

A M E R I C A N U N I V E R S I T Y S T U D I E S

The Term “Person” in
the Trinitarian Theology
of Wolfhart Pannenberg

THEODORE JAMES WHAPHAM

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Introduction

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the doctrine of the Trinity had fallen into disrepute among many theologians. In a move that is emblematic of this attitude, Friedrich Schleiermacher addressed the Trinity in the appendix of *The Christian Faith* as a second order proposition that had no practical value.¹ However, with the publication of the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth does a great deal to contribute to the resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity which takes place in the twentieth century.² One important element of this contribution is his critique of the term “person” as a modern translation of the term *hypostasis*, which had been used by the Greek speaking Fathers of the Church to describe the distinctions within the Godhead. His criticisms of the term are manifold, including his complaint that *hypostasis* was never adequately clarified and that in the wake of modernity the term person has become tinged with the ideas of self-consciousness, personal autonomy, and volition. Barth argues that none of these associations is fitting for a proper understanding of divine personhood. Given the great confusion associated with the term “person,” Barth chooses to develop a different term to express the same concept, rather than using “person” in a highly technical sense or attempting to incorporate the notion of self-consciousness into the doctrine of the Trinity. *Seinsweise* (mode of being or way of being) is the term that he selects to carry this burden. He views this term as the literal translation of the term *hypostasis* into modern theological conversations without the excess theological and etymological baggage of the term “person.”

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2d ed, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1928), 738-9.

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol 1.1, trans, G. W. Bromiley, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 295-384 .

Karl Rahner, writing approximately ten years later, shares many of the concerns that Barth has with regard to the usage of the term person.³ Rahner finds this term problematic because, despite the history of its use among theologians and in the magisterium, “person” in modern usage tends to imply an individual consciousness and center of activity. Rahner feels that the implicit (or explicit) application of such categories to the divine *hypostases* serves to undermine Trinitarian monotheism. Thus, while he disagrees with Karl Barth’s opinion that the word is inherently ill-suited to express its intended meaning, and he affirms that the term must be kept because of the history of its use by the magisterium, he argues that the word has developed to the point that it is “not in every respect well adapted to express what is meant and that it does not lack certain disadvantages.”⁴ For this reason, Rahner offers the term *Subsistenzweisen* (modes or manners of subsisting) to help clarify the ambiguities that he believes have become a part of the contemporary context and use of the term “person.” He argues that this category “is better, simpler, and more in harmony with the traditional language of theology and the Church” than Barth’s *Seinsweisen* because it says exactly what Thomas means by “person” and because it appeals to the Christian’s experience of the Father, Son, and Spirit as revealed in salvation history.⁵

Thus, by the middle of the twentieth century, the influence of the two great Karls of the theological world led to a reevaluation of the understanding of Trinitarian personhood. However, Jürgen Moltmann provides a very different appreciation of the term person in his own Trinitarian theology that proceeds from an emphasis on other important developments in Rahner’s Trinitarian theology.⁶ He argues that in order to avoid the influence of a long standing crypto-modalism that had crept into traditional Western understandings of the doctrine of the Trinity, all Trinitarian theology must begin from the concrete revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He cites Barth’s and Rahner’s desires to remove the term “person” from theological treatises on the doctrine of the Trinity as the most obvious examples which continue the centuries-old trend of crypto-modalism in

3. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel, with an introduction by Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 42–45; 73–78.

4. Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, 44.

5. *Ibid.*, 110.

6. Most notably the placement of the doctrine of the Trinity after the treatment of divine unity in Scholastic manuals and Rahner’s insistence on the identity of the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Western Trinitarian theology⁷. Moltmann so emphasizes the persons of the Trinity (and thus argues strongly against any attempt to jettison this term from theological discourse) that he takes issue with idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is the distinctly Christian form of monotheism.⁸ For Moltmann, monotheism is so connected to theological, political, and social monarchy that it threatens the uniqueness of the contribution of Christ and must therefore be dropped from theology. Instead, the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit must be located within the concept of personhood. He finds this unity of the Trinitarian persons in the notion of perichoresis, the mutual indwelling of each of the Trinitarian persons with the other two.⁹

Thus, debates over the meaning, value, and significance of the term “person” have become a central characteristic of the resurgence of Trinitarian theology over the past century. This trend continues to be significant and has given rise to much of the contemporary emphasis on relationality that is ascendant in a great deal of contemporary Trinitarian theology. Wolfhart Pannenberg is among those who have made a significant contribution in the area in recent years. The publication of his three-volume *Systematic Theology* provides those interested in his work with a great deal to discuss.¹⁰ These volumes offer not only a condensed version of his theology on a range of topics, but they also arrange these ideas in a systematic fashion and demonstrate the relative importance of a number of themes that Pannenberg had not previously addressed in an extended format. Of these themes, none is more important than Pannenberg’s treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in chapter six of the first volume of *Systematic Theology*. Here, Pannenberg provides his readers with a distinctive and fully developed discussion of the Trinitarian persons and of the centrality of this doctrine for all of theology.

