and explanation is equally unjustified. As it is used in this context he defines explanation as the "inclusion of individual phenomena under a general rule..." while understanding "considers the individual in the context of the whole which it belongs."¹¹² Pannenberg claims this division finds its roots

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 127

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 135.

in the dualism of the human and natural sciences.¹¹³ Therefore it should not be unexpected that those who have criticised the dichotomy in the sciences will level the same criticism against any division between understanding and explanation. Pannenberg says:

This is logical, because the opposition is no more than the methodal expression of the view that there exists a fundamental distinction between mind and nature, and of the theoretical distinction...between the natural and human sciences as two groups of sciences: the method of explanation by the application of universal laws is contrasted with the methods of understanding, the hermeneutical methods, of the human sciences.¹¹⁴

Yet this claim is not without dispute. Pannenberg says that E. Topitsch and H. Albert say the aforementioned view has the intention of removing "the sphere of human life from the scope of explanatory science."¹¹⁵ Albert, says Pannenberg, thinks this is the proper interpretation of Dilthey's notion of understanding as a universal human activity. "Dilthey helps us 'to explain understanding'," says Albert.¹¹⁶

Pannenberg thinks Albert is attempting to construct a deductive-nomological basis for understanding. He says:

This model goes back through John Stuart Mill to David Hume and presents a scientific explanation as the inclusion of individual phenomena under natural laws. The best known modern spokesman for this theory of explanation is Karl Popper, and Popper's version has been taken further by C.G. Hempel and P. Oppenheim.¹¹⁷

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 136.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

Albert's interpretation of Dilthey says that his view of understanding rests on a knowledge of laws, making it deductive-nomological in nature.¹¹⁸ Pannenberg thinks Albert's interpretation of Dilthey is clearly mistaken. He says, even if we accept its correctness i.e. understanding has a nomothetical character and 'explains understanding' "this is no more than an explanatory statement about the process of understanding."¹¹⁹ Pannenberg says Albert has confused "the process of understanding with statements about it which describe its 'structure.'"¹²⁰ Pannenberg believes Albert's analysis to be incorrect because "the process of understanding consists in bringing an individual feature under its general structure: understanding relates the individual to a whole as a constituent of it or a factor in it, and it is this which creates the 'structure' of life as Dilthey sees it."¹²¹ It is the establishment of a 'system' which makes understanding possible in the first place. But it cannot be claimed that understanding is a universal under which a particular can be subsumed, even though the system is individual, 'open' and autonomous. Therefore Pannenberg thinks it is impossible to reduce understanding to a deductive-nomological pattern, though it is possible to envisage it as "the object of this type of explanation."¹²²

Concerning the nature of explanation and understanding, Pannenberg believes the best way of thinking about these concepts is "to say the former always presupposes the latter."¹²³ This means that a scientific explanation

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 137.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., p. 137.

which has developed as a law is really a special form of understanding.¹²⁴ With this view in hand Pannenberg claims that explanation has understanding as its goal.¹²⁵

This is particularly important when a phenomenon occurs which is suprising because it does not fit into a framework which is already familiar. Explanation is not functionally significant when it makes "the unknown intelligible by reference to the already known."¹²⁶ On the other hand, "something which supprises us seems to require explanation precisely because it bursts through the familiar, current understanding of the world because it is not intelligible within the framework of the already known."¹²⁷ Therefore Pannenberg thinks that the correct starting-place for explanation is as a system-theory which permits the construction of hypotheses to make nature intelligible, particularly when suprising or unintelligible events are encountered.¹²⁸ The suprising event forces us to expand our frame of reference so that we can now account for this suprising phenomenon and make it intelligible to ourselves. Because of this Pannenberg says, "...that it is ...impossible....to regard the concept of explanation as the bringing of data under laws."¹²⁹ There are "practical situations" in which data are perceived to be unintelligible and as requiring an explanation.¹³⁰ The feeling that the

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 138.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 139.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 142.

¹³⁰Ibid.

phenomenon is unintelligible is the cause of our determination to give it an explanation.¹³¹

Pannenberg continues this argument in the historical realm and admits his indebtedness to the work of W. Dray and A.C. Danto. He says Dray in particular has shown that any attempt at bringing historical events under general laws fails to see them in "their historical uniqueness and therefore is inadequate as an explanation for them as historical events."¹³² Dray thinks that when the historian attempts to explain historical events under the control of some covering law he is forced to a level of generality which makes the law "innocuous" from a methodological point of view.¹³³ Even if it is possible to construct a law which explains a general fact "e.g. that we have more often found E following C than not" is not proof that the explanatory force of the law extends to particular occurrences which fall under the law.¹³⁴ Dray says it is "logically artificial" and "methodologically misleading" to claim that the pre-requisite for an explanation is the indication of a covering law.¹³⁵ Such an approach is unable to account for the way historians "explain conditions and events which are unique."¹³⁶ He claims, "The question is no longer whether, in some interesting sense, we must have a law, but rather, supposing that we have an appropriate

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid., p. 143.

¹³³William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 28.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 31.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 58.

¹³⁶Ibid.

empirical law, whether we then *ipso facto* have the materials for giving an explanation."¹³⁷

Dray argues that there is a great dissimilarity between explanation and prediction. He says, "....if a person knows that a certain event occurred and he has the information from which it might justifiably have been predicted, then he has all that is needed to explain the event in question."¹³⁸ These comments are made by Dray against Karl Popper and C.G. Hempel who think that an explanation lacks completeness unless it functions as a prediction.

To correctly explain historical events it is necessary for the historian "to reconstruct the 'ladder' of conditions which made the event in question possible."¹³⁹ Pannenberg says that Dray's methodology is better equipped to explain unique historical events than one which places them under general laws.¹⁴⁰ Pannenberg terms his view, in alliance with Dray, a historico-genetic one versus the deductive-nomological type. The former assumes "a mutiplicity of laws working together in the individual events and the series they form and thereby explaining them."¹⁴¹ The main use for the deductive-nomological view is when it is seen as the justification of an already known explanation and not an explanation itself.¹⁴² Some individuals e.g. K.O. Apel have tried to show that history is a human science, concerned with understanding versus the explanatory method of the natural

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 59.

¹³⁹Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 144.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., Cf. Dray, pp. 44ff.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁴²Ibid.

sciences. Pannenberg agrees with H. Albert who says this is nothing more than "a new attempt to justify the dualism of the natural and human sciences."¹⁴³

Contrary to this dualism, Pannenberg accepts Dray's model of history as a series of events which can be reconstructed as a ladder. He believes this approach is able to account for the uniqueness of meaning found in human perception. Further, explanations attempted by natural laws are incapable of this because historical events take place in an "individual open system" which provides for the uniqueness of historical events and processes.¹⁴⁴

To complete the argument that there is no legitimate reason to divide the human sciences from the natural sciences on the basis of a dichotomy between explanation and understanding, Pannenberg says:

Where we understand, no explanations are needed. It is only where we do not understand that explanations are required. When people find this or that unintelligible, in need of explanation, it is always in a context of general understanding of familiarity with their world.¹⁴⁵

When events which are surprising i.e. unexpected given the familiar frame of reference, occur, explanation is then required. This is true whether we are involved in the sciences, religion, or art, says Pannenberg. For him understanding and explanation are inseparable feature of human endeavor.

The implications for hermeneutics from what Pannenberg has said on the unity of the sciences and the relationship of explanation and understanding are apparent. Pannenberg summarises this relationship as follows:

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 154.

1) "The aim of hermeneutic is the understanding of meaning, and meaning is to be understood in this context as the relation of parts to whole within a structure of life or experience." 2) There is a connection between theory construction in hermeneutic and theory construction in natural science. It is not correct to think that the experience of meaning belongs only to the human sciences. Rather, all systems have concern for the relationships between parts and whole within their specific systems.¹⁴⁶ 3) There is no distinction between the understanding of meaning (hermeneutics) and explanation of hypothetical laws. These are not distinct intellectual functions. "In particular, where the objects to be explained are unique structures, as in a historical event, laws have only limited explanatory force compared with interpretation, which can reveal the individual structure of the complex of events. It is by interpretation that what was previously unintelligible is now understood. Hermeneutics is able to yield the totality of the meaning of human experience."¹⁴⁷

So far Pannenberg has argued for the essential unity of the sciences and claims that history shares in the scientific enterprise. Now it will be possible to see the way in which he argues for the historical nature of revelational events. He implies that these can be investigated for their historical veracity like all other historical events.

Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation

Perhaps the best way to proceed is to focus on what Pannenberg terms "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," and to weave into each of these an expanded explanation of its meaning from his other works. Pannenberg sets forth seven theses, which are the substance of chapter four of *Revelation as History*.

¹⁴⁶Pannenberg thinks E. Nagel's discussion of "Wholes, Sums, and Organic Unities" in chapter 11 of his *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1961), pp. 380-390 is useful in clarifying some of these problems.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

Thesis number one states:

The self-revelation of God in the biblical witnesses is not of a direct type in the sense of theophany, but is indirect and brought about by means of the historical acts of God.¹⁴⁸

Pannenberg readily concurs with modern Protestantism's consensus that revelation is the "self revelation of God." This is observable in the above thesis statement. But the central difference between Pannenberg's view and that of modern Protestantism is found in the terms of directness and indirectness. Pannenberg thinks that modern Protestantism has involved itself in a view which sees revelation as coming by direct means. He is critical of this approach because it entails a kind of superstition or gnostic veiling of revelational material.

Pannenberg does not leave his readers wanting in the search for a straight forward definition of revelation. He says:

Self-revelation is thus so strictly understood that it is no longer possible to think of a medium of revelation that is distinct from God himself. Or rather: the creaturely medium of revelation, the man Jesus Christ, is caught up to God in his distinctiveness and received in unity with God himself. A means of revelation that in itself remains creaturely and holds to its distinctiveness from God would of course imply a sort of pollution of the divine light, presuppose an inadequate manifestation, and prevent the development of a full revelation.¹⁴⁹

Pannenberg's stated purpose in this first thesis is "to draw together the results of the exegetical investigation and expand them with particular reference to the question of the indirectness (or directness) of revelation."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 125.

One of the most remarkable features of Pannenberg's theses on the doctrine of revelation is the blending of scientific and philosophical discussion with an analysis of biblical passages. This is especially true for the first thesis where "an understanding of Yahweh is obtained through his historical activity."¹⁵¹ The most noteworthy example is to be found in the chief act of salvation in Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from the hands of Egypt (Exodus 14:31). According to Pannenberg, faithful trust was generated by historical acts such as these performed by Yahweh. He says, "In Deuteronomy, the attention is not on the single events, but on the complex of exodus and occupancy of the land, all of which is viewed as the self-vindication of Yahweh..."¹⁵²

Pannenberg continues to quote many Old Testament passages ranging from the Pentateuch to the Prophets which he views as examples of his claim that Yahweh's self-vindication is grounded in historical activity. By self-vindication he means something roughly comparable to self-revelation. It is on the basis of the idea of God that Pannenberg thinks the biblical religions can claim of uniqueness.¹⁵³

Pannenberg moves from the Old Testament to the New to continue his argument of Yahweh's self-revelation. He makes this move by discussing the apocalyptic nature of books such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. These writers, says Pannenberg, lived in the expectation of Yahweh's self-vindication as an end event. "This expectation is also part of the apocalyptic horizon in the

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁵³Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 314.

proclamation of Jesus."¹⁵⁴ By connecting the Old and New Testaments, Pannenberg believes he has shown a full biblical theology for his arguments. But what clearly emerges from Pannenberg's account is that Israel's understanding of the self-revelation of God was not obvious in her early history but became known in a progressive consciousness.

The specific terms used for revelation in the New Testament (*apokaluptein* and *phaneroun*) do not in themselves express the idea of self-revelation. Pannenberg says this can only be found in the notion of the "glory of God." For him this is the more precise understanding of God becoming manifest.¹⁵⁵ The unveiling of God's glory is a future event and Pannenberg tries to prove his point by further reference to scriptural passages e.g. Is. 40:5, 43:1, 68:18f., Ex. 14:18.

So far Pannenberg has only affirmed his solidarity with modern Protestantism in viewing God's revelation as self-revelation. But what of the important difference which is found in the indirectness of revelation? It is because the glory of God is revealed in the specific historical event that Pannenberg says revelation is mediated indirectly. This is the essence of the anti-theophany statement found as an integral part of the first thesis. A theophany by definition entails a direct experience of deity. As Pannenberg says, "Although formulated only in words, the glorification of Yahweh through his acts in history is clearly an expression pointing to the indirect revelation of his deity in those acts."¹⁵⁶ He says:

¹⁵⁴Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 127.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 128.

Indirect communication is distinguished by not having God as the content in any direct manner. Every activity and act of God can directly express something about God. It can say that God is the one who does this or that. Here the event in question does not have the same aspect as it would if one merely stood under the impact of its content. Not only is the content perceived for its own value; it is also seen that the event defined in this way has God as its originator.¹⁵⁷

Another example of the importance of indirect self-revelation to Pannenberg is stated in this fashion:

First, Israel understood God's self-revelation as an indirect proceeding. Yahweh does not descend from heaven in order to give a few chosen ones a special lesson about his being and attributes, by which men are then fully supplied with all necessary knowledge of God. Yahweh does not speak much about himself, but acts and announces certain events. *His deeds indirectly throw light back on him.*¹⁵⁸

The notion of indirectness "means that the actual content of the revelatory experience...is not identical with what the experience is intended to reveal, namely God himself..."¹⁵⁹ God is to be inferred indirectly from the historical event.¹⁶⁰ Revelation produces in us an inferential insight to the activity of God.¹⁶¹

With the same concern exhibited for showing that the concept of self-revelation is a constant in both the Old and New Testaments, Pannenberg wishes to demonstrate that indirectness also has the same constancy in the full sense of biblical theology. But in the New Testament the indirect self-revelation of God is to be found in the fate of Jesus. "Because the imminent

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁵⁸Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, trans. John Maxwell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 56. Italics mine.

¹⁵⁹James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds. *New Frontiers in Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., 1967), vol. 3: *Theology as History*, by James M. Robinson, p. 63.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

eschaton has broken in with the fate of Jesus, the glory of God is already present in the proclamation of the gospel."¹⁶²

Pannenberg has concentrated in the first thesis on showing that God is made known to man by a process of indirect self-revelation. He hinted at the issue of eschatology by referring to Jesus as the imminent eschaton who makes God's glory known. He is careful to answer the obvious question which rises from his claims of the indirectness of revelation and what seems to be the direct picture of revelation in the person of Jesus as presented by John's gospel (e.g. John 1:14). He says John breaks the directness of revelation by reshaping the Christ event with emphasis on its past character.¹⁶³ This caused second generation Christians to view "the Glory of God in Christ only indirectly."¹⁶⁴ He says this is possible through the experience of the Spirit in John's gospel which links Christ to the past (14:26; 16:14). Pannenberg admits that John's gospel is still a problem for his arguments because it employs a style which presents the activity of Jesus as a direct manifestation.¹⁶⁵

In the second thesis Pannenberg says:

Revelation is not comprehended completely in the beginning, but at the end of the revealing history.¹⁶⁶

This thesis is in line with what was said earlier about the emerging consciousness of Israel with regard to the self-revelation of God. Full cognizance of the meaning of revelation can only come at history's end.

¹⁶²Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 129.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 131.

Pannenberg does not have in mind just a small segment of history but "the total sweep of history visible only at the end."¹⁶⁷

Pannenberg wants to show the connection between thesis one and two by noting a linkage between revelation and history's end. He thinks this will demonstrate revelation's indirect character. Because revelation that is caught up in history has the revealing of God as its goal, it can come about only at the end of history.

Now Pannenberg's adoption of Dray's model for history shows its importance to his system. If revelatory events are viewed as a series of historical events whose meaning becomes clear only at the end of history it is evident why these events must be reconstructed into a "ladder" to unify them into a totality of history. Their ultimate meaning, however, is not ascertainable until the end of the revealing history. Pannenberg says:

If we wish to understand the indirect self-communication that resides in every individual act of God as revelation, then there are as many revelations as there are divine acts and occurrences in nature and history. But this destroys the strict sense of revelation as the self-revelation of God. Only then is it possible to understand the totality of God's action-and if God is one then that means everything that happens-as his revelation.¹⁶⁸

But if we overview the historical events of God's activity beginning with the Yahwistic tradition up to the apocalyptic literature of the Prophets, Pannenberg believes there is a development which shows not only an increasing extent of events demonstrating God's deity but also an increasing content of revelation. What is important here is the constant revision that

¹⁶⁷Robinson, p. 30.

¹⁶⁸Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 16.

the content of revelation is undergoing.¹⁶⁹ This must be the case for Pannenberg since we are not yet at the end of the revealing history. Therefore he says, "What had previously been the final vindication of God is now seen as only one step in the ever-increasing context of revelation."¹⁷⁰

In other words, at each stage of history the historian is able to reflect back on the entire content of revelation, and from this standpoint see the self-vindication of Yahweh. At the same time the historian should know that his standpoint is a provisional one since the passage of time will increase the content of revelation. Therefore at each stage of history greater insight to the nature of Yahweh and his glory is gained. "It is not just through the single events of this long history, but rather at the end, in the fulfillment of the promises to the fathers that Yahweh's deity is proved."¹⁷¹ But Yahweh's final and complete revelation is expected at the end of history, thus it lies on the horizon of the future.

Two very important concepts related to the second thesis are now brought to the forefront of the discussion. The first is what Pannenberg calls a "prolepsis" and the second has to do with apparent influence of Hegel on Pannenberg's view of history. Each of these will be dealt with in turn.

First, the meaning behind the word prolepsis. Because the revealing history has not reached its ultimate conclusion there is a sense of anticipation of its end when the self-vindication of Yahweh will be comprehended. Pannenberg says:

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 131-132.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 132.

Yahweh would complete the entire course of world events, world history, in order that man might thereby know his divinity. Only at the end of history is he completely revealed from his deeds as the God who accomplishes everything.¹⁷²

Here in the anticipation (prolepsis) of history's end we find a deeper concern in Pannenberg for eschatological and apocalyptic matters. The complete and final revelation of God is "transferred to the end of all events."¹⁷³ We live in a time of expectation which involves examining past historical events to see the partial self-revelation of God there and a hoped for completion of events which will fully reveal the deity of Yahweh. Therefore a portion of God's essence remains hidden from us until the completion of history. But as Pannenberg says, "Not only is the decisive event of salvation always in the future, but the meaning of the present event is, in general totally hidden."¹⁷⁴ This is why we find in Pannenberg's thinking a kind of eschatological verification similar to I.M. Crombie and John Hick.¹⁷⁵

A history which is in the midst of process and progressively reveals God has obvious Hegelian overtones. From the discussion of prolepsis it is natural to move to an investigation of the influence of Hegel on Pannenberg's thought. Pannenberg readily admits to the influence of a wide range of thinkers upon his philosophical theology, e.g. E. Bloch, A.N. Whitehead, E. Troeltsch, W. Dilthey, even some of whom he is very critical. But none seem to have had the same degree of impact as Hegel upon.

¹⁷²Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 128.

¹⁷³Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁷⁵Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 343.

Pannenberg thinks it was Hegel who first understood that the revelation of God is found in his self-revelation.¹⁷⁶ Hegel's philosophy of history is the product of German idealism of which Pannenberg says is not a reason by itself to reject it. He says:

This innovation (God's self-revelation) can be classed as a legacy of German idealism. The Enlightenment destroyed the old concept of revelation that belonged to seventeenth-century orthodox dogmatics and the inspiration of Holy Scripture, the understanding of revelation as the transmission of supernatural and hidden truths. The assertion of such a revelation was suspected of fostering an obscurantism that would avoid the light of scientific reason. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was the suspicion that supernaturalism is superstition, and the concept of revelation could only be rescued by means of reducing its content to God's self-revelation. This reduction amounts to a definition excluding everything miraculous... The strictly defined concept of revelation as self-revelation of the absolute appears to have been the first time that the full self-manifestation of God can only be a unique one. Hegel expressly reserved the designation "a revealed and revealing religion" for Christianity, not because it contains truths that have been transmitted by supernatural means, but because, in distinction from all other religions, it rests on full disclosure of the nature of the absolute spirit.¹⁷⁷

Neie says that Pannenberg thinks of Hegel's view as biblical because he sees: 1) truth as in the midst of process, and 2) "only the end will show the unity of the process..."¹⁷⁸

But in a spirit that has come to be expected from Pannenberg, he is also deeply critical of Hegel. He says that Hegel lost sight of the provisionality of his own standpoint in history. In not taking account of his own position in the historical frame Hegel produced a kind of foreclosure on

¹⁷⁶Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁸Herbert Neie, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), p. 97.

the future.¹⁷⁹ An essential ingredient to Pannenberg's system is lost when this occurs i.e. the openness of the future. By ignoring this problem Pannenberg thinks Hegel undermines the unity of truth and destroys the full and complete self-revelation of God. In a sense Hegel sees himself as standing at the end of history by not recognizing his own provisional position in history's unfolding. Hegel "did not take the contingency of the events seriously enough and in its stead made the logic of the notion the lord of reality."¹⁸⁰ Though Pannenberg assumes the basic correctness of Hegel's philosophy of history, his attempt to stand at history's end is "the one earth-shaking objection that has to be raised against Hegel."¹⁸¹

To this point two very important questions have been left uninvestigated. They are not necessarily related to one another but they do find a common origin in Pannenberg's notion of "revelation as history." The first question involves the place of mythology in the scriptures, while the second entails the proposed solution to the prolepsis-problem in his historiography. Answers to these questions are a necessary prerequisite to analysing the remaining theses on the doctrine of revelation.

That the theme of myth should enter the discussion at this point is not at all surprising since it is often assumed that mythology and historical fact are antonyms. For Pannenberg such a distinction is plainly too simplistic. He realizes his concern for the "facts" of history would bring his thought under severe criticism by anyone who held the unsophisticated view of myth as

¹⁷⁹Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), p. 82.

¹⁸⁰Neie, p. 97.

¹⁸¹Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 25.

opposite of history. Thus he feels obliged to give some explanation and interpretation of mythology and its relationship to theology as history. Pannenberg's procedure is to weave his historical model into an understanding of ancient Near-Eastern and Greek mythology and its implications for biblical literature.

The New Testament shows a consciousness of the separation between myth and the Christian message in some of its later writings. Pannenberg says 2 Peter contrasts myth and the witnessed based preaching of Christ (1:16); 1 Timothy warns against the appearance of "myths and endless genealogies" (1:4); 2 Timothy describes a time when people will "turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths (4:4); Titus describes the problem of "Jewish myths" (1:14).¹⁸² In spite of this biblical critics have not ceased from discovering mythical material within the biblical texts.¹⁸³

The most famous historical paradigm of one who concerned himself with the problem of mythology in Christianity is Rudolf Bultmann and his influential system of demythologisation.. He sees myth as a way of expressing a particular world-view which has now been made obsolete by the modern scientific world-view.¹⁸⁴ But Pannenberg thinks myth has a much wider significance than this. Instead of calling for a polarisation of the ancient biblical *weltanschauung* from the scientific one, Pannenberg proposes that myth be viewed as a way of expressing the nature of reality. That is, myth takes on a metaphorical structure to delineate the true nature of reality for Pannenberg. He sees the Bultmannian paradigm as opening the

¹⁸²Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 1.

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 8. Cf. Bultmann's *Kerygma and Myth*.

way "to legitimize a modern consciousness which is increasingly excluding religious topics altogether."¹⁸⁵

Pannenberg recognizes the influence of mythological forms on the entirety of biblical literature. For example, he compares Babylonian mythology to the sagas of creation, paradise, the flood, and the tower of Babel found in the Bible.¹⁸⁶ However he claims that the Yahwist and priestly account of creation "show great restraint with regard to the mythical elements in their material."¹⁸⁷ In both cases the creation account is shifted to the background of the definitive past. "It thus lost the essential feature of myth, the ability, as the events of the primal age, at the same time to be present in any age through the events of the cult."¹⁸⁸ This means that the Yahwist and priestly account of creation historicise the myth, thereby breaking its mythological structure. Pannenberg continues to give further Old Testament examples of how this model of shifting events to the background of the definitive past functions. In each case he claims that Israelite religion no longer re-enacted the event in its cultic practice.

For Pannenberg myth has an important role to play for eschatology and apocalyptic literature. There is no better example of how this claim is made relevant than in the eschatology of Jesus. Because of the "news of the resurrection of Jesus, which led to the formation of a Christian community" the possibility of a new life in God ushered in by the future came into focus.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 70.

As an example, though there are some rough comparisons between the gnostic redeemer myth and the idea of incarnation, which is emphasized by Bultmann, incarnation was able to join "the substance of myth, the nature of deity itself, to a historical person."¹⁹⁰ As Pannenberg says:

The characteristic feature of the eschatology of Jesus and of the earliest church must therefore be regarded not as the starting point for demythologisation, but rather as the origin of the specifically Christian myth of the incarnation of the Son of God, regardless of the question whether or not a redeemer myth existed as a stimulus for the formation of the Christian doctrine.¹⁹¹

Thus the incarnation is not myth in the ordinary sense of the word but a way of interpreting the meaning of a historical person.¹⁹² In fact, without the idea of incarnation Christian theology cannot avoid being reduced entirely to the realm of myth. But because this so-called myth intersects the "horizontal" aspects of Jesus' earthly life in history we do not have a mythology of incarnation in the person of Jesus.¹⁹³ Rather, we have an exposition of the meaning of Jesus' life and ministry. In this view it is not acceptable to say the people of the first century had a defective world-view which could only be managed in the terms of mythology and now stands corrected by the world-view of modern science (*a la* Bultmann).

Viewing myth as an interpretive schema for the meaning of significant events or people is the source of Pannenberg's notion of a Christology "from below." He believes Christology must begin in the realm of historical research. A historical examination of the life of Jesus is the basis of

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*

¹⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 73.

Christological claims. To subject the life of Jesus to mythology makes a sham of any positive Christology and calls into question the entire validity of the Christian faith.

Pannenberg says mythical accounts of the relation of deity to man begin with a prototype of "from 'above' to 'below'."¹⁹⁴ "In contrast, Christological statements take their departure...from the man Jesus, from what happened to Jesus in which the confession of faith answers."¹⁹⁵ Christological statements always concern themselves with the earthly life of Jesus. Even his preexistence and thus his incarnation are tightly woven into the historical Jesus and his resurrection.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, the only common element between myth and the Christian message is one of metaphorical structure.¹⁹⁷ That is, mythological forms are a vehicle employed for the purpose of interpreting the life and meaning of a historical person. Pannenberg would claim that we should not expect myth to be the integrative focus of Christology but that this is the responsibility of historical research.

Before an exposition of the prolepsis in Pannenberg's thought is done, thesis three on the doctrine of revelation will be given. The solution to the proleptic problem is found in thesis four, but for the sake of continuity they will be taken in the order of their numeration.

¹⁹⁴Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 186.

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 187.

Thesis three states:

In distinction from special manifestations of the deity, the historical revelation is open to anyone who has eyes to see. It has a universal character.¹⁹⁸

This thesis reveals and has more points of contact with the work of Pannenberg as a whole than any other of the theses on the doctrine of revelation. There is concern here for natural theology, historical research, the nature of reality, the universal features of history, hermeneutics, and a rational understanding of faith. This single thesis is best suited to demonstrate how the entire methodology of Pannenberg's philosophical theology can be applied. As will become evident, theses five and six are really sub-themes of thesis three. Pannenberg begins by saying:

We are ordinarily urged to think of revelation as an occurrence that man cannot perceive with natural eyes and that is made known only through secret meditation. The revelation, however, of the biblical God in his activity is no secret or mysterious happening. An understanding that puts revelation in contrast to, or even conflict with, natural knowledge is in danger of distorting the historical revelation into a gnostic knowledge of secrets.¹⁹⁹

The basic content of this thesis is another way in which Pannenberg expresses his view that reality is experienced by all individuals in a common-sense fashion. As he says:

Nothing must mute the fact that all truth lies right before the eyes, and that its appropriation is a natural consequence of the facts. There is no need for any additional perfection of man as though he could not focus on the "supernatural" truth with his normal equipment for knowing. The event which Paul witnessed, took place within the

¹⁹⁸Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 135.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

realm of what is humanly visible...Theology has no reason or excuse to cheapen the character and value of a truth that is open to general reasonableness.²⁰⁰

But what does Pannenberg mean by this often misused term "reality"? For him it is the observation that the whole of being is a great interconnected unity. He claims that if the Bible were to use a term which best describes reality it would be "history."²⁰¹ Without understanding all of reality as history we will not come to a proper understanding God, contends Pannenberg.²⁰² Historical understanding and hermeneutics would also be impossible without this relationship to wholeness.²⁰³ Pannenberg says, "For the individual human being receives the meaning that constitutes his wholeness only in relation to an encompassing whole."²⁰⁴

Central to these claims is the notion of finding the unity of history in God and not man. If the unifying principle of history is found in man the inevitable result is the breakup of its meaning into a variety of historical perspectives which have no real franchise in delivering an authoritative meaning for history.²⁰⁵ When the primacy of history is in view it is possible to remain open to the future.

When Pannenberg speaks of historical fact he means our experience with the events of history. Historical fact, like all facts, are not naked but "are to be seen in their traditio-historical context."²⁰⁶ In this approach Pannenberg thinks it is possible to bridge the gulf between the past and the

²⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 136-137.

²⁰¹Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, pp. 8-10.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 1.

²⁰³Thielsen, p. 82.

²⁰⁴Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, p. 164.

²⁰⁵Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, p. 17.

²⁰⁶Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 137.

present, against the thought of Lessing. In fact, for Pannenberg no such gulf even exists. History is defined as "an interconnected system of events in which any one thing can be shown to be connected with anything else."²⁰⁷ In this view men can extend their present time reference to encompass the New Testament period so that the difference of time between them becomes irrelevant.²⁰⁸ Making all history contemporary history can allow men to see that history is factual material, which permits natural conclusions to be drawn from it. According to Pannenberg these conclusions have often been changed by the insertion of things that distort their natural meaning.