This study seeks to analyze and evaluate Pannenberg’s Trinitarian theology, especially in relation to his use of the term “person.” He argues that the category “person” must be retained in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Further, he makes this argument by employing an understanding of

7. *Ibid.*, 129-150.

8. In fact, Moltmann expressly rejects the idea of a Christian monotheism as heretical. “But monotheism and monarchianism are only the names for two sides of the same thing; the One is the principle and point of the integration of the many. . . . Strict monotheism obliges us to think of God without Christ, and consequently to think of Christ without God as well.” *Ibid.*, 130-1.

9. *Ibid.*, 174-178.

10. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Bd. 1-3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988-1993).

personhood that incorporates many of the changes that modern philosophy has introduced to its meaning.

The first chapter will address Pannenberg's theology and his broad theological orientation. It will analyze the first two volumes of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* which deal with questions of theological method, creation and Christian anthropology, and Christology. The section on theological method addresses Pannenberg's understanding of the goal of theology, the relationship between theology and philosophy, the study of religion, and revelation. The section on creation pays special attention to the notion of creation as the work of the entire Trinity that comes to a climax in the creation of human persons. The final section of this chapter addresses Pannenberg's Christology and soteriology. In each of the sections, the chapter endeavors to focus on the interrelation between these elements of the systematic expression of Pannenberg's theology and the doctrine of the Trinity in a fashion that demonstrates the centrality of Trinitarian theology for his entire project.

Next, the study addresses Pannenberg's understanding of the history of the term "person" giving special attention to its development within Trinitarian theology. The chapter proceeds chronologically, focusing on figures who Pannenberg argues are crucial to the development of the term "person." This chapter not only introduces the history of the term "person" and its development throughout the Patristic, Medieval, and Modern periods, but also demonstrates Pannenberg's appreciation and critique of the Christian tradition.

The central chapter of the work analyzes Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology. Special emphasis is given to Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, not only because it represents the fully systematic expression of his mature thought, but also because this work provides his most complete treatment of the themes of Trinitarian theology. To accomplish its task, this chapter addresses Pannenberg's use of the term "person" to describe the distinctions within the Godhead and his treatment of the unity and attributes of the divine essence. This second aspect is extremely important because Pannenberg's methodological decision to begin reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity with the three persons, makes the unity of the three the central problem for Trinitarian theology if it is to avoid Tri-theism. In effect, this method reverses the traditional approach to the doctrine of God and underscores the significance of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The final chapter of this investigation seeks to offer an appraisal of Pannenberg's understanding of Trinitarian personhood. The chapter focuses upon the contribution, importance, and influence, as well as the strengths and

weaknesses of his Trinitarian theology. Thus, this volume seeks not only to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology; it also seeks to point out the distinctive characteristics of his approach to the Trinity, evaluate the centrality of this doctrine in his overall system, offer an initial assessment of the lasting effects of his work, and recognize the strengths and liabilities of his approach.

Overview of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*

Before turning directly to the presentation of Wolfhart Pannenberg's contribution to the theology of divine personhood and his evaluation of the Christian tradition as it relates to this matter, it is essential to have a general understanding of Pannenberg's overall theological project, its historical context, and the place of Trinitarian theology within it. The current chapter seeks to provide this overview by studying his approach to theological method, anthropology, the doctrine of creation, and Christology.

Focusing on these overarching themes is justified for two reasons. First, a brief look at the table of contents of the first two volumes of *Systematic Theology* reveals that this material provides the immediate context leading up to and following his exposition of Trinitarian theology. Thus, from a systematic perspective, it will become clear that these themes are not mere discrete discourses that must be treated in a thorough-going dogmatic theology; rather, they are integrally related to one another, and the logic of each section is intertwined with that of the others. Secondly, this structure is indicated genetically because Pannenberg's theology developed in accordance with these themes. During various periods of his theological career, Pannenberg focused more intensely on one of these themes, as can be seen by looking at the major treatises that he has put forth, in particular *Revelation as History*, *Jesus-God and Man*, and *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Pannenberg refers to these stages in an autobiographical essay: "Nor is there much need to explain why I focused on Christology, anthropology, and theological method. . . In my mind, they were necessary stages before I could produce a systematic theology."¹ While such a characterization of the periods in Pannenberg's

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "An Autobiographical Sketch," in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 17.

development should not be overemphasized, this observation is nonetheless generally valid.

Thus, the structure of the present chapter will focus on a brief exposition of the key themes, questions, and concerns of each of these major segments of Pannenberg's systematic theology. Each section will conclude with a brief description of how this material relates to Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology. The major source for all of this material will be the first two volumes of *Systematic Theology* because this work offers the most mature presentation of Pannenberg's theology and emphasizes its relationship to the other branches of theological inquiry.