These claims directly influence what Pannenberg says about historical research and comes from the most basic elements in his philosophical theology. History is a science in the view of Pannenberg and the facts which emerge are directly accessible to the powers of human reason. As he says, "....historical studies are not further removed from reality than natural science."²⁰⁹

When the scholar involves himself in the enterprise of historical research of theological claims he is investigating the events of Israel's history up through the resurrection of Jesus. These events are not something to which the believer brings his faith, but by approaching them in an open way faith is sparked.²¹⁰ Therefore faith is to be grounded on a reliable basis and is not truly described as a "blissful gullibility."²¹¹

²⁰⁷Robinson and Cobb, p. 192.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 66.

²¹⁰Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 137.

²¹¹Ibid., p. 138.

Further,

....only the knowledge of God's revelation can be the foundation of faith, no matter how confused or mixed with doubt such knowledge might be. It should be emphasized that it is not knowledge, but the resulting faith in God that secures participation in salvation.²¹²

In another place Pannenberg reiterates this claim by challenging theologians who think they do faith a favour by seeing it as pure risk. This view comes from those who attempt to make faith its own basis. Pannenberg says this undermines faith and degrades it into a work of man.²¹³

The event Pannenberg has most in mind when discussing the results of historical research is the resurrection of Jesus. He argues that the constant reinterpretation of this event is the result of a narrow conception of reality which has the hidden a priori assumption that "dead men do not rise." As long as the historian does not begin this way it is not clear why the best explanation of this event could not be as the Gospels have described it. "If, however, historical study declares itself unable to establish what 'really' happened on Easter, then all the more, faith is not able to do so; for faith cannot ascertain anything about events of the past that would perhaps be inaccessible to the historian."²¹⁴ Pannenberg thinks this narrow conception of reality smacks of historical and philosophical positivism. Those who argue against the historicity of Jesus' resurrection do so primarily on ideological considerations rather than objective evaluation of historical information.²¹⁵ Just because it "breaks the analogy of what is otherwise customary or

²¹²Ibid., p. 139.

²¹³Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, p. 65.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Robinson and Cobb, p. 32.

frequently attested is not in itself sufficient grounds to contest its factuality."²¹⁶ It is on this basis that Pannenberg believes he has overcome the most basic objection to viewing the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event.

It is out of historical research that the concern for meaning or hermeneutics arises. For theology this is generated by the historical distance between primitive Christianity and our age. Pannenberg believes that hermeneutics must somehow achieve an understanding which is able to span this historical distance.²¹⁷ He is critical of Bultmann and Kahler for creating a dualism between fact and value or event and interpretation.²¹⁸ Pannenberg says:

Under the influence of positivism and neo-Kantianism scholars have come to distinguish more sharply between the facts, on the one hand, and their evaluation or significance on the other hand....Against this we must reinstate today the original unity of facts and their meaning.²¹⁹

The implications of these claims have a radical character for historical understanding. For the resurrection it means it must be interpreted in the light of its historical context and not through the experiences of the modern interpreter.²²⁰

It was said that theses five and six were directly related to thesis three. Respectively these say:

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, p. 96.

²¹⁸Thielsen, p. 75.

²¹⁹Robinson and Cobb, pp. 126-127.

²²⁰Ibid.

The Christ event does not reveal the deity of the God of Israel as an isolated event, but rather insofar as it is a part of the history of God with Israel.²²¹

and,

In the formulation of the non-Jewish conceptions of revelation in the Gentile Christian church, the universality of the eschatological self-vindication of God in the fate of Jesus comes to actual expression.²²²

What is common to these theses is the concern for the universal aspects of revelation. In thesis three the claim is made that revelation is understood by natural means and is clear to all men. Thesis five proclaims that the Christ event is not isolated but is linked with God's history in connection with Israel. Thesis six states that the fate of Jesus is linked with a universal world history. Pannenberg thinks that unless these universal aspects of revelation are emphasized, revelation is understandable only to the religious community and it becomes gnostic in nature.

Pannenberg proclaims that biblical history is not only a part of salvation history (*heilsgeschichte*) but is part and parcel to universal history.²²³ It is this approach that makes history open to the scientific and investigative procedures of historical research. History is an indisputable continuity running from primitive Israel through the Christ event of the New Testament up to our own time, says Pannenberg.²²⁴ Thus there is a unity and wholeness to history of which God is the unifying factor. Single events of history are not in themselves revelatory of God, but only when these events are seen as being linked together and as pointing to an end do they reveal God. This would be "the last, the eschatological event which binds

²²¹Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 145.

²²²Ibid., p. 149.

²²³Thielsen, p. 77.

²²⁴Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, p. 9.

history together."²²⁵ It is in this concept of history's wholeness that fact and meaning are bridged.

But what would this event be? According to Pannenberg, it is the event of Jesus Christ who is God's final and complete revelation. Thesis four is the formal version of this claim:

The universal revelation of the deity of God is not yet realized in the history of Israel, but first in the fate of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as the end of all events is anticipated in his fate.²²⁶

In the Christ event we find the anticipated end of all events. The answer to Hegel's foreclosure of history is found here as well since the contingency of our own position in the historical frame is overcome by this event which gives a foretaste of the end. The whole of history "is only visible when one stands at the end," says Pannenberg.²²⁷ With Jesus' resurrection the end of history has already occurred and the hidden God is revealed. The Christ event is the prolepsis, the anticipated event of history's end. It is the event which allows us to scan all of history so that its meaning can be perceived. Pannenberg's claim clearly does not mean that nothing new happens after Christ but that history continues to bear his mark.²²⁸ "He is God's revelation in the fact that all history receives its due light from him."²²⁹ The eschatological significance of Jesus' life is confirmed by the resurrection whose factuality can be demonstrated in historical research.

²²⁵Robinson and Cobb, p. 122.

²²⁶Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 139.

²²⁷Ibid., p. 142.

²²⁸Ibid., p. 144.

²²⁹Robinson and Cobb, p. 125.

Lastly, thesis seven concludes what Pannenberg has to say about the doctrine of revelation:

The word relates itself to revelation as foretelling, forthtelling, and report.²³⁰

One might suppose that Pannenberg sees history as being constructed of mere "brute" facts. If this were the case it would be legitimate to ask where we would find important Christian concepts such as trust, understanding, and remembrance? Pannenberg says because the word of God (revelation) gives itself in the forms of promise (foretelling), forthtelling, and kerygma that these concepts have an ongoing existence in the Christian tradition. This is possible because facts carry meaning with them, contrary to the view of positivism which distinguishes between facts and their significance or evaluation.²³¹ Pannenberg declares that Bultmann's theology is the most radical in this area since he relegates the Christian Easter message to the realm of significance only.²³² He says:

Such a splitting up of historical consciousness into a detection of facts and evaluation (or into history as known and history as experienced) is intolerable to Christian faith, not only because the message of the resurrection of Jesus and God's revelation in him necessarily becomes merely subjective interpretation, but also because it is the reflection of an outmoded and questionable historical method. It is based on the futile aim of the positivist historians to ascertain bare facts without meaning in history.²³³

But meaning is ascertainable because in both the Old and New Testaments a knowledge of God and of divine self-vindication are

²³⁰Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 152.

²³¹Robinson and Cobb, p. 126.

²³²*Ibid.*

²³³*Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

presupposed.²³⁴ These are the content of forthtelling. Lastly, kerygma is the reporting of God's eschatological event in Jesus. It is not its own isolated revelatory event.²³⁵

²³⁴Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, p. 153.

²³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 155.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD AS THE ALL-DETERMINING REALITY

Modern Protestantism's Capitulation to Skepticism

In a preliminary fashion the concept of God as the "all-determining reality" was introduced in the latter part of chapter one. A more expanded treatment of this notion will now be given, bearing in mind its direct connection to Pannenberg's philosophical theology. In the previous chapter he argued that the "whole of reality is seen as a single unity and (is) regarded as history."²³⁶ Does this mean that Pannenberg regards God as equivalent to history if he is the "all-determining reality?" Some critics think so. But for Pannenberg there is concern to demonstrate God to be the all-determining reality so that he can be shown "to be the one God of all mankind."²³⁷

In the introductory material of this exposition of Pannenberg's work it was said that philosophical theology and natural theology were co-concepts. That is, they share similar concerns which are specifically directed to the possibility of man's natural knowledge of God. Pannenberg is in this tradition by his claim that man can achieve a natural knowledge of God through his reasoning power. He has attempted to show that theology can be formulated in scientific and philosophical ways and that its truth claims are

²³⁶ Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, p. 15.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

open to investigation and empirical testing. In the third theme of Pannenberg's philosophical theology this approach is continued. If there is any sense in which Pannenberg can be said to have developed a natural theology in the tradition of Anselm or Aquinas, it can be found here.

As is his usual way of addressing problems, Pannenberg prefaces his own theological arguments with criticisms of those he perceives to be mistaken. His sustained attack against modern Protestantism continues to be an important facet of his literary style under this theme too.

Pannenberg says Barth viewed the natural knowledge of God and natural theology as "the enemy of a theology based upon the revelation of Christ, because it was an inalienable feature of revelation that it provided man with his knowledge, his first knowledge of God."²³⁸ Pannenberg says Barth's rejection of natural theology was the climax of a growing tendency within Protestant theology which began with the thought of Ritschl and Schleiermacher.

Later Protestant theologians see natural theology as being abstracted from the positive religions. Natural theology then became a derivation of and secondary to the study of religion.²³⁹ The only ground for any operation of natural theology and the metaphysical doctrine of God seemed to lie in the realm of ethics. But as Pannenberg says:

Finally, although Barth began in the school of Ritschl, he came to include even an ethically based knowledge of God on Kantian lines in "natural" theology and argued instead that it should be replaced by the revelation of Christ as the sole source of a true knowledge of God. Thus the road leading from Schleiermacher to Barth showed an

²³⁸Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 99.

²³⁹Ibid.

increasing extension of the concept of "natural" theology as a polemic opposed to the Christian theology of revelation, together with a progressive narrowing down of the way the Christian theology of revelation was itself understood by those who maintained it.²⁴⁰

Pannenberg notes that Barth's rejection of natural theology led him to the formulation of a new form of apologetics for Christian theology. The history of Christian apologetic methodology had always asserted the truth of Christian claims on rational grounds. Barth however, developed his apologetic in terms of the unique or exceptional nature of the Christian revelation.²⁴¹ This strategy removes Christian truth claims from the arena of criticism and supports the suspicion that it is nothing more than mythology. While this tactic rescues theology from any critical challenge it also makes it indefensible in the usual sense of apologetics.

This immunising process employed by Barth and his followers comes naturally as a response to Feuerbach's critique of religion, says Pannenberg. "Ultimately the main intention of Feuerbach, as of his atheist successors, Marx and Freud, was to unmask Christianity and the Christian idea of God as the product of human self-alienation." ²⁴² Those theologians who are Barthian in their thinking on this matter seem to have merely granted the success of Feuerbach's critique of religion and have sought a new area of operation for religious thought. Pannenberg says:

The present day tendency to argue away and exclude the idea of God in Protestant theology must be understood as the consequence of the movement which began with the rejection of "natural" knowledge of God, and with it all philosophical theology.²⁴³

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 101.

From here Pannenberg tries to show that the heirs to Barth and Bultmann are theologians like Herbert Braun (the demythologisation of the idea of God), John Robinson (Honest to God), and Thomas Altizer (Death of God).²⁴⁴ The names of other recent contemporary theologians like Paul Van Buren, Don Cupitt, and Stewart Sutherland could be added to this list as well. Pannenberg reserves his most stinging comments for the theological styles which emerges from this group: "Anyone to whom Jesus' message concerning God no longer means anything would do better to look round for other exemplary figures of humanity, towards which the self-realization of man in the world can be more securely oriented than Jesus."²⁴⁵ Though Pannenberg thinks the efforts of these theologians can be counted as genuinely Christian he believes they have deceived themselves by no longer seeing the reflection of God in Jesus. Their abandonment of the idea of God can have only one result according to Pannenberg: the final destruction of Christianity.²⁴⁶

Modern protestantism's capitulation to Feuerbach's critique of religion and theology's self immunisation is reminiscent of the skeptical/fideistic dichotomy. The theologians of modern Protestantism, having accepted Feuerbach's atheistic critique of religious claims, shift the basis of theology from a posteriori arguments for faith's justification to a priori grounds. Pannenberg says they (modern Protestantism) have assumed the basic correctness of the claim that there are no rational foundations upon which faith can rest. Therefore, faith's legitimacy can only be grounded in

²⁴⁴Ibid., p. 102.

²⁴⁵Ibid., p. 103.

²⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 103-104.

irrationality. By shifting faith's foundations religious claims are "immunised," that is, protected from any rational critique against them.²⁴⁷

Pannenberg's importance to this discussion lies in the fact that he sees the fideistic route as an unnecessary capitulation to skepticism. He believes that this capitulation is ultimately no rescue for religious faith at all but leaves it in a rather bad way. Pannenberg proposes the unfashionable direction of taking religious belief out of the hands of its fideistic rescuers and returning it to the arena of criticism where it can be empirically investigated and either verified or falsified.

Now that Pannenberg has shown us what he thinks are the fallacious elements of modern Protestantism's rejection of natural theology and natural knowledge of God, plus its place in the historical dispute between skepticism and fideism, he sets forth his own natural theological system. Pannenberg does not think he is reconstructing the natural theology of thinkers like Anselm and Aquinas. But he attempts to show that the question of God has not been emptied of reason; that it is a genuine philosophical question worthy of investigation and is at the heart of human concern. While

²⁴⁷Though Pannenberg points to Feuerbach as the paradigm of the modern critique of religious belief, the dichotomy between skepticism and fideism can be traced through Hume and Kierkegaard as well. Cf. Richard Popkin, "Hume and Kierkegaard," *The Journal of Religion* 31 (October, 1951): 274-81. Kierkegaard's notion of "inwardness" in his *Philosophical Fragments* is roughly comparable to the shift from rationality to irrationality for faith's substantiation performed by modern Protestantism. Notice what Kierkegaard says: "The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation-process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness. The existing individual who chooses the subjective way apprehends instantly the entire dialectical difficulty involved in having to use some time, perhaps a long time, in finding God objectively; and he feels this dialectical difficulty in all its painfulness, because he must see God at that very moment, since every moment is wasted in which he does not see God." *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 76. It is clear that Pannenberg would reject with equal vigour Kierkegaard's response to Hume as he has Barth's et.al. to Feuerbach.

skeptical systems have treated the idea of God as a kind of "boo" word and fideistic thought has upheld the basic non-rationality of faith in God, Pannenberg thinks the impasse of this dichotomy can be broken by addressing the idea of God in a philosophical manner.

Pannenberg's Natural Theology

To open (re-open?) the question of God, Pannenberg asks that we consider the possibility of viewing God as the all-determining reality. When human language employs the word 'God' it is attempting to register its concern for the whole of reality since "speaking about God means speaking about the all-determining reality," claims Pannenberg. Proof of this would be demonstration that the divine reality (the central concern of all religions and philosophical enquiry about God) is present in human language since an all-determining reality is present and active in every event.²⁴⁸ Pannenberg tips his hand to the view that the all-determining reality is a being which pervades every aspect of reality.

Pannenberg believes this to be important for theology because part of its task is to examine "the validity of the thesis of faith as a hypothesis."²⁴⁹ Theology is more than just a positive science of Christianity in one of its two forms; either supernaturalist or as a part of culture's history.²⁵⁰ In accomplishing its task theology cannot "have a field of investigation which can be separated or isolated from others."²⁵¹ He adds:

Though it (theology) considers everything it studies in particular relation to the reality of God, it is not a specialised positive science.

²⁴⁸Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 283.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 296.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*

²⁵¹*Ibid.*

The investigation of God as the all-determining reality involves all reality.²⁵²

These comments have direct connection with Pannenberg's statements about the nature of history. There is no compartmentalised study of religious history as opposed to secular history. All of history, religious and secular (to use the conventional terms), have the same reality as the focus of their investigative procedures. Therefore theology, Pannenberg would say, shares with science, philosophy, history and all other investigative enterprises a common reality. The truth of empirically deduced conclusions are said to be true (or false) on the basis of their explanation of reality as a whole. What is true for science must also be true for philosophy, theology, and history, and vice versa. None of these investigative enterprises are entitled to an independent realm in which its claims can be judged apart from the relevance of the others.

Therefore, Pannenberg thinks the outcome of the investigation of reality will push us to the ultimate reality of God. He asks: "How can there be a science of God? Clearly only on the assumption that the reality of God is *co-given* to experience in other objects, that it is therefore accessible to theological reflection not directly, but only indirectly."²⁵³

Pannenberg has previously said that the revelation of God comes to man not in a direct way, but only in an indirect mode. The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that truth about God is revealed in investigative procedures. Since God's revelation comes to man indirectly and the reality of God is co-given in other objects the discovery of truth about God in the

²⁵²*ibid.*

²⁵³*ibid.*, p. 301.

investigation of reality can be expected.

Pannenberg means that in all objects of reality we find traces of the divine reality. He says:

The question which is important...to the development of our inquiry, which is concerned with the possibility of theology at all, is: *in what objects of experience is God-as a problem-indirectly co-given*, and what objects of experience can therefore be considered as possible traces of God? The only possible answer is: *all objects*.²⁵⁴

Pannenberg thinks this answer to be the only possible one in the light of the definition of God as the all-determining reality. Part of the task of theology is to show how all things are determined and made intelligible by this reality.²⁵⁵ "On the assumption then that the word 'God' is to be understood as referring to an all-determining reality, substantiation of talk about God requires that everything which exists be shown to be a trace of the divine reality."²⁵⁶

The word 'all' is of key importance and is treated as a synonym for reality, or everything which exists. Pannenberg emphasizes this point by claiming that when any particular object is investigated it is always done in its relationship to all other objects. Objects are not investigated in abstract isolation, but insight to their essence is gained by viewing them in their unbroken continuity to reality. That is, the word all "refers not to each individual thing on its own but to each in its continuity with all others."²⁵⁷

Pannenberg believes it is on the basis of the above argument that theology and philosophy manifest their close relationship. They each

²⁵⁴Ibid., p. 302.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

²⁵⁶Ibid.

²⁵⁷Ibid., p. 303.

envision an inquiry which shows concern, not for an individual being i.e. an object of experience in its particularity, or "with only a segment of reality, but with the Being of beings," or "reality in general."²⁵⁸ Importantly, Pannenberg tries to show how the thread of this thinking is traceable from the ontological metaphysics of Aristotle, to empiricism, where reality is delivered in sense impressions, to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which all knowledge begins with experience. Thus, he claims reality is to be found in human experience of the world.²⁵⁹

The nature of human experience is a point of great importance for the thought of Pannenberg. At a later time an exposition of man and his subjectivity as it relates to Pannenberg's response to Feuerbach will be given. For now though it is important to remember that he is addressing the issue of reality's basic unity and seeks to understand what makes "all that exists a unity as a single reality."²⁶⁰

When philosophy seeks to answer this question it is driven to the question of God, who is the reality which determines everything. As Pannenberg recognizes, the question of God is an ultimate question.²⁶¹ He says it is possible for philosophy to occupy itself with a whole range of topics which have an important role to play. But philosophy must not concentrate on these topics to the exclusion of the question of God. If it does so it runs the risk of contradicting itself, "since the claims of its assertions about the nature of experience and reality in general always also imply assumptions

²⁵⁸Ibid. Not unexpectedly, Pannenberg makes reference to Heidegger as he too is concerned about the "Being of beings." Cf. *What is Metaphysics?*

²⁵⁹Ibid.

²⁶⁰Ibid.

²⁶¹Ibid., p. 304.

about reality as a whole."²⁶² Pannenberg says that discussion of reality as a whole is not possible without, at some time, including discussion of God as the all-determining reality. When philosophy avoids this question it reveals its lack of rigour in discussing the "philosophical question of experience and reality, even though fashion may present an approach which on principle stops at this point."²⁶³

Pannenberg thinks theology and philosophy share a concern for ultimacy. "Like all other statements which are concerned with the totality of the meaning of existence, theological statements go beyond the antagonisms and absurdities of the world as it now exists, and beyond the fragmentary nature of reality."²⁶⁴ Philosophy as well has to come to grips with "the conditions of its own reflection upon its foundations, it cannot simply regard dialogue with religion and theology as something irrelevant to its own purpose."²⁶⁵ Pannenberg thinks that philosophy has become "entangled in the problems of subjectivity" to the degree that it is "...at the mercy of a subjectivism which carries no compelling force of conviction."²⁶⁶ Pannenberg implies that philosophy has trivialized its main purpose in the world by losing sight of its concern for reality as a whole. Traditionally philosophy has been useful in breaking down authoritarian religious structures,²⁶⁷ but now, instead of concerning itself with questions of ultimacy, it considers only a fragmented reality.

²⁶²Ibid., pp. 304-305.

²⁶³Ibid.

²⁶⁴Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 139.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

²⁶⁶Ibid., p. 140.

²⁶⁷Ibid., p. 143.

Pannenberg thinks the demonstration of the scientific quality of theological assertions must begin by testing the implications of the infinity of divine reality and actions over and against the nature of finite reality.²⁶⁸ The indirect approach as the key to the scientific logic of theology is also emphasized here by Pannenberg.

Pannenberg's Philosophy of Religion

It can be concluded that the idea of the all-determining reality is the very basis of Pannenberg's philosophy of religion. His claim is that the variety of traditions found in the biblical literature each represent an attempt to define God as the all-determining reality.²⁶⁹ This is over and against certain attempts to develop a philosophy of religion which is organized around a system of ethics (e.g. Kant and Braithwaite). In fact Pannenberg thinks ethics is the least suited of all branches of systematic theology to be a basis for a philosophy of religion, since moral attitudes depend on a sense of meaning which presuppose religious doctrine.²⁷⁰

Pannenberg expands the idea of the all-determining reality to embrace religion in general. Any comparative study requires a philosophical theory of religion, particularly if it involves a judgement about belief in revelation, which is the concern of all the world's religions.²⁷¹ The common element to be found in all human religion is a concern for ultimacy. Therefore, in Pannenberg's view all religions are revelations of God to the degree which they reveal God's future unity of all things.²⁷² "All religious

²⁶⁸Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 332.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 388.

²⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 423.

²⁷¹Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 120.

²⁷²*Ibid.*

experience is concerned with such a totality of meaning of existence, by contrast with the incomplete fragmentariness of what exists at any particular time."²⁷³ Pannenberg adds that a theology of revelation "assumes an understanding of revelation and religion, that is, a philosophy of religion."²⁷⁴ It is then incumbent upon every tradition to employ a theology of religion and religions to test themselves by the standard of their own understanding of the divine reality.²⁷⁵

At first Pannenberg's discussion surrounding the idea of the all-determining reality appears to be another form of the cosmological or ontological argument for the existence of God. But it was remarked that Pannenberg's goal is not a reconstruction of medieval natural theology. His judgement is that the most the proofs for the existence of God are able to demonstrate is the finiteness of man in the world.²⁷⁶ On the other hand he does attempt to provide an explanation of the way in which the idea of God can be seen as a genuine philosophical question, deserving the full attention of philosophical enquiry. It is Pannenberg's desire to keep the question of God open-ended so that its investigation is possible.

Pannenberg does not think that God is an object to be investigated like other objects of experience. Herein lies the fundamental mistake of the medieval arguments for the existence of God i.e. they treat God as an object at hand for direct investigation. Pannenberg responds to these classical arguments by viewing them as provisional and open to future possibilities.

²⁷³Ibid., p. 133.

²⁷⁴Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷⁵Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 320.

²⁷⁶Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 114.

As he says, "...the question of the totality as opposed to the multiplicity of finite things forces itself upon us as a provisional expression of the unity we seek."²⁷⁷

By first dissociating his views from the older medieval natural theology, Pannenberg seeks another basis on which to ground his brand of natural theology. He will not accept the Barthian move of a Christocentric basis for theology because of its connection to classical fideism. Neither is the view that the existence of God as the all-determining reality to be known through the cosmos acceptable since the advent of natural science with its principle of inertia has closed this route.²⁷⁸ That is, the cosmos cannot be the starting place to demonstrate in a quasi-experimental way that God is the first cause of the natural order.²⁷⁹ The mechanistic theory of Newton has caused the general failure of the cosmological arguments of Design and has seemingly rendered the God hypothesis obsolete.²⁸⁰

Where then and on what basis is the discussion of natural theology and the natural knowledge of God to be grounded? Pannenberg says it must begin with anthropology. This is so because of what we discover as a central concern in Christian and non-Christian religion i.e. "...the reality which we call God is everywhere a constituent element as such."²⁸¹ Since no sure avenue leading from nature to God can be found, modern philosophical

²⁷⁷Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 305.

²⁷⁸Ibid., p. 306

²⁷⁹Wolfgang Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 12.

²⁸⁰Ibid.

²⁸¹Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 104.

theology has placed the weight of truthfulness of faith in God upon a proper understanding of man.²⁸² Pannenberg says:

In the state of the problem resulting from the work of post-Renaissance philosophy, such a philosophy of religion would require a general anthropology as a basis. An example of the work such a philosophy of religion would do is the construction of the concept of religion in connection with the objects of human experience of meaning, that is, so as to take account of the totality of meaning implicit in all experience of meaning, a totality which in turn implies the existence of an all-determining reality as its unifying unity.²⁸³

Pannenberg develops this description of religious philosophy in response to Schleiermacher's account, which sees ethics as the basis for the philosophy of religion. Instead Pannenberg says ethics presupposes a basis in anthropology. The religious outlook of life cannot be mediated by ethics as a general theory of action but is rooted directly in the constitution of human being.²⁸⁴

Pannenberg thinks that modern philosophy's anthropocentrism has stimulated a concern for the nature of man in theology. It has concentrated upon "the human person as subject of all experience and of philosophical reflection," which has caused a deep impression upon theology.²⁸⁵ However, the danger for theology is the privatization (segmentations) of the religious life in modern society. The religious life has become so restricted to the private sphere that political and economic issues have been relieved of religious influence, says Pannenberg.²⁸⁶ The result has been the

²⁸²Ibid., p. 82.

²⁸³Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 368.

²⁸⁴Ibid., p. 371.

²⁸⁵Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 12.

²⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 12-13.

development of pietism (human interiority), which becomes the preserve for the themes of the religious life. Pannenberg thinks "pietistic devotion could hold its own in the religious debates of the modern age only if it could successfully show the universal validity of religious interiority."²⁸⁷ This is why he thinks that anthropology is of central concern to the public life of the modern age. It has a shared conception of the human person, human values, human rights, and is the basis for social existence.²⁸⁸

This discussion of anthropology forms the second part of Pannenberg's ontology, which is constructed of two basic presuppositions: 1) the biblical material is witness to God's self-revelation; 2) the evidence of anthropology is a means to verification of this. This is why he says:

The specific areas with which philosophy of religion is concerned are,...., first basic forms of religious conceptions of the 'sacred power' of the divine reality, second, the corresponding understanding of the world and thirdly, the forms of the religious relationship, i.e., of worship.²⁸⁹

Pannenberg says that it is Hegel who renewed the proofs of God which were to be understood as an anthropological interpretation by Kant.²⁹⁰ Hegel argued that the cosmological and physico-theological proofs could no longer be related to the processes of nature but express man's relationship to nature, his "elevation above the finitude of natural phenomena to the idea of the infinite..."²⁹¹ For Hegel, says Pannenberg, the proofs express "the

²⁸⁷Ibid., p. 14.

²⁸⁸Ibid., p. 15.

²⁸⁹Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 362. The reader can find further contemporary discussion of this topic in Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*, in chapters one and two, entitled "The Hearer of the Message" and "Man in the Presence of Absolute Mystery," respectively.

²⁹⁰Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 84.

²⁹¹Ibid.

elevation of man in religion above everything finite to the infinite."²⁹² Hegel recognizes the apparent absurdity in claiming finite reality as the starting point which lead to the conclusion of God's existence. But Hegel, says Pannenberg, discovered here a profound meaning. Religion attempts to elevate the mind over its experience of nature to raise it to the idea of God.²⁹³ Pannenberg's interpretation of Hegel says he asserts "the existence of the infinite on account of the transitoriness of the finite..."²⁹⁴

Pannenberg is faithful to his view that all claims are provisional in nature by naming Hegel's philosophy a theoretical truth. He uses the word proof in a way which attempts to open the question of God for reflection and is not presented as a decisive proof as we would expect to find in mathematics. Rather, Pannenberg's view is that God can be seen as a presupposition of human subjectivity who can be thought of in terms of humanity and no longer in terms of the world.²⁹⁵ The natural world is no longer seen as the point of departure in discussing the reality of God, but this is to be found in human experience of the world.²⁹⁶ Pannenberg's assertion is that, "Human beings seemed able to understand themselves in relation to the world only if they presupposed God as the common author of both themselves and the world."²⁹⁷

It should not be thought as extraordinary that Pannenberg has chosen anthropology as the ground on which to base his claims concerning natural

²⁹²Ibid.

²⁹³Ibid., p. 85.

²⁹⁴Ibid.

²⁹⁵Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 11.

²⁹⁶Ibid.

²⁹⁷Ibid.

theology and the natural knowledge of God. The reason this has been done is that the modern atheistic critique of religion is also based in anthropology. Therefore, to Pannenberg it is of the utmost importance to tackle modern atheism's critique of religion on its own terrain. Pannenberg focuses on Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Hartmann and Sartre as the most prominent individuals of modern atheism. In each case he thinks he is able to reduce each system to a claim which denies the necessity of the idea of God for a proper understanding of human existence.²⁹⁸ For example, Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud in particular try "to unmask Christianity and the Christian idea of God as the product of human self-alienation."²⁹⁹ Man, because he is alienated from himself, projects the idea of God, which is in reality the worship of his own nature (man's) because he is a separate, higher being.³⁰⁰ Therefore, modern atheism has as its goal to argue that belief in God is an illusion and does not belong to the essence of man.³⁰¹ The idea of God is merely a phase of man's history (though a rather extended one!), which will disappear when unmasked, according to Pannenberg's interpretation of these systems.