Biographical Sketch

Wolfgang Pannenberg was born in Stettin, Germany (currently in Poland), in 1928. Although he was baptized in the Lutheran church, his family was not particularly religious, and therefore, he did not receive any formal religious training as a child or regularly attend religious services. During his middle teen years, with his father called up for military service for the Third Reich, Pannenberg discovered the writings of Nietzsche and the world of philosophy. During this same stage in his life Pannenberg had a profound religious experience which he later described in the following words:

It was a quiet winter until early January 1945. On the sixth of January, while I was walking back home from school (instead of using the train)—a somewhat lengthy walk of several hours—an extraordinary event occurred in which I found myself absorbed into the light of the setting sun and for one eternal moment dissolved in the light surrounding me. When I became aware again of my finite existence, I did not know what had happened but certainly knew that it was the most important event of my life; I spent many years afterwards to find out what it meant to me.²

Around this same period of time, Pannenberg became a soldier during the last efforts to defend Germany at the end of the Second World War.

After these events, Pannenberg became a more focused student, studying philosophy and theology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. While initially it was philosophy that held his greatest interest, soon theology fascinated him to the degree that he knew that he would be a theologian for the rest of his life. During his studies, a scholarship enabled him to read philosophy with Karl Jaspers and theology with Karl Barth for a term at Basel. While Pannenberg

2. Ibid., 12.

developed a great respect for Barth (that he has carried with him ever since), he was dissatisfied with “the lack of philosophical rigor in his thought.”³ He continued his studies in the fall of 1950 at Heidelberg, where he was particularly influenced by Gerhard von Rad’s lectures on the exegesis of the Old Testament, Karl Löwith’s lectures on the philosophy of history, and Hans von Campenhausen’s lectures on patristic theology. He finished his doctoral work on Duns Scotus in 1953 and his unpublished *Habilitationsschrift* in 1955.⁴

It was during these student years that he became involved in the “Heidelberg Circle,” a small group of students in scripture, church history, and systematics who were dissatisfied with the theological options of Barth and Bultmann. They met regularly and tried to work out a systematic theology based on the exegetical work of Gerhard von Rad. After ten years of discussion, the group produced an outline for a new approach to theology entitled *Revelation as History* which was published in 1961.⁵ Although the group discontinued regular meetings in 1969 as a result of differences of opinion about the historicity and significance of the resurrection of Jesus, it helped to develop some of the most important themes in Pannenberg’s unique approach to theology.

In 1958, Pannenberg became a professor of systematic theology at the seminary of Wuppertal where he taught for three years with Jürgen Moltmann. Here, he started working on his first strictly systematic projects in anthropology and Christology. In 1961, he moved to the University of Mainz, where he faced the task of teaching the entirety of Christian theology. He moved again to the University of Munich in 1967, where he spent the rest of his teaching career. Although currently retired from teaching, Pannenberg remains active.

Pannenberg boasts an impressive body of published works. The most important works include: *Revelation as History*, 1961; *Jesus-God and Man*, 1968; *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 1973; *Anthropology in*

3. *Ibid.*, 14.

4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Analogie und Offenbarung: Eine kritische Untersuchung der Geschichte des Analogiebegriffs in der Gotteserkenntnis*, (*Habilitationsschrift*, Universität Heidelberg, 1955).

5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1968). In addition to acting as general editor to this volume, Pannenberg penned the introduction to the work and provided one of the most significant and programmatic essays for it, entitled “Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation.” The second German edition of the book also includes a new chapter in which Pannenberg responds to some of the early critics of the book.

Theological Perspective, 1983; *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 1988; and most importantly, his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, 1988, 1991, 1993.⁶

Theological Method

Throughout his career, Pannenberg has been preoccupied by questions related to the proper goal, method, and tools for Christian theology. This interest can be seen in works as early as his still unpublished *Habilitationschrift* on the role of analogy in Western theology up to Aquinas and as recently as the first volume of his magisterial *Systematic Theology*.⁷ In fact, more than half of this first volume is dedicated to taking up methodological issues, such as the nature and goal of systematic theology, the proper relationship between theology and philosophy, the academic study of religion and theology, and the doctrine of revelation. Therefore, in order to understand the overall character of Pannenberg's theology, this chapter will begin with an analysis of his approach to such questions of method. However, the following study will only have space to concentrate on the main points of this material and will not be able to discuss these issues in full detail.

Truth

Pannenberg begins the systematic presentation of his theology with the presupposition that the God of Jesus of Nazareth is the proper subject of all Christian theological inquiry and that theology, as any other academic discipline, has the duty to establish the truth of Christian doctrine in the court of rational inquiry. In short, Christians must constantly respond to questions about why one should commit oneself to membership in a Christian church. Pannenberg believes that the only possible reason for such a commitment to Christianity is because Christian doctrine is true. The task of the discipline of

6. Wollhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1968); *Jesus-God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe, 2d. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985); *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990); *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991-8).

7. Cf. Pannenberg, *Analogie und Offenbarung*, and Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 1-257.

systematic theology is to establish the truth of Christian doctrine.⁸ While in most cases such an effort to establish the truth of Christian doctrine is conducted by a believing and committed member of a Christian community, it can be undertaken by anyone open to the possibility of this truth because of the rational nature of the endeavor. This element of Pannenberg's thought will be taken up more fully below in relation to his views on philosophy and religion. Thus, Pannenberg, from the very outset of his *Systematic Theology*, envisions theology as an academic discipline which seeks to make truth claims about its subject matter and which is able to relate to other academic disciplines.