Pannenberg believes theology must begin on the ground of anthropology if it is to have any hope of defending the conviction that their faith and its message have universal validity.³⁰² He says this against the relativistic claim that any "truth" which is simply viewed as my truth could not even remain true for me. This is why Christians are compelled to defend

²⁹⁸Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 87.

²⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁰⁰Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 308.

³⁰¹Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 87.

³⁰²Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 15.

the view that their faith is true in a universal sense. According to Pannenberg, "It also explains why in the modern age they must conduct their defense on the terrain of the interpretation of human existence and in debate over whether religion is an indispensable component of humanness or, on the contrary, contributes to alienate human beings from themselves."³⁰³

Pannenberg complains that dialectical theology (a synonym for modern Protestantism) has merely adapted to the views of modern atheism by thinking it could "accept atheist arguments and trump them by a radical belief in revelation."³⁰⁴ Dialectical theology viewed Feuerbach's arguments as expressions of human self-deification and opted instead for a view of God as Wholly Other, "inaccessible to an approach from the human side and revealed solely by his own initiative in Jesus Christ."³⁰⁵ When dialectical theology did not take a position on the terrain of anthropology it was defenseless against the charge that its faith was something arbitrarily legislated by human beings. "As a result, its very rejection of anthropology was a form of dependence on anthropological suppositions."³⁰⁶ Thus Barth did not justify his position at all but arbitrarily decided to begin with God and "unwittingly adopted the most extreme form of theological subjectivism."³⁰⁷ Pannenberg says the logical outcome for theology is the "death of God" as begun by Gabriel Vahanian in response to the efforts of

³⁰³Ibid.

³⁰⁴Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 87.

³⁰⁵Ibid.

³⁰⁶Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 16.

³⁰⁷Ibid.

Barth.³⁰⁸ Vahanian was able to show that "the anthropocentric mentality of secular humanity, a creature of modern science and technology," when contrasted with Barth's theocentric Christianity provided the decisive judgement against the relevance of God to modern culture.³⁰⁹ Pannenberg concurs with Vahanian's analysis which says that Christianity contributed to its own erosion in culture by seeing Barth's view as normative.³¹⁰ Therefore, Pannenberg thinks that the opposing of the sovereignty of God to human subjectivity offers no remedy to the current situation for theology, but only exacerbates the problem.

The Nature of Human Experience

In reaction to the claims of Barth and dialectical theology, Pannenberg thinks theological anthropology must have a fundamental status for theology.³¹¹ The theologians proper activity is theology but this must begin by recognising the central importance of anthropology for "the universal validity of religious statements."³¹² This must be done to avoid the complaint that theology and religion can be reduced to anthropology i.e. a set of human assumptions and illusions. This is the basic content of the atheist critique of religion.³¹³ Thus the universal validity of what theologians say can only be made clear on the terrain of anthropology. But Pannenberg wants to know what the nature of this terrain is and whether it will be

³⁰⁸Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 76.

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*

³¹⁰*Ibid.*

³¹¹Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 90.

³¹²Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 16.

³¹³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

suitable for the erection of theological structures.³¹⁴ In this sense anthropology for Pannenberg is what is typically thought of as the scientific discipline of anthropology. In its modern state it investigates man empirically rather than metaphysically, which Pannenberg calls non-theological anthropology."³¹⁵

Pannenberg recognizes that modern anthropology has often implicitly or explicitly rejected theological questions concerning human nature. Nonetheless, he says, "Theologians...must expect that a critical appropriation of these findings for theological use is also possible, if the God of the Bible is indeed the creator of reality."³¹⁶ He does not want to allow anthropology to neglect theology by bracketing its main concern, which is the idea of God. In describing his purpose here, he says:

The aim is to lay theological claim to the human phenomena described in the anthropological disciplines. To this end, the secular description is accepted as simply a provisional version of the objective reality, a version that needs to be expanded and deepened by showing that the anthropological datum itself contains a further and theologically relevant dimension.³¹⁷

Within the confines of this single comment it is possible to detect several points which reveal Pannenberg's sincere attempt to give his theology a scientific and philosophical flavour. First, he wishes to engage modern atheism on its own ground. He takes seriously the atheistic critique of religion based upon anthropological claims. He does not want to allow the battle to be shifted to another front, as Barth does. Secondly, if these

³¹⁴Ibid.

³¹⁵Ibid., p. 18.

³¹⁶Ibid., p. 19.

³¹⁷Ibid., p. 20.

statements are going to be more than empty talk, Pannenberg knows he must squarely face the discoveries of modern anthropology. He does this by recognizing the legitimacy of anthropology as a scientific discipline able to yield empirical data of the human person. He does not accept this discipline uncritically but wishes to expand the scope of its investigation to include the religious dimension of man. Thirdly, Pannenberg is using the term modern anthropology in two senses; one which describes it as a scientific discipline and the second as a view of human nature.

The first and second claims are extremely important here since they serve as the points of contact between theology and modern anthropology. Pannenberg thinks that the objective results of anthropological studies will reveal the religious dimension of man's being. It will show that God is a universal presupposition of human subjectivity, and if anthropology ignores this feature of man it has fallen short of its scientific responsibilities.

Pannenberg knows such reflection has its limitations. For example, it is not able to serve as a proof for the reality of God.³¹⁸ However, a general theological anthropology is able to show that the question of God seems to be a vital component in man's understanding of himself. "It can show that what takes place in religious experience is as much a constituent part of man's being as walking erect, or the ability to use fire and tools."³¹⁹ In true scientific fashion, Pannenberg thinks the question of God is as important to anthropological reflection as anything else known to be true of human beings.

³¹⁸Pannenberg, *Idea of God and Human Freedom*, p. 94.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*

Pannenberg's most recent book in English translation, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, gives a detailed account of a modern theological anthropology. Here he considers the full range of important anthropological evidence and developments and shows how they might shed light on a theological anthropology.

The main features of an anthropology which reflects upon the religious dimension of man will have to begin by considering the uniqueness of humanity, says Pannenberg. The Judeo-Christian and modern anthropological view of man share this common characteristic but for entirely different reasons. For modern anthropology, humanity's uniqueness is found "through a comparison of human existence with that of the higher animals."³²⁰ In the Judeo-Christian tradition it is to be found in the claim that human beings alone are endowed with an immortal soul which gives them a special dignity and elevates them above the cosmos.³²¹ With reference to modern anthropological studies, Pannenberg begins by pointing to the great influences of classical behaviorism and its key figures of Pavlov, Watson and Skinner upon philosophical anthropology. Behaviorism and philosophical anthropology share the opinion that man must be interpreted solely in terms of his corporeality.³²² Thus, from the beginning the Christian view of man is repudiated by modern anthropology. For this reason it has lost sight of the religious dimension of man as a constituent of human nature. But Pannenberg also says that there are important differences between behaviorism and philosophical anthropology. The most

³²⁰Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 27.

³²¹Ibid.

³²²Ibid., p. 35.

noteworthy work comes from Gehlen, Scheler and Plessner who describe man as being "open to the world" and as having a kind of exocentricity about him. These are used as descriptions of man's unique nature.³²³ Man's "openness to the world" has as its theological analog the creation of man "in the image of God." (Genesis 1:26) Both are possible ways of explaining or describing that which is unique to human beings.

Pannenberg defines "openness to the world" as the "unique freedom of man to inquire and to move beyond every regulation of his existence..."³²⁴ It is man not being bound to his environment but able to rise above it with critical inquiry into the nature of reality. It means to view man as not only different in degree "but also in kind from the animal's bondage to its environment."³²⁵ Additionally, "openness to the world essentially means openness to God."³²⁶ It is man's nature to move through the world toward God and to fulfill his destiny to be in communion with God.³²⁷ Thus, it is essential to see that man has a "world" and that he is not steered by mere instincts but that his openness helps him to transcend any experience.³²⁸ Because man is able to experience the world he can detect his needs, which give him a self-understanding and allows him to identify his goals.³²⁹ Man strives into the "open" because he lives under the pressure of a "surplus of drives."³³⁰ Pannenberg says this pressure is different from animal instinct

³²³Ibid.

³²⁴Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?* trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 3.

³²⁵Ibid., p. 8.

³²⁶Ibid., p. 54.

³²⁷Ibid., pp. 54-55.

³²⁸Nele, p. 105.

³²⁹Ibid.

³³⁰Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 9.

because the latter only "goes into action...when the triggering object is present."³³¹

In contrast, the pressure of human drives is directed toward something undefined. It arises because our drives find no goal that entirely satisfies them. It asserts itself in man's characteristic impulse toward play and daring or in the detachment from the present through a smile. It drives man into the open, apparently without a goal. Arnold Gehlen has spoken appropriately of an "indefinite obligation," which makes men restive and drives them beyond every attained stage in the actualization of life. He has also seen that this restlessness is one root of all religious life. That certainly does not mean that man creates religions by giving form to that undefined pressure through his imagination (*Phantasie*). Something else always precedes all imaginative activity in the formation of religions, and for that reason religion is more than merely a creation of man.³³²

To be driven by these impulses implies that man is dependent upon that which lies outside of himself. Pannenberg calls this man's "chronic need" or "his indefinite independence."³³³ This causes man to presuppose a being which is beyond the realm of the finite. He says our language employs the word God to describe this entity.³³⁴

Pannenberg has tried to show that "openness to the world" is meaningful in non-theological anthropology as well as a theological view of

³³¹Ibid.

³³²Nele, pp. 105-106.

³³³Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, p. 10.

³³⁴Ibid.

man. Both see its referent as the uniqueness of humanity which is to be found in the goal oriented nature of man. The behavioral sciences have been able to show that man's striving for goals is not the result of inherited instincts.³³⁵ What's more, this goal seems to be indefinite. The upshot of this is that man has a future destiny to be in communion with God, according to Pannenberg. He says this is directly related to the expression "image of God" which also expresses the human destination of communion with God.³³⁶ In these claims Pannenberg believes he has found a connection between the discoveries of non-theological anthropology and what the Judeo-Christian tradition has to say about man in its literature.

Pannenberg thinks that J. G. Herder may provide a positive point of departure in giving explanation to what lies behind the doctrine of the *imago Dei* as a meaning. He summarizes Herder's analysis of this concept in the following ways.

1. As instinct guides the behavior of the animals, so the image of God guides human beings: instinct and image of God alike have as their function to give direction to the life of the creature, instead of leaving it a prey to the "murderous chance" of random impressions.
2. The image of God, which is impressed "on the mind" of human beings, functions as a teleological concept for their behavior. It can exercise this function because the image of God represents the goal of human existence as such.... Thus the image of God and the selfness or humanness of human beings belongs together....
3. What human beings possess initially is only "the disposition to reason, humanity, and religion," the outline of the statue... It is the specific character of the human race "that born almost without instinct, we are formed to manhood only by the practice of the whole life, and both the perfectibility and corruptibility of our species depend on it." What is involved here is "an education...of the human

³³⁵Ibid., p. 54.

³³⁶Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, p. 74.

species: since everyone becomes man only by means of education, and the whole species lives solely in this chain of individuals."³³⁷

In acknowledging the usefulness of Herder's explanation of the uniqueness of humanity in terms of the image of God, Pannenberg admits that he puts himself in opposition to traditional Christian dogmatics in this area. Traditional doctrine often teaches that man "had been created in the perfect image of God but then lost this original perfection through the fall."³³⁸

To any dialectical theology such as modern Protestantism, it is very important to argue for the destruction of the *imago Dei* as a direct consequence of the fall. This is so because any "remnant" of the *imago Dei* would serve as a point of contact for God's revelation. Barth, in opposition to Emil Brunner argues in this manner. Barth "could not allow that any anthropological conditions which would be distinct from and prior to God's gracious action could be understood as a point of contact which the divine action must respect."³³⁹

For Pannenberg it is important to side with Brunner against Barth in this matter and take the view that an ongoing remnant of the *imago Dei* persists even after the "fall." More accurately, Pannenberg is against any notion of a primordial fall which has lead to the view that sin has annihilated the image of God in man. This is not only because of his view of human rationality and its ability to perceive God's revelation indirectly but also because of his understanding of the *imago Dei* as a doctrine of human

³³⁷Ibid., pp. 45-46. Pannenberg is quoting from J.G. Herder's work entitled *Outlines of a Philosophy of History*, trans. T. Churchill.

³³⁸Ibid., p. 47.

³³⁹Ibid., pp. 49-50.

destiny. The mistake of dialectical theology is its tendency to overlook the image of God as a point of human destiny and to return to the Reformation thesis of the image's loss from an original state of perfection.³⁴⁰

The purpose here has been to find those elements in Pannenberg's argument which clarify why he thinks anthropology is the place to begin to describe the rationality of belief in God. He begins with anthropological studies because he thinks God to be the universal presupposition of human experience. Also, he attempts to engage the atheistic critique of religion on its own ground. Pannenberg warns, however, that the question of human salvation must not be focused upon so narrowly that theologians forget that "the Godness of God, and not human religious experience, must have first place in theology."³⁴¹

³⁴⁰Ibid., p. 55.

³⁴¹Ibid., p. 16.

CHAPTER FOUR

PANNENBERG AND HIS PEERS

The first three chapters serve as an exposition of the key features of Wolfhart Pannenberg's philosophical theology. So far there has been no attempt at a critical analysis of his claims. The central purpose of this concluding section will be to supply a critical analysis of Pannenberg's thought. Basically, this is accomplished by considering various questions raised by some of Pannenberg's theological peers against his system.

As might be expected the responses to Pannenberg's theological system have been many and varied. His interpreters range from absolute exhilaration to bitter disappointment in their analyses of his theological system. However, all who engage him in dialogue recognize Pannenberg as a "...theologian of rare brilliance, remarkably capable in philosophy, biblical studies, and theology."³⁴²

It may be seriously asked, "What is so important about Wolfhart Pannenberg? Why is he the focal point of attention when there are a great number of important contemporary thinkers making contributions to philosophical theology?" A partial answer to these questions is given by James Robinson. He says that the work of Pannenberg and his associates

³⁴²Clark Pinnock, "Pannenberg's Theology: Reasonable Happenings in History," *Christianity Today* 147 (Nov. 5, 1976): 19.

has generated a new school of thought for theology. This new school "is the first to emerge from the German generation that was born after World War I had passed, was raised in the throes of the Third Reich, World War II, and the collapse of 1945, and has reached full maturity in the *Bundesrepublik*." It is also the first theological school to emerge in Germany within recent years that is not in one form or another a development of the dialectical theology of the early twenties.³⁴³ This is important for the first issue raised in this discussion: If Pannenberg's claims are true then a major rethinking of theology is in order. This rethinking is to be done in opposition to dialectical theology, which for many years has been considered normative in theological circles.