Pannenberg argues that theology is properly conceived of only as reflection on the God who has revealed himself in revelation. This approach agrees with the work of Karl Barth and contrasts strongly with liberal Protestant theologians such as Schleiermacher, who envision theology primarily as a reflection upon human experience of the divine. While he wants to avoid the presumption of truth that he finds in both, he is particularly concerned with Barth's understanding of dogmatics as the exercise through which the Church tests its own proclamations as the Word of God against the more fundamental understanding of the Word of God (i.e. Scripture and Jesus himself). Pannenberg views such approaches as fideism and rejects them because they presume the truth of Christianity rather than seeking to establish it. In response, he wants to reestablish the connection between faith and reason that Barth severs without reducing theology to anthropology as Schleiermacher does. Because God is the underlying and unifying Being behind all beings, Pannenberg recognizes that theology can and must touch upon all aspects of existence from creation and humanity to redemption and future consummation. In this way the relationship of individual treatises of a systematic theology to the whole becomes an important theme for Pannenberg and his understanding of truth.

Truth for Pannenberg is defined as that which remains constant throughout time and unifies all that is. Consequently, truth can only be adequately tested by evaluating a claim to truth from the perspective of the end of time. "All human concern for coherence can only be an imperfect and incomplete repetition. It can only follow in thought the divinely grounded unity of all that is true. Or it can only project it when God gives this unity the form of history, so that it comes to fulfillment in the process of time."⁹ This

8. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 4-5.

9. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 53.

fact indicates the eschatological nature of truth in Pannenberg's system. Because he defines truth as consistency over time, truth can only be finally judged from the perspective of the end of time. Until time comes to an end, all things that appear to be true are in question, since no one knows what the future holds. For example, the truth of the statement "The sun always rises in the east" is contingent upon the fact that the sun continues to rise and the orbit of the earth remains constant. However, in the future, something could (at least theoretically) happen to alter these events, thus invalidating this truth claim. On the other hand, if the sun continues to rise and the orbit of the earth remains unchanged, the statement about the sun rising in the east will have always been true. Pannenberg uses the term "anticipation" to describe this relationship between the contingency of truth claims and the future. Science anticipates the truth of the statement about the sun rising in the east because of its practical value.

However, because truth is for Pannenberg intimately related to the One, then from the current place of humans in the flow of history, truth claims must be supported by establishing their coherence with the various phenomena of existence. This work is precisely the task of systematic theology: to give support to the truth claims of Christian doctrine by establishing through rational argumentation their connections and interrelations not only with one another but with the entire human search for truth. "Systematic theology ascertains the truth of Christian doctrine by investigation and presentation of its coherence as regards both the interrelation of the parts and the relation to other knowledge."¹⁰ Coherence then becomes the primary criterion of truth for systematic theology.

Pannenberg develops his understanding of coherence in contrast to equating the truth of Christian dogma with the consensus of the Church, which he recognizes has had a long history of approval in the Christian tradition dating back at least to Vincent of Lerin's famous formula regarding dogma: *curandum est, ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum*.¹¹ However, Pannenberg views consensus as a criterion of truth that has limited applicability, because it has been undermined by the unavoidable appeals that it makes to authority. Nonetheless, the idea of consensus is connected to the view of truth as coherence because Pannenberg believes that the unity and universality of truth will be established throughout the course of history. In this revelatory process, that which is true will be accessible to all and undeniable to rational argumentation.

10. Ibid., 21-2.

11. Ibid., 11. cf. also Vincent of Lerin, *Commonitorium*, c. 2 -3.

Yet, as a result of the connection between God and Truth in Pannenberg's theology, he accepts the idea of truth as correspondence. But, for Pannenberg correspondence acts as a secondary characteristic of truth which serves to connect the epistemological criterion for truth with its ontological basis in God. In relation to truth, correspondence is ontologically prior to coherence, but coherence is epistemologically prior to correspondence. Thus, Pannenberg understands theology to be on at least an equal footing with all academic disciplines in its ability to establish its truth claims and moreover asserts that from the perspective of the end of history the truth of the Christian God will establish its fundamental importance both ontically and noetically.

As one important element of Pannenberg's overall theological method, his concept of truth is important for understanding his Trinitarian theology because it reveals right from the beginning the eschatological nature of his theology. It also helps develop his understanding of the ontological and noetic elements of truth which parallel the relationship and relative priority of the economic and immanent Trinity, and set the framework of what he is seeking to accomplish in the entirety of his theology. This parallel is perhaps the most interesting of the connections of the connections between Pannenberg's understanding of truth and the doctrine of the Trinity. Just as there is only one truth for Pannenberg, there is only one Trinity. Theologically and from the present limited and anticipatory perspective of humanity, priority must be given to the epistemological role of truth and correspondingly to the economy of the Trinity through which God is revealed and fulfilled in history. Yet, on the other hand, from the perspective of the fullness of time, when all will be fully revealed and God will be known as he truly is, then the priority of the ontological dimension of truth and the corresponding emphasis on the immanent life of the Trinity will be manifest.