Sometimes the gap in time between the development of German dialectical theology by the likes of Barth and Bultmann in the 1920's and the emergence of the "Pannenberg circle" in the 1960's is termed the "generation gap" in German academia.³⁴⁴ It refers to the generation in Germany that "went missing" under the forces of National Socialism. Thus, "There is no natural bridge between the twenties and thirties of Barth and Bultmann and the sixties of Pannenberg."³⁴⁵ It must be admitted, as the 1990's approach, that it seems doubtful that Pannenberg will make the lasting and deep impressions of either Barth or Bultmann. This fact does not minimize the importance of Pannenberg's contributions, especially in his criticisms of dialectical theology, but helps to gain insight to the depth of influence found in Barth's and Bultmann's theological systems. Only the passage of time will

³⁴³Robinson and Cobb, p. 13.

³⁴⁴Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 17.

³⁴⁵*Ibid.*

show how influential Pannenberg has been.

Some uninitiated readers might be doubtful of the concrete reality of the battle which has existed between Pannenberg and the main object of his polemic, Karl Barth. It is important to remember that in 1950 Pannenberg went to Basel to study under Barth. For those who think that such disputes are merely verbal or semantically oriented copies of two letters of personal correspondence between Pannenberg and Barth are included in Appendix 1.

The inclusion of the text of these letters between Barth and Pannenberg are evidence of the real differences which exist between them, differences which are understood by them as well. It brings the reader into direct contact with the words employed by both individuals to state their respective cases and delivers a firsthand look at the disputes between them. Further, their disagreements are not just grist to keep theological faculties alive, but exist as ultimate issues for them.

Pannenberg's own embracing of the Christian tradition came more by "...rational reflection than of Christian nurture or a conversion experience."³⁴⁶ This personal information dovetails marvelously with what seems to be the crux of Pannenberg's thought: the theology of reason. It is also the issue which helps to sort out the differences between Pannenberg and his critics. For the most part his critics see faith as the self-fulfillment of man, having no propositional content, nor rational support.³⁴⁷ However, Pannenberg takes the opposite route by contending that faith is not self-authenticating and that it is oriented toward a trust in what God promises to do in the

³⁴⁶Robinson and Cobb, p. 11n.

³⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 217.

future, since man's existence is incomplete in the present.³⁴⁸ It is Pannenberg's commitment to rationality which has made his enterprise so unfashionable to those schooled in dialectical theology.³⁴⁹ When Pannenberg talks about the theology of reason and human rationality he attempts to show the differences between what he means by rationalism and what it has meant in past traditions. For example, Pannenberg does not have in mind Luther, Calvin, or the orthodoxy of St. Thomas, all of which "attempted to organize data in airtight conceptual compartments."³⁵⁰ Nor does he define rationality in the same way Kant has. Essentially, "Pannenberg's thought can be described as a highly personal and historical idealism in conscious debt to the work of Hegel."³⁵¹

An overview of the variety of criticisms which have been raised against Pannenberg by some important theologians and philosophers is in order at this point. Pannenberg is a theologian who is very sensitive to these criticisms, not because he sees them as a personal attack, but because of his openness to criticism and challenge. He is consistent with his view that all assertions are provisional at best and he seeks dialogue and rigorous debate to modify his claims in the light of new evidence. Pannenberg has no apparent vested interests which he protects from challenge and questioning. These personal qualities are noted as being to his credit and as characteristics that are worthy of pursuit by all involved in the intellectual sphere.

³⁴⁸Ibid.

³⁴⁹Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 43.

³⁵⁰Ibid., p. 44.

³⁵¹Ibid.

Those who have criticised Pannenberg have often begun by pointing to what they perceive to be the Hegelian features of his understanding of history. The view that history is the place in which present disparities are resolved in some ultimate synthesis makes the influence of Hegel's thought upon Pannenberg very apparent.³⁵² The intention of any criticism which charges Pannenberg with being Hegelian in his philosophy of history is parallel to Karl Popper's critique of Hegel.

First, Popper reacts to those who try to find meaning in history, one which he says is usually reducible to a "history of power politics..." where might makes right and men worship at the altar of historical success. He says, "For the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder."³⁵³ It is for this reason that he says:

But is there really no such thing as a universal history in the sense of a concrete history of mankind? There can be none. This must be the reply of every Christian. A concrete history of mankind, if there were any, would have to be the history of all men. It would have to be the history of all human hopes, struggles and sufferings... Clearly, this concrete history cannot be written.³⁵⁴

Popper goes on to say that apologists for Christianity who defend the doctrine that God reveals himself in history do so without the support of the New Testament. He contends such a view is nothing but pure idolatry and superstition from rationalist, humanist, and Christian points of view.³⁵⁵ "The theory that God reveals himself and his judgement in history is

³⁵²Ibid., p. 23.

³⁵³Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol.2: *Hegel and Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 270.

³⁵⁴Ibid.

³⁵⁵Ibid., p. 271.

indistinguishable from the theory that worldly success is the ultimate judge and justification of our actions; it comes to the same thing as the doctrine that history will judge, that is to say, that future might is right; it is the same thing as what I have called 'moral futurism'," says Popper.³⁵⁶ He calls such a view of history a "theistic historicism" whose end result reveals a lack of faith.³⁵⁷ For him, this brand of historicism is in open "conflict with any religion which teaches the importance of conscience and particularly that conscience must judge power."³⁵⁸

The second part of Popper's negative assessment of Hegelian historiography and indirectly, Pannenberg's view as well, comes into focus. Popper thinks that Hegel, along with Plato and Marx, are the archenemies of what he calls the "open society." He points to Hegel's philosophy of history as a system which threatens the open society because it has lost sight of the basic dualism of "facts and standards." Popper says Hegel's view is one in which all standards are seen as historical, where there is nothing but fact and no distinction between "ought" and "is."³⁵⁹ Thus, it becomes impossible for human beings to make judgements of conscience against abuses of power, since there is no standard but the one which exists.

Lothar Steiger and Ernst Fuchs criticise Pannenberg in a way which is similar to the path chosen by Popper to criticise Hegel. Both claim that Pannenberg's views lose an important sense of dialectic i.e. theology becomes without distinction. Steiger also has serious misgivings about the suitability

³⁵⁶Ibid.

³⁵⁷Ibid., p. 273.

³⁵⁸Ibid., p. 279.

³⁵⁹Ibid., p. 395.

of German Idealism as an interpretive model for the Bible.³⁶⁰ For him, "It presupposes the model of sight rather than hearing, and hence misses the dialectic of God's call, involving his unexposedness and hence calling forth the decision of faith or faithlessness rather than the theoretical judgement of comprehension or incomprehension."³⁶¹

Gunter Klein claims that Pannenberg's notion of an indirect revelation in history is mistaken since God is not the content of experiencing history, but that revelation actually takes place only when man reflects upon history.³⁶² William Hamilton, another critic of Pannenberg, has said that he has merely reintroduced the idea of a theonomous history.³⁶³ According to Hamilton, such a view refuses to take seriously the modern world of unbelief, according to Hamilton.³⁶⁴ He thinks Pannenberg has continued to live in the past with his views. Hamilton complains that while Pannenberg discusses at length being open to the world he is out of touch with it from the beginning.³⁶⁵ He says that Pannenberg is at one with Bultmann by presupposing the natural religiousness of man.³⁶⁶ To support this claim he quotes from Pannenberg's essay entitled, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," where Pannenberg says, "Only in God's proximity, in community with God, does human existence find its fulfillment."³⁶⁷ Hamilton wants to know what meaning lies behind this statement. Is it a statement based on

³⁶⁰Robert W. Funk, ed. *Journal of Theology for the Church*, vol. 4: *History and Hermeneutic* (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., 1967), p. 101.

³⁶¹Robinson and Cobb, pp. 74-75.

³⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 187.

³⁶⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 118.

observations of humanity, or does it deal with man's ontology? Is there evidence for such a claim? If there are men who declare that their fulfillment is not in God, does this invalidate the statement?"³⁶⁸ Hamilton does not think that Pannenberg's claim is true in a self-evident manner. He says, "It seems to proceed more from some other world than from the real world of the twentieth century with its genuine and painful unbelief."³⁶⁹ Because of this Hamilton thinks Pannenberg ignores the role and influence of modern secularism. He says:

I can see no way in which Pannenberg can take seriously the world of modern unbelief, where as unlike both him and Barth, I suspect theology needs to take it seriously. I assume that certain rejections of God in our time are real rejections, and that they cannot be taken care of by calling them "negative witnesses to God," or some other such silliness. "No" to God can really mean "no", and it need not always refer to the *cor inquietum* that cannot rest until it finds rest in God.³⁷⁰

Pannenberg says he concurs with Hamilton's judgement that Christian faith cannot retreat "to some sheltered area where it would be immune from historical criticism" and that the Christian message would be irrelevant in our time if it did not engage the secular man where he lives.³⁷¹ This is in response to Hamilton's charge that Pannenberg's view of history is theonomous in nature. Pannenberg says his view does have some theonomous features but that it is false to think he wishes to transform "the modern experience of reality... back into the medieval mode of thinking."³⁷²

³⁶⁸Ibid., p. 179.

³⁶⁹Ibid.

³⁷⁰Ibid., p. 180.

³⁷¹Ibid., pp. 248-249.

³⁷²Ibid., p. 249.

This would be impossible since medieval thought took its departure from the position of authority while the modern man has the luxury of making judgements for himself. Thus the validity of the modern world is found in its criticism of the "positivism of the authority principle" of the medieval period.³⁷³ This is why the period of the Enlightenment is such a critical point in history for Pannenberg.

Pannenberg thinks Hamilton's understanding of theonomy is purely reactionary and that he is mistaken in claiming his (Pannenberg's) view identifies God with the process of history or that "the world of finiteness already contains God."³⁷⁴ Rather, says Pannenberg, "The transcendence (or incommensurability) of the infinite over against the finite forms the theme of my writings on the idea of the analogy between God and the world".³⁷⁵ For Pannenberg the thesis of analogy appears as an infringement upon the transcendence of God.³⁷⁶ His own view, he says, was developed as an alternative "to the classical determination of the relationship between God and the world as it is worked out in the doctrine of analogy."³⁷⁷ Pannenberg says:

The relation between the finite and the infinite is always, even in the case of Jesus, mediated negatively... The very negativity fulfills itself nevertheless in history itself, and indeed as history, viz., in the collapse and in the transformation of all institutions and forms of political life as well as individuals. History is not the field of a finite enclosed within itself, an "immanence" to which one could and indeed would have to oppose a transcendence. History is rather the ongoing

³⁷³Ibid.

³⁷⁴Ibid., p. 250.

³⁷⁵Ibid., p. 251.

³⁷⁶Ibid.

³⁷⁷Ibid.

collapse of the existing reality which is enclosed in its own "immanence".... The power of the infinite is active and present in this collapse of the finite. Thus the infinite expresses itself in the first place negatively. But because the finite lives not by clinging to itself, but only in transformation of itself... insofar the power of the infinite expresses itself also positively, as reconciliation and preservation of the finite in the midst of its collapse. If one regards history as only the sum of the self contained finite, and understands it in this way as the total panorama of human deeds and sufferings, then it becomes incomprehensible how it can be said of history that God is revealed in it.³⁷⁸

Pannenberg contends that Hamilton's criticism of him is erroneous because it suggests that he views history as the sum of finite parts by which he refers back to God as the originator of this totality.³⁷⁹ Pannenberg calls this a crude model of his theology of history because it overlooks the fact that there is a crisis involved in every individual event of history, where in its own particular way, the power of the infinite is at work.³⁸⁰

The view that the relationship between the finite and the infinite is mediated negatively is connected to Pannenberg's argument of the relationship between theology and philosophy. When humans take account of the finite world in its fragmentariness it compels them to seek a unity for the objects of experience. Pannenberg thinks this unity must lie outside the world itself, thinks Pannenberg. The disunity of the finite causes men to seek a unity which can only be found in the infinite. This is what he means by the negative mediation of the finite and infinite. It is when the all-determining reality is sought after that men show themselves to have a natural religiousness. The quest for ultimacy in the explanation of reality as

³⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 251-252.

³⁷⁹Ibid., p. 254-255.

³⁸⁰Ibid., p. 255.

a whole betrays the religious propensities of man. Theology and philosophy both seek this reality and therefore have a point of contact. When philosophy refuses to search for the ultimate explanation of reality it falls short of its central purpose, says Pannenberg.

This also explains why Pannenberg rejects analogical arguments for the existence of God. For him they represent a positive assessment of the finite rather than a negative one. In other places Pannenberg has been careful to separate himself from the classical arguments for the existence of God. He would see the doctrine of analogy as fitting into this mold.³⁸¹ Pannenberg thinks these arguments tend to infringe upon the transcendence of God because they view the finite in a positive rather than negative way. Therefore he thinks his view to be an alternative to them.

This part of the discussion of those who are critical of Pannenberg rose out of claims that his views represent a refurbished Hegelianism. In personal correspondence with Dr. Pannenberg, I addressed a question to him with these criticisms in mind. I asked him, "In what sense is your notion of 'revelation as history' different from Hegelian historiography, which in some sense, might be termed 'history as revelation?'" He responded by saying:

...there is a widespread misunderstanding of my position in relation to the philosophy of Hegel. I am not a follower of Hegel's basic assumptions in philosophy, although I take him rather seriously as a thinker of the first magnitude in modern developments of metaphysics. My own philosophical convictions are more closely related to Dilthey than to Hegel, especially in connection with the hermeneutics of human experience. When I talk on the totality of meaning or the totality of history, it is more Dilthey than Hegel who is

³⁸¹A very helpful source in explaining the doctrine of analogy is E.L. Mascall's *Existence and Analogy*. Archon Books, 1967.

in the background of such language, although I have some critical reservations concerning the metaphysical groundwork (or extrapolations) of Dilthey's thought in terms of a philosophy of life. As compared to Hegel's philosophy of history, I do not envisage history as the unfolding of the dynamics of an "idea", but rather as a sequence of contingent events, the continuity of which becomes intelligible only in looking back. Concerning his philosophy of the history of religions,... I especially object to his presentation of the history of religions as a sequence of types rather than looking at the development within each particular historical religion and at the interactions between them. Finally, my idea of revelation is based on the concept of anticipation which has no parallel in Hegel's thought, but is rooted in an analysis of historical experience in terms of a description like Dilthey's, although Dilthey did not develop the notion of anticipation either, but emphasized that the meaning of present experience could be decided only on the basis of a future outcome of history.³⁸²

Here Pannenberg attempts to show that his ideas as related to revelation are not just a remodeled Hegelianism. Earlier, as well as in this context Pannenberg has described how he is critical of Hegel, particularly for not seeing the provisionality of his own standpoint in history. Hegel's foreclosure on the future is remarkably different from Pannenberg's view of the openness of the future. Pannenberg thinks Hegel's view undermines the unity of truth and God's full and complete revelation. It is plainly too simplistic to charge Pannenberg with having borrowed Hegel's philosophy of history and making it his own. He has been careful to note the significant differences which exist between Hegel and himself. By noting these differences Pannenberg has shown that he has not blindly or uncritically accepted Hegelian historiography.

Though many do not share a positive assessment of Pannenberg's work, no one denies that for him history is the workbench of theology.³⁸³

³⁸²Letter received from Wolfhart Pannenberg, November 11, 1986.

³⁸³Ibid., p. 195.

It has an epistemological priority to everything else that theology hopes to accomplish. This is because of his deep concern for the unity of truth which is to be investigated in the public arena. Richard J. Neuhaus notes that Pannenberg shows a wide range of interests including "politics, race relations, psychology, biology, and sociology..."³⁸⁴ He views these as areas where his theological constructs can be tested and examined in the light of "many worlds of thought."³⁸⁵

Gunter Klein, Jurgen Moltmann, and Gerhard Sauter are also critical of various aspects of Pannenberg's view of history. Klein focuses on Pannenberg's "classification of Jesus' resurrection as history."³⁸⁶ This is because Klein thinks Pannenberg's view causes the resurrection to lose its eschatological character and merely becomes a past phenomenon of the world.³⁸⁷ Pannenberg attacks this claim for not recognizing that in his view, history and apocalypticism are not in tension. But this is not satisfactory for Klein who thinks this separates "the object of faith from the ground of faith." Pannenberg quickly answers that faith must always begin as knowledge of revelatory history.³⁸⁸

In further developments of this debate, Klein accepts from Pannenberg four basic topics which serve as the basis of their ongoing discussion. First, there is the question of an alternative to the theology of the word. In this case Klein thinks Pannenberg "devalues" the biblical word of both the Old and New Testaments because he wishes to hear the language

³⁸⁴Pannenberg, *Theology and Kingdom of God*, p. 17.

³⁸⁵*Ibid.*

³⁸⁶Robinson and Cobb, p. 78.

³⁸⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸⁸*Ibid.*

of scripture as making reference to fact. Secondly, there is disagreement over the understanding of how the Old Testament, New Testament, and primitive Christianity relate to one another in terms of the transmission of traditions. This point of contention is very important to Pannenberg's system since it is in the midst of history's continuity that God reveals himself. Yet Klein thinks Pannenberg has allowed tradition to predominate over event and does not do justice to the whole range of the subject matter surrounding tradition. Thirdly, the significant concept of revelation is connected to the anticipatory (proleptic) character of Jesus' history and especially his resurrection. Klein thinks that Pannenberg's view is like a *deus ex machina* where the meaning of historical events is determined by the final event. Pannenberg developed the notion of a prolepsis of the Christ event as a foretaste of human destiny and to overcome the provisionality of past and present history. Klein thinks this view is destructive to the decisive significance of Jesus' resurrection for all of mankind since it is treated as a special instance of the future general resurrection. Klein is clearly mistaken here since even a cursory reading of chapter seven of *Jesus: God and Man* ("The Meaning of the Vicarious Death on the Cross") reveals Pannenberg's defence of the vicarious death of Jesus. Fourthly, in light of proleptic eschatological nature of the Christ event there is a dialectic between faith and knowledge. This statement involves a classic confrontation between dialectical theology and a theologian like Pannenberg. Klein, representing the dialectical view, thinks Pannenberg puts God at man's disposal by making him an object in the world. Again, Klein's research of Pannenberg's

work is incomplete. It has been shown that Pannenberg avoids this problem by developing a natural theology based on man's experience of the world and not the world itself. In his notion of God as the all-determining reality he does not allow his argument to present God as one object among all other objects of experience. Yet Klein persists in his critique by saying that the function of preaching is to cause the hearer to make a leap of faith without the basis of certainty. But Pannenberg thinks "one should reckon with degrees of probability in a progressive demonstration of the gospel, just as is characteristic of other areas of knowledge." This is the basis of the claim that Pannenberg has developed a theology of reason and makes clear his motives as a Christian apologist. However, he thinks that it is not just an unbelieving world which should be convinced of Christian truth claims, but Christians themselves must have the surety of the universality of their claims to sustain faith.

Another important critic of Pannenberg is his former colleague, Jürgen Moltmann. He is probably best known for his book entitled *Theology of Hope*, which appeared in English translation in 1967. Moltmann is often very appreciative and accepting of Pannenberg's work but has a number of serious reservations. Like Klein, he begins his criticism of Pannenberg on a certain facet of his theology of history. In Moltmann's case, however, he focuses on Pannenberg's understanding of revelation being perceived indirectly. As was shown above, this is the central content of the first thesis described in *Revelation as History*.

Moltmann contends that it is Pannenberg's intention to extend and

supersede the Greek cosmic theology. Thus the cosmological proof of God's existence is replaced by a theology of history which proclaims the unity of reality as history. Moltmann says:

History thus becomes the new summary term for reality in its totality. In place of the metaphysical point in which the unity of the cosmos culminates, we have the eschatological point in which history finds its unity and its goal. Just as in the light of that culminating metaphysical unity the cosmos could be recognized as indirect revelation of God, so now in the light of the end of history, history can be recognized as indirect revelation of God.³⁸⁹

Moltmann's complaint is that in effect Pannenberg has replaced the theology of the word (kerygmatic theology) with a theology which perceives God in a language of facts.³⁹⁰ Moltmann says he has not been clear as to whether he has exchanged a theophany of nature with a theophany of history.³⁹¹ Moltmann thinks Pannenberg has, in spite of Kant's critique, resurrected the old cosmological argument. This is what he means by Greek cosmic theology but which has the additional feature of an eschatological application.³⁹² The end result is a method which "leads to a view of 'historic fact' which, with its implied concept of being, of 'mirror' and 'image', appears to resist any combination with faith and hope and even with history."³⁹³ It is a mistake for Pannenberg, says Moltmann, to think his theology of history is different from the theology of *heilsgeschichte* because it seeks to be historically verifiable.³⁹⁴ "But that is just what cannot be

³⁸⁹Ibid., p. 78.

³⁹⁰Ibid.

³⁹¹Ibid., p. 79.

³⁹²Ibid.

³⁹³Ibid.

³⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 79-80.

maintained, unless and until the concept of the 'historical' is transformed and the theology of history becomes the ground of its redefinition," says Moltmann.³⁹⁵

Moltmann agrees with Pannenberg's hermeneutical principle of seeing texts in their historical context to find their meaning as opposed to applying them to a theology of present existence.³⁹⁶ He quotes Pannenberg in recognizing this truth:

Only a conception of the course of history which does in fact join the past situation with the present and with its future horizon can provide the comprehensive horizon in which the limited present horizon of the expositor and the historical horizon of the text blend together.³⁹⁷

But Moltmann adds,

Since this comprehensive context of history can be embraced in the midst of history only in terms of a finite, provision and therefore revisable perspective, it remains fragmentary in view of the open future.³⁹⁸

Because history has not yet reached its termination point Moltmann thinks it is difficult to see how it is possible to express the idea of God in the midst of an unfinished history. Thus, Moltmann thinks it would be best for Pannenberg to give up the intentions of the cosmological argument.³⁹⁹ "As long as the reality of the world and of man in it is not yet "whole", but its totality is historically at stake, there can be no proof of God from it."⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵Ibid., p. 80.

³⁹⁶Robinson and Cobb, p. 91.

³⁹⁷Moltmann, p. 277.

³⁹⁸Ibid.

³⁹⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 277-278.

Pannenberg says he cannot help feeling "a certain mild surprise" in seeing Moltmann's argument.⁴⁰¹ He says he agrees with Moltmann's view that the wholeness of the world and man is still at stake because of the freedom of God and the openness of the historical reality. Pannenberg says that Moltmann's advice to give up the intentions of the cosmological argument does not apply to him since he has carefully separated himself from it.⁴⁰² Pannenberg claims that Moltmann's interpretation has been without close inspection and this causes him to misrepresent his theological system.⁴⁰³ If Pannenberg is right Moltmann has missed the nature of the argument based on the all-determining reality. Here Pannenberg clearly eschews the cosmological argument for one based on human experience of the world.

The central feature of the dispute between Pannenberg and Moltmann is the place of history in Pannenberg's theology. Undeniably, the most significant event in the process of history is the resurrection of Jesus. It is the proleptic event which gives all of history its meaning, according to Pannenberg. The full development of his argument for the historicity of the resurrection is found in *Jesus: God and Man*.

Pannenberg believes that a discussion of the historical reality of the resurrection must begin with a "Christology from below" to demonstrate Jesus' unity with God. He complains that most of biblical scholarship has established its Christology through an appeal to his proclamation and work,

⁴⁰¹ Robinson and Cobb, p. 255n.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

not by his resurrection.⁴⁰⁴ While he believes it is important to begin with a "Christology from below" instead of a postulated "Christology from above" to substantiate Jesus' unity with God, Pannenberg says it is the resurrection and not his proclamation and work which accomplishes this. This is why he says, "Jesus' unity with God was not yet established by the claim implied in his pre-Easter appearance, but only by his resurrection"⁴⁰⁵

In maintaining a "Christology from below", which implies examination of the historical Jesus, Pannenberg shifts the emphasis to Jesus' resurrection versus his pre-Easter activity because the latter is not a reasonable basis to justify faith in him.⁴⁰⁶ His claim to authority "by itself cannot be made the basis of a Christology..."⁴⁰⁷ This can only be verified by Jesus' unity with God, which is demonstrated by the resurrection.⁴⁰⁸

It is curious that Pannenberg does not rely primarily on the Gospel accounts to discuss the historical reality of the resurrection but instead

⁴⁰⁴Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 53.

⁴⁰⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁰⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸The main concern here is the resurrection as a historical event. But since Pannenberg unifies fact and meaning, he believes it is important to describe the significance (meaning) of Jesus' resurrection. He describes this significance in the following six statements:

a) If Jesus has been raised, then the end of the world has begun.

(b) If Jesus has been raised, this for a Jew can only mean that God himself has confirmed the pre-Easter activity of Jesus.

(c) Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus moved so close to the Son of Man that the insight became obvious: the Son of Man is none other than the man Jesus who will come again.

(d) If Jesus, having been raised from the dead, is ascended to God and if thereby the end of the world has begun, then God is ultimately revealed in Jesus.

(e) The transition to the Gentile mission is motivated by the eschatological resurrection of Jesus as resurrection of the crucified One.

(f) Particularly the last consequence throws light on the relationship between the appearances of the resurrected Jesus and the words spoken by him: what the early Christian tradition transmitted as the words of the risen Jesus is to be understood in terms of its content as the explication of the significance inherent in the resurrection itself. pp. 67-72.

turns to the the Pauline material of 1 Corinthians 15. He does this to distinguish between the resurrection as an eschatological event and the resuscitation of a corpses recorded by the Evangelists (Mark 5:35-43, Luke 7:11-17, John 11). Pannenberg makes this distinction because he believes Jesus' resurrection is qualitatively different from the corpse resuscitations noted above. For example, it could be expected that these people would die again while Jesus' resurrection took on an imperishable quality (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). This is why Pannenberg does not view the resurrection as the mere resuscitation of a corpse but as an eschatological event belonging to the category of a general resurrection.⁴⁰⁹

Pannenberg notes that there are two traditions in primitive Christianity which deal with Jesus' resurrection as a historical problem. The first is the account of the empty tomb and the second the appearances of the resurrected Lord.⁴¹⁰ Mark holds to an account of the empty tomb; Luke records them both but holds them apart, while Matthew "connects the discovery of the grave with a report of an appearance; John...then allows appearances to take place at the grave."⁴¹¹ Paul reports appearances of the resurrected Jesus by themselves.⁴¹²

Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 15 involves an enumeration of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. His appearances are "to Peter, then to the Twelve, then to five-hundred Christian brethren at once, then to James, the brother of Jesus, then to the apostles, and finally to Paul himself."⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 81.

⁴¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁴¹²*Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴¹³*Ibid.*

Pannenberg says that the clear intention of this enumeration is "to give proof by means of the witnesses for the facticity of Jesus' resurrection."⁴¹⁴ In the end Pannenberg says that the appearance tradition and the grave tradition came into existence independent of one another and serve as complementary views which assert the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection.⁴¹⁵

Pannenberg says it is unacceptable to circumvent this hard evidence by assuming a narrow view of reality in which "dead men do not rise."⁴¹⁶ In principle historiography is the vehicle best suited to describe what took place on Easter since faith "cannot ascertain about events of the past that would perhaps be inaccessible to the historian."⁴¹⁷ Consequently, it is not suprising to find Pannenberg saying, "In the sense of a logical presupposition...., the knowledge of Jesus' history, including the resurrection from the dead, is the basis of faith."⁴¹⁸ For Pannenberg, faith and knowledge are intimately connected.

Hamilton attacks this view of faith by an appeal to tradition. He claims Pannenberg has drifted from the "Calvinistic doctrine of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit," and that "a whole family of traditional theological terms have been deprived of its meaning..." by Pannenberg's view.⁴¹⁹ Worse yet, he has demonstrated unfaith by searching for evidence of faith in history.⁴²⁰ If Pannenberg were at all a cynical person he might respond to these criticisms by saying, "So, what!" The point is that Pannenberg's critical

⁴¹⁴Ibid.

⁴¹⁵Ibid., p. 105.

⁴¹⁶Ibid., p. 109.

⁴¹⁷Ibid.

⁴¹⁸Robinson and Cobb, p. 187.

⁴¹⁹Ibid., p. 188.

⁴²⁰Ibid., p. 189.

rationalism and theology of reason do not allow an appeal to authority to protect the viability of faith. There is little of substantial or real criticism here on the part of Hamilton against Pannenberg.

In a vein similar to Hamilton, John Cobb thinks Pannenberg puts faith at the mercy of the historians and leaves it vulnerable to the course of historical research.⁴²¹ He complains that historical research might uncover ancient documents which could conceivably change our view of the events of Jesus' life and resurrection; show a conscious deception on the part of the disciples, or reveal that the earliest Christian community was caught up in the techniques of auto-suggestion to induce resurrection appearances.⁴²² However, Pannenberg believes faith must take these risks. Also, even if such "new evidence" were to come to light, who would want to continue to have faith in something that was shown to be so straight forwardly mistaken? For people to have faith in something that is demonstrably false represents the worst form of irrationalism, according to Pannenberg. What is shocking here is that Cobb seems to suggest that Christians should hang on to their faith even if historical research shows it to be blatantly in error!

Pannenberg says that the correct definition of the relationship between faith and knowledge is one of *inter alias*.⁴²³ When knowledge of the history of Jesus is available the promissory nature of history provides a way to trust the God who raised Jesus from the dead.⁴²⁴ This protects the

⁴²¹Ibid., pp. 214-215.

⁴²²Ibid., p. 215.

⁴²³Ibid., p. 267.

⁴²⁴Ibid.

"decision" of faith from the suspicion that it rests upon a pious self-deception.