Philosophy and Religion

It is already clear from this discussion of the role of truth in the enterprise of developing a systematic theology that Pannenberg views theology as a truly academic science. As a result, it is not at all surprising that Pannenberg would rebel against the radical distrust of philosophy that has long been characteristic of certain elements of Protestant theology from Luther through Ritschl down to Barth. If theology seeks to establish the truth claims of Christian doctrine, then it must first give some basis for assenting to the necessary prerequisite of a

self-revealing God. This task Pannenberg assigns to philosophy and the modern study of religion.¹²

Philosophy comes first in that it seeks to establish the rationality of belief in God (or at least ward off the notion of the irrationality of belief in God). It does so by setting up a negative limit of what cannot be included in the idea of God. Pannenberg begins his discussion of the role of philosophy in theology by describing the loss of significance of the very notion of “God.” He points out that from the very beginnings of Western philosophy there has always been a concern with “the final foundations of social and cosmic order and the courts which guarantee them.”¹³ Originally, this interest developed as a critique of the mythical and political cult of the gods which lay at the center of the Greek city states. When Christianity began to expand its influence outside of Judaism, it relied upon the philosophical notion of God that was used to critique the polytheistic pagan religions.¹⁴ However, by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, philosophy grew increasingly distrustful of the use of the term “God,” its metaphysical heritage, and its claims about knowledge beyond what is immediately verifiable.

Pannenberg is very critical of philosophical and theological schools which accept this current situation. “The difficulties in making what Christianity says about God intelligible today are at least sharpened if Christian theology perhaps too hastily follows the modern cultural consciousness in retreating from ‘metaphysics’ in the tradition of philosophical theology, and too little considers what this might mean for the validity of theological talk about God.”¹⁵ These statement demonstrates Pannenberg’s concerns with abandoning ontological categories too quickly. He states elsewhere that, “The Word ‘God’ (and this word alone) confronts us with the one totality of reality

12. Since Pannenberg’s retirement from teaching, he has published a book-length treatment of the history of philosophy and its relation to theology. For more on his reading of the history of western philosophy cf. Wollhart Pannenberg, *Philosophie und Theologie: Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

13. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 63.

14. Unlike many Protestant theologians working in the wake of men such as Albert Ritschl and Karl Barth, Pannenberg views this transmission of Jewish Christianity to the Gentile world through the appropriation of Greek philosophical concepts as a largely positive step. For a fuller treatment of his evaluation of this process of transmission and misappropriations that he argues developed as a result cf. Wollhart Pannenberg, “The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology” in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2. trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 119–83.

15. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 68.

and the totality of our own existence.”¹⁶ These statements point to the reason why philosophy, in the form of natural theology, cannot be wholly dismissed from the theological enterprise without destroying the presuppositions for the turn to the Christian God as he moved beyond the confines of Israel. However, they also indicate that the philosophical understanding of God cannot be imported uncritically.

Working from his critique of the current situation in theology and philosophy, Pannenberg proceeds to describe more specifically how he views the role of natural theology in systematic theology. Natural theology, as Pannenberg understands the term, is the philosophical doctrine of God that seeks to “correspond to the nature of the divine itself, unfalsified by political interests. . . or by the literary imaging, or lies, of the poets.”¹⁷ Most importantly, natural theology has as its sole purpose the task of acting as a neutral and rational arbiter of determining the constitutive elements of the divine nature. Such an enterprise can only go so far because God can only be known through his revelation. Pannenberg is arguing here that the nature of the divine cannot be inherently irrational. As a result, theology must be able either to show how the Christian notion of God conforms to the limits of natural theology or argue in accordance with the presuppositions of natural theology why its conclusions are wrong. In other words, theologians must be prepared either to describe how their statements regarding the future being of God are in keeping with the findings of natural theology or argue philosophically, prescinding from revelation, for the rationality of this revised understanding of the divine nature.

The critical function of natural theology helps to explain the value of proofs for the existence of God. Given the modern cultural topography, every religious message must demonstrate its truth claims by philosophical reflection on the relation of humanity and religion. In natural theology, proofs serve the role of providing rational arguments for the existence of God. Therefore, anthropological arguments for the existence of God have been infused with new importance as a result of the modern turn to the subject. On the other hand, Pannenberg believes that, in the current cultural situation, the cosmological proofs for the existence of God (along with the ontological argument) have become less helpful for the same reason. While Pannenberg argues that knowledge of God is only available through revelation, these proofs are not without value as descriptions of the reality of humanity and the world

16. *Ibid.*, 71.

17. *Ibid.*, 77.

which make talk about God intelligible and can thus establish criteria for such talk.¹⁸

To sum up, Pannenberg gives philosophical argumentation in the form of natural theology an important place in the overall scheme of his systematic theology. Although God is only known through revelation, the transmission of this historical revelation to the Gentile world necessitated interaction with Greek philosophy, which was able to establish neutral and rational criteria for what human interaction with the divine must be like. Christian theology can, and at times must, challenge these criteria, but in the end, Christian theology must either establish how the Christian God is in conformity with these criteria or utilize philosophical argumentation to dispute these criteria. This position also continues Pannenberg's attempt to mediate between the theological projects of liberal Protestantism and Neo-Orthodoxy. He is critical of the liberal overemphasis on the rationality of God and of the reasoning mind's unfettered access to the Being of God. In this sense, Pannenberg argues that there can be no natural religion; neither can religion be established through knowledge of God that is derived purely from the category of experience as Schleiermacher attempts. On the other hand, the kind of wholesale rejection of natural theology as idolatry which Barth employs also fails to give due respect to the realm of rational inquiry and serves only to isolate theology from other disciplines which seek to establish the one truth of reality.

After having discussed these limits for the idea of God as determined through philosophical inquiry, Pannenberg then hands over to the modern historical study of religion the chore of arguing for the truth of Christianity over other forms of religion.¹⁹ In this task, he is once again working to find an intermediate position between the theological approaches represented by Schleiermacher and Barth. Schleiermacher pointed to an anthropological basis for the human phenomenon of religion in the feeling of absolute dependence in order to argue for the superiority of Christianity. However, Schleiermacher's approach neglected what Pannenberg refers to as the theological nature of religion which must correspond to its anthropological

18. *Ibid.*, 94–95.

19. Pannenberg views the history of religions as a process of moving toward greater clarity and understanding of the notion of God, as can be seen in the movement from natural religions and animism to monotheism culminating in the person of Jesus and his revelation of God the Father and the Trinity of divine persons. He makes the argument based on the claim that “decision as to the truth of a religion or, primarily, as to the gods in whom its adherents believe prove to be gods, is thus taken in the process of experience of the world and the struggle to interpret it” (*Ibid.*, 168). Thus, he envisions the competition between religious traditions in the process of history as the process through which the truth of the religions is established.

nature. Barth, on the other hand, reacted drastically to Schleiermacher's emphasis on the role of religion in the notion of God, and argued that religion is another example of a purely human attempt to reach God apart from revelation and as a result is idolatrous; as such, it can make no valid contribution to theology. Pannenberg's approach seeks to mediate between these positions by allowing a place for the study of religion in establishing the truth of Christian doctrine; in this way it serves a positive and in fact indispensable purpose. For Pannenberg, even the most rudimentary anthropological understanding of religious experience results in a monotheistic understanding of God, because it presupposes the unity of humanity and a common basis for comparing various religious experiences.

But, Pannenberg also seeks to connect this purely anthropological understanding of religion with revelation, which means exploring the theological nature of religion and evaluating the competing truth claims of the various religions. The human phenomenon of religion, if it is to be valid, must not only come from the human side but also from God. The process of validating the theological basis of the human phenomenon of religion begins by verifying the superiority of monotheistic religions because of their greater conformity to the very notion of religion. However, this theoretical superiority is not enough. The truth claims of the monotheistic religions can and must be confirmed through history. "In other words, the gods of the religions must show in our experience of the world that they are the powers which they claim to be."²⁰ The decision as to the truth of a religion must therefore be evaluated in light of human experience. Pannenberg also lays out criteria through which the truth of a religion can be confirmed. These confirmations must take place first and foremost through the experience of the adherents to a particular religion. Further, validation occurs through the pressure of competition over differing religious claims and through the shifting sands of time. This leads to an early formulation of Pannenberg's understanding of revelation. "The manifestation of divine reality even within the unresolved conflicts of religious and ideological truth claims is called revelation."²¹ This connection between the concept of religion and that of revelation is in direct response to Barth's criticism of religion as a pure circumvention of revelation. However, it also is critical of the purely anthropological understanding of the notion of religion that Schleiermacher advanced.

Thus, in Pannenberg's understanding of a systematic theology, the works of philosophy and religious studies are the indispensable precursors to

20. *Ibid.*, 167.

21. *Ibid.*, 171.

establishing the Christian notion of revelation and more importantly the Trinitarian God who stands behind the act of God's self-disclosure through history. Further, because philosophy acts as a negative limit for the idea of God, Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology must be prepared to defend itself not only to Christians on the basis of Christian revelation, but also to philosophers of a wide variety of perspectives. The concept of religion furthers this connection between the sacred and the profane and points to the need for the specifically Christian understanding of monotheism to confirm its truth through human experience of the world, including religious phenomena.

Revelation

Pannenberg's interests in issues of theological method are brought together in his understanding of revelation. His work in this area dates back to *Revelation as History*, which first established his presence in theological circles as a major contributor to the contemporary shape of theology.²² In *Revelation as History*, Pannenberg and his co-contributors focus heavily on their critique of Barth's theology of the Word in favor of a greater emphasis on God's revealing action in history. However, in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg provides a more mature and nuanced presentation of the relation between deeds and words in revelation. Here, he begins the discussion by looking to the varied conceptions of revelation in scripture, particularly in the Hebrew Scriptures. Despite the variety of forms, he traces a development in Israel's understanding of the nature of revelation to the later prophets and the apocalypticists who subordinate the importance of present experience to a proleptic disclosure of what will be made universally manifest in the future. According to Pannenberg, this same insight is held to and carried forward in Jesus of Nazareth's preaching of the kingdom of God, which was both established in his public activity and yet to be fulfilled. As will become clear in the discussion of Christology below, the resurrection of Jesus is of particular importance for this understanding. From here Pannenberg turns to the subsequent development of the concept of revelation in the history of theology.