Pannenberg shows his exasperation with Hamilton who charges that his view of faith means *fides historica*. Pannenberg says Hamilton has failed to recognize how his view goes beyond mere cognizance of historical information to faithful trust.⁴²⁵ He adds that "Hamilton's parallel assertion, that the 'proper methodology has been substituted for the Holy Spirit,' sets forth so crude a caricature of my position, and one which I hope, is so obviously a caricature to any unprejudiced judgement, that there is no need to answer it."⁴²⁶

To further explain his position against charges that he holds an erroneous view of faith, Pannenberg says his view sees faith as dependent upon the reliability of the historical truth of Jesus and his message. Therefore, the logical order is first a knowledge of the history of Jesus followed by an act of faith. This "enables faith to resist the gnawing doubt that it has no basis beyond itself and that it merely satisfies a subjective need through fictions, and thus is only accomplishing self-redemption through self-deception."⁴²⁷ For Pannenberg there must be reasons for the decision of faith in the midst of a myriad of possible decisions one could make. "Therefore it is the business of theological knowledge to confirm the truth which is presupposed for faith and on which it trusts."⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁴²⁷*Ibid.*

⁴²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 271.

Consistent with views that were explained in chapter one on the philosophy of science and the scientific status of theology, Pannenberg says historical research does not obtain certainty in its results but only probability in its claims after assessing the evidence. This involves the idea of the unity of truth and for Pannenberg these are matters of personal and intellectual integrity.⁴²⁹

Theology as the Science of God

It should be clear that the implied result of Pannenberg's philosophical theology is an apologetic for the truth of the Christian revelation. He believes he not only defends the Christian faith against the capitulation of modern Protestantism to skepticism but also in opposition to its atheistic detractors. But with reference to apologetics, how does he view the position of other world religions in light of Christian truth claims?

It has already been shown that the phenomena of the world religions serve as an integral part of Pannenberg's philosophy of religion. They reveal man's innate religious longing and point to the possible existence of God as the all-determining reality. Also religion is a part of the scope of reality as a whole and therefore must be investigated. Historical religions are to be regarded as "expressions of the experience of the divine reality within the totality of meaning of experienced reality."⁴³⁰ This is connected with Pannenberg's notion of God as the all-determining reality, which is descriptive of man's concern for ultimacy in both philosophy and religion.

According to Pannenberg, the place to begin in answering this question is to devise a system which sees theology as the science of God. In

⁴²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁴³⁰Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 313.

this setting religious claims are to be "regarded as hypotheses to be tested by the full range of currently accessible experience."⁴³¹ This means that the task of religious studies is to examine, through comparative procedures, the ways in "which different religions have been able to take account of the experience of reality to which their adherents have been exposed and the ability of the different religious traditions to cope with the experiential situation of mankind today."⁴³² He clearly thinks Christianity is best able to do this.

An important aspect of his system is revealed in this context. For Pannenberg it is essential that theology seek a general base in the science of religion. He cites the work of Paul Lagarde and Franz Overbeck who "campaign[ed] for the abolition of theological faculties" to be replaced "by chairs or faculties of general religious studies."⁴³³ Ernst Troeltsch as well thought Christianity should seek a more broad and general base and "proclaimed the superiority of Christianity to other religions an open question" which should be settled by the investigative procedures of a science of religion.⁴³⁴

Pannenberg calls for a reconstitution of theology away from the view that theology is only a discussion of Christianity, to a science of religion where theology is an investigation of God as the all-determining reality. Pannenberg says this is a genuine concern for all religious traditions. "The method of a theology of religion and religions is to test religious traditions by

⁴³¹*ibid.*, p. 315.

⁴³²*ibid.*, p. 316.

⁴³³*ibid.*

⁴³⁴*ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

the standard of their own understanding of the divine reality."⁴³⁵ It is only in the context of theology as the science of God that apologetics is even possible. If theology remains separate from the science of religion it "cannot avoid the difficulties connected with the positivity of a 'science of faith'."⁴³⁶ Pannenberg adds, "We found that the task of theology was the testing of religious traditions in general against their specifically religious claims, and it follows from this that a theology of the Christian tradition can be regarded as nothing more than a specialised branch of theology in general."⁴³⁷ In the larger scheme of Pannenberg's system, these reflections are connected to his concern for the unity of truth and historical fact.

In the past the Christian tradition could afford to restrict theology to a theology of Christianity, particularly since it was the major force in European culture. However, in the present the Christian revelation is a matter of dispute.⁴³⁸ This leaves only two possible courses for Christian theology: It may take up the positivist position which appeals to divine revelation, at the cost of its intellectual legitimation, or it may choose a path whereby it can make the superiority of its claims known through open investigation and challenge from other religious traditions.⁴³⁹ Pannenberg stresses the importance of keeping the assumption of Christianity's superiority over other traditions open to investigation and critical inquiry.

⁴³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁴³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

⁴³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁴³⁹*Ibid.*

Pannenberg notes that the current structure of theology in German universities is one which restricts theology to a theology of Christianity.⁴⁴⁰ In his opinion this situation should be rectified by intensive educational reform where theology is viewed as the science of God, and participates with all other academic disciplines as an equal partner.

Such a program would "de-confessionalise" theology so as to elevate it to the status of a scientific discipline. Over time it would be expected that denominational distinctions would also disappear. If this were to occur, theology as it appears in Christianity would be regarded, not as evangelical or Catholic, but as Christian without further qualification.⁴⁴¹

Thus a theology of religion functions as a philosophical theology and gives a basis for theology as a whole. It also demonstrates a method by which theology can be established as a part of university faculties. The non-development of an understanding of theology as a whole ignores the "importance of history for religions and for Christianity in particular," says Pannenberg.⁴⁴²

This discussion of Pannenberg's philosophical theology began by contending that his methodology may require an entire rethinking of theological claims. He asks his readers to envision the possibility of a scientific theology against the protests of a well entrenched modern Protestantism. Pannenberg attacks modern unbelief because of its all too quick rejection of the question of God. He attempts to resolve this problem by the restructuring of theology through university reform. In a

⁴⁴⁰Ibid., p. 324.

⁴⁴¹Ibid., p. 371.

⁴⁴²Ibid.

metaphorical sense it does seem that he has "taken on the world." But if his analysis of the above systems is correct (and there is good reason to believe that it is) it would seem that the basic contention of this discussion is at least provisionally substantiated.

Pannenberg's philosophical theology is strongly academic and a powerful intellectual response to what he perceives to be the mistakes of modern Protestantism and the secular developments in contemporary society. He thinks the only way to address these problems is with a "theology of reason." Neuhaus says this commitment to rationality is a major obstacle to the acceptance of Pannenberg's work in the current intellectual scene.⁴⁴³ His opposition to a host of great theological thinkers such as Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich contributes to his lack of fashionability.

Of great concern here is the fact that most people of faith are separated from the realms of theological debate. To many individuals faith is a source of comfort and encouragement against the pressures of life. In light of this, what relevance does a theology of reason have to the "average" believer? Is he or she required to participate in these theological debates and, if so, at what level? There seems to be a certain danger that what Pannenberg has to say will be largely irrelevant to a great portion of the faithful. Is it possible that the theology of reason could serve as a catalyst in creating a theological elite? Does it ignore or circumvent pastoral concerns at the congregational level?

Pannenberg does not think so. In his view the "theology of reason poses no threat to Christian piety."⁴⁴⁴ He admits that "academic theology

⁴⁴³Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 43.

⁴⁴⁴*ibid.*, p. 45.

often works at a distance from the emotional life of Christian piety."⁴⁴⁵ But he thinks the aloofness of academic theology is due primarily to "the spirit of historical investigation and philosophical reflection" and that these skills are required of the technical theologian.⁴⁴⁶ However, he says, "...authentic theology has always been able to speak to the central motifs of the Christian faith."⁴⁴⁷ Doctrinal issues must always be related to the dynamic life of Christian faith. Pannenberg says, "A reasonable man stands in fearful awe before the mystery of existence, before the power of the future that will in its coming resolve the contradictions of experience. The beginning of wisdom is indeed the fear of God."⁴⁴⁸

Thus Pannenberg does not see the theology of reason as an arid rationalism divorced from Christian practice. Neuhaus says Pannenberg "holds himself responsible to, though not restricted by, the Christian tradition."⁴⁴⁹ Pannenberg is a committed "Church theologian" who thinks that in the classroom and at the pulpit the truth of the Kingdom is to be explored.⁴⁵⁰ There is a danger, however, that some interpreters of Pannenberg's work will think the theology of reason overshadows these features that give balance to his thought and personality.

Pannenberg is conscious of the task oriented nature of philosophical theology and commits himself to it. His system revolves around giving

⁴⁴⁵Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 13

⁴⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, p. 45.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 38-39.

expression to religious thought in the terms of philosophical inquiry. His central goal is to clarify religious beliefs and submit them to critical questioning in the milieu of our post-Enlightenment world of skepticism and secularization. No matter how he is finally assessed by his critics, there will be an ongoing admiration for the breadth and depth of his thought. Pannenberg relentlessly pursues religious truth but not as a category of truth separated from scientific and philosophical truth.

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APPENDIX

Prof. Karl Barth to Prof. Wolfhart Pannenberg
Mainz

Basel, 7 December 1964

Dear Colleague,

What must you have thought of me on your visit to us with your wife a while ago when I advised you with well-meant exaggeration not to publish anything for ten years until you had become clear as to what you wanted and had in mind? Your great work on christology, which you have so kindly sent me, must have been already finished then, and perhaps already in print. I have studied it in one sitting and see plainly now that you know very well where you want to go. Only too well, I might add, for the material decision which I regarded in our earlier meeting as merely experimental and provisional has been acted upon in this book with such breadth and clarity that it is hard to see how you could reverse it without a 180-degree conversion. And now that you have so definitely made the decision, we are theologically--and you yourself will not disagree--very different if not separated people.

I have every reason to respect and admire most sincerely a good deal in your achievement: Your astonishing breadth of reading in the exegetical, historical, and philosophical fields; the constancy with which you are able to stick to your course through all the thickets; the critical acumen that never fails in detail, and with which you are able to establish and safeguard yourself on both the right hand and the left. Your book is a venture of unusual significance.

And mark you, Dr. Pannenberg, I have read it--as some weeks ago I read the *Theology of Hope* of Jürgen Moltman--with the sincere curiosity whether I might be dealing at last with the child of peace and promise whose work would represent a genuine superior alternative to what I myself have attempted and undertaken in theology the last forty-five years. For a long time I have been waiting for this better option and I only hope I will be alert and humble enough to understand and recognize it as such should it

come my way. But in your project, too, I am not yet able to see it, believing rather that for all the originality with which you have ventured and executed it we have a serious regression to a mode of thinking which I cannot regard as appropriate to the matter and am thus unable to adopt.

My first reaction on reading your book was one of horror when on the very first page I found you rejecting M. Kähler in a way which led me to suspect that, like others, you--and you with particular resolution and with an orientation toward a Jesus who may be found historically--intended to pursue a path from below to above. Obviously your intention did not offer you occasion to reflect that our common friend H. Vogel stopped at his admittedly very substantial analysis of the below, and never gave us the second part of his christology which was to deal with the above reached from the below. I wrestle in vain with the question by what right you manage to rest the doctrine of the revelation of God and Jesus' identity with him, on the basis of the figure of your historical Jesus and his message and commitment to God, confirmed by his resurrection from the dead--all of which is much weaker in substance than Vogel's historical Jesus. As Biederman already saw and said, we know that the resurrection may be reduced historically to objective visions of the disciples and the brute fact of the empty tomb. Is not this to build a house on sand--the shifting sand of historical probabilities moving one way yesterday and another today? And if you think you are not dealing here with sand but with solid rock, does this not consist finally and properly of Jewish apocalyptic, in whose context you think we can explain both the pre-Easter Jesus and the risen Lord? Is it in the light of this that you explain the recognition and acknowledgement of a general ordination of man to a being that transcends his life and death? In its positive content is your christology--after the practice of so many modern fathers--anything other than the outstanding example and symbol of a presupposed general anthropology, cosmology, and ontology? I have looked in vain in your exposition for new shores, for something better than this return to the old shores. I concede to you with praise the formal point that on your proposed way you have followed a consistent course from below to above, or from the general to the particular--beginning with the shadowy figure of your historical man Jesus (beyond the only historically sure fact of the New Testament text) you could not come to any other result. Over against this I believe that for all its difficulties the christology of the early church is much more promising. I expect your position and my own will be improved on when we have a more energetic and careful treading of the path from above to below, from the particular to the general. In the meantime, if you will pardon the harsh expression, I can only regard your own path as reactionary.

I cannot think you expected any other attitude from me. It alters in no way my thanks for your stimulation and instructive work--nor the fact that so far as time and strength permit I shall follow your future career with close interest.

My regards to your wife and friendly greetings to yourself.

Yours,
Karl Barth⁴⁵¹

Prof. Wolfhart Pannenberg to Prof. Karl Barth

Mainz-Gonsenheim, 9 May 1965

Dear Professor Barth,

Please permit me to send you sincere greetings for your birthday tomorrow with the hope that in the meantime you have completely overcome your illness, which Mr. Ritschl told me about in the winter. May I also thank you for the letter which you wrote me in December about my book on christology. It moved me greatly, especially when I heard from Mr. Ritschl how far from well you were at the time, that you should have read my book so thoroughly and taken the time and energy to write so full a letter to me. Of course, I cannot say that I feel you have understood me. After your friendly reaction to my first effort I was bold enough to hope that you would perceive in my work a continuation of the basic thought of your theology of revelation in a changed intellectual climate. Have I really found in christology the symbol of a general anthropology that has its basis elsewhere? Have I not rather tried to understand the event of Jesus of Nazareth as a mutation of its own--as of all earlier and later--general historical presuppositions? It has been my concern not to begin with the generality of a soteriological-anthropological interest or a christological concept of a God-Man-unity but rather with the highly particular and unique fact of the historical event of Jesus of Nazareth. It has thus seemed unavoidable that I should start with the historical question of Jesus of Nazareth, since otherwise his historical particularity would be concealed at once by general theological or other concepts. My different approach to the significance of historico-critical biblical investigation for theology (in spite of

⁴⁵¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. *Karl Barth; Letters 1961-1968* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), pp. 177-179.

the many ways in which philosophical considerations constrict the modern historical method) is the prominent sign of the change of intellectual climate in comparison with your own work. Even from my student days in Heidelberg it has seemed to me, of course, that a change at this point was being unavoidably forced even on those who will not give up the basic features of their theological opposition to Neo-Protestant anthropocentrism. If you cannot see the problem which inevitably arises at this point for those who have studied with you, as I gather from your remarks on the historical study of scripture, then I can understand, of course, that you regard my effort as a superfluous and, as you put it, "reactionary" enterprise. But might there not also be here a limitation in your awareness of the problem with which you once started, in what was for the most part a justifiable antithesis to the theological historicism of a Troeltsch or a Harnack? I venture to put the question here only because I would like to express my conviction that even though a critical turn is made in this question it will still be possible to continue your concentration of theology on the truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which transcends all our human questioning and speaking. I shall never cease to be grateful that I learned from you to focus all theological work on this center.

With the request that you will give my kind regards to your honored wife and to Miss V. Kirschbaum.

Yours respectfully,
Wolfhart Pannenberg⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² Ibid., pp. 350-351.