In this discussion, Pannenberg's theological method can once again be seen as an attempt to mediate between nineteenth and twentieth century theologies. However, in this case, the conversation partner from the nineteenth century is better seen in the understanding of revelation in Hegel and Rothe

22. Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*.

than in Schleiermacher.²³ Hegel was among the first to present the concept of revelation as God's self-disclosure. This connection allowed him to present all of creation and history as the ground for revelation because he related God's self-revelation to "the total process of the emanation of the world of finite things from God."²⁴ This idea was met with suspicion because it seemed to equate the process of world history entirely with God. Richard Rothe tried to adapt the idea of God's self-revelation in history by focusing only on certain historical events that were significant for salvation. However, Pannenberg is critical of the unnatural distinction that this view creates between the divine and the secular. In the twentieth century, Barth took over the concept of divine self-revelation, equating it with the Word of God that encounters humanity and demands the response of faith. However, Pannenberg holds to the criticism laid out in *Revelation as History* that "the reduction of the revelation of God to divine speaking hardly does justice to the complex variety of the biblical concepts of revelation, particularly to the fact that among OT ideas of revelation the one that is closest to the concept of divine self-revelation is the indirect self-demonstration of God by historical acts, as in the prophetic word of demonstration."²⁵ Thus, Pannenberg seeks to develop a theology of revelation that is based in history while at the same time doing justice to the relation between the divine and the secular. In an effort to respond to the critics of *Revelation as History*, Pannenberg argues that his reshaping of the idealistic view of universal history by relating it to biblical eschatology provides the opportunity to overcome the antithesis that developed between revelation as manifestation in deed and the supplementary inspiration of word.

In spite of the effort at reconciling the notions of revelation as history with revelation as word, Pannenberg still retains each of the seven major theses that he developed in the essay "Dogmatic Theses on Revelation" in *Revelation as History*. In fact, Pannenberg uses the fourth chapter of *Systematic Theology* as a stage to fine tune his earlier presentation of the concept of revelation and as an opportunity to defend and restate some of its most important features. Of particular importance in this regard is the idea that God's self-revelation takes place only indirectly. For Pannenberg this notion means that all of God's acts in history will only be seen as disclosing the revealing God from the vantage point of the eschatological end of history. As Christoph Schwöbel points out,

23. Richard Rothe (1799-1867) was a student of Schleiermacher who was also deeply influenced by the work of G. W. F. Hegel. The work with which Pannenberg is most interested in this context is "Offenbarung," *Theologischen Studien und Kritiken* 31 (1858): 3-49.

24. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 223.

25. *Ibid.*, 227.

“the crucial point of this rudimentary program is the claim that the end of history as the final self-revelation of God is proleptically realized in the resurrection of Jesus.”²⁶ Thus, the final revelation of God that is to take place at the end of history is revealed in an anticipatory fashion through the resurrection of Christ. In this way, Christians can have definitive, yet limited, access to revelation.

The third dogmatic thesis in Pannenberg’s 1961 essay asserts that “In the distinctions from special manifestation of the deity, the historical revelation is open to anyone who has eyes to see. It has a universal character.”²⁷ In other words, the fullness of God’s eschatological revelation will be apparent to all. In his more mature work, Pannenberg points out that the basis for this claim is established by the intratrinitarian relationship of the Word and the Spirit. This thesis is “directed against views which regard the Spirit as outside the content of the Word and additional to it, as though the apostolic kerygma were not Spirit-filled in virtue of its content.”²⁸ This statement suggests that the eschatological revelation of God does not need to be supplemented by inspiration as a principle of interpretation. It is also in concert with the earlier principles of Pannenberg’s theological method, which emphasize the interrelationship of the divine and the secular. Thus, the gracious revelation of God completes and fulfills all that is present in creation from the beginning. Overall, Pannenberg argues that the concept of revelation as history gives greater precision to the concept of the Word in that it helps to avoid the tendency to reduce the Word to a mythical category that depends on unproven claims to authority.²⁹

Pannenberg’s understanding of revelation is key to the development and placement of his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in his systematic theology. This relationship can be seen first of all in his adherence to the idea of revelation as the self-disclosure of God that is the shared presupposition of both Hegel and Barth. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, for Barth the self-revelation of God is intimately connected to the doctrine of the Trinity, in that it is this doctrine of the church that most explicitly deals with the content of revelation. Pannenberg is in full agreement with this element of Barth’s Trinitarian theology, although he does make adjustments

26. Christoph Schwöbel, “Wolfgang Pannenberg” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2d ed., ed. David Ford (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 182.

27. Pannenberg, “Dogmatic Theses” 135.

28. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 250.

29. *Ibid.*, 256.

allowing for the indirectness of revelation. In addition, having established the Christian understanding of revelation as grounded in the resurrection of Jesus (yet also open to and dependent upon future verification in history), the pathway is cleared for Pannenberg to turn more explicitly to the systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in contrast to the foundational issues that are the focus the first portion of his *Systematic Theology*. Such a presentation must always begin with the understanding of God that is disclosed in the event of revelation which is expressly Trinitarian.³⁰

In conclusion, Pannenberg's treatment of the foundational issues of theology is essential for understanding his doctrine of the Trinity. This connection is clear first in his eschatological understanding of truth. Verification of the truth claims of Christianity about the Trinity is at the very heart of his understanding of systematic theology. Further, it is in his understanding of truth that Pannenberg's emphasis on eschatology is first encountered. It is only in the future that truth will finally be revealed in the coming of the Trinitarian God into history. This focus on eschatology is continued in his treatment of the doctrine of revelation. Pannenberg follows Hegel and Barth in identifying revelation as the self-manifestation of the Trinitarian God. God reveals himself indirectly and anticipatorily throughout the course of history. However, in the eschatological fulfillment of time, God will fully reveal himself to humanity. In this way, Pannenberg gives ontological priority to the future for creation when all will be fulfilled. However, epistemologically and for methodological purposes he always begins with what has already been proleptically revealed in history. Finally, Pannenberg's use of philosophy and religion highlights his focus on the complementarity of faith and reason. Thus, his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity must either be in accordance with the principles of natural theology or use philosophical argumentation to modify its conclusions.

Creation and Theological Anthropology

In 1991 Pannenberg delivered the inaugural Osterhaven Lecture at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan and used this occasion to lay out the foundation for the first two volumes of his *Systematic Theology*. In doing so, he provided a general introduction to this project.³¹ This lecture helps to demonstrate the importance that Pannenberg attributes to the doctrine of

30. Ibid, 257.

31. This lecture was subsequently published as Pannenberg, Introduction, 1991.

creation, its place in the overall structure of a systematic theology, and its connection to Trinitarian theology: “Because of its close connection to the very idea of God, the doctrine of creation in all its parts serves as a consolidation and corroboration of belief in God.”³² He also goes on to say that the doctrine of creation relates to the entire economy of God’s action in and for the world.³³ Thus, the doctrine of creation is intimately related to the idea of God and God’s interaction in the world. As a result, its importance for Pannenberg’s entire understanding of God, including his teachings on the Trinity, should not be underestimated.

This section will analyze Pannenberg’s doctrine of creation, which reaches an initial apex in the creation of humans, and demonstrate the relevance and interconnection between this central component of Pannenberg’s *Systematic Theology* and his Trinitarian theology. Before beginning this task, however, it is important to note one difficulty. Because his exposition of the themes of creation and anthropology immediately follow his material on the Trinity and the doctrine of God, these chapters in the *Systematic Theology* assume the presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. However, this is not true of the overall progression of Pannenberg’s theological career, nor is it the case in this current study. Therefore, it will be impossible to discuss the most relevant aspects of this material as it is presented in his most mature work without making reference to themes that are better reserved for more detailed analysis until later in this project. Nonetheless, this discussion of Pannenberg’s doctrine of creation without first discussing the Trinity is justified by the needs of the current project and Pannenberg’s own career.

Creation as the Act of God

Pannenberg’s presentation of the doctrine of creation begins by looking at creation as an act of the Trinitarian God. Here, he is primarily concerned with two understandings of creation which he considers mistaken: those of Plotinus and Hegel. Plotinus, a Neo-Platonic philosopher, views the creation of the world as the fall of the world soul through a mistake of the Pneuma. In his view, the visible world is a temporal punishment for fallen creatures, and physical existence for this reason is evil and a form of separation from the original nature and destiny of the soul. Hegel, on the other hand, views the divine act of creation not as a mistake, but as a necessary element of the life of the Trinity. Hegel’s view is flawed because he understands the Son as the

32. *Ibid.*, 39.

33. *Ibid.*, 40.

principle of distinction within the Absolute Subject which finds its necessary determination in creation. This view has two consequences for Hegel's understanding of the relationship between God and the world. First, it means that creation is a necessary, not contingent, act of God. God has no choice but to create because the element of distinction in God present in the Son *must* be brought to completion in creation and in universal history. Secondly, this perspective means that creation and world history are divine co-principles. There is no meaningful distinction between the Logos and the world that issues forth from his self-distinction from the Father. Pannenberg holds that the Hegelian view of creation is much closer to a traditional Christian position than that of Plotinus, in part because it developed from Christian doctrine and as an interpretation of Christian doctrine. However, he argues that there must be serious revisions to Hegel's understanding of the relation between God and history.

Pannenberg's own understanding of creation as a divine act is thus very close to the Hegelian view in a number of ways. This similarity is particularly clear in his use of dialectical logic. Hegel's dialectical logic proposes that all of reality follows a pattern where an original idea (thesis) is countered by an opposing notion (antithesis) and finally these two apparently contradictory positions are brought together in a new unity (synthesis). When this approach is applied to the doctrine of the Trinity of the divine persons, the Father is best understood as the moment of original divine unity and completion. The Son, however, is constituted by his self-distinction from and obedience to the Father. As a result, the Son is best seen as the divine principle of distinction and difference. The resulting tension and distinction within the intratrinitarian life of God can only be resolved by a third principle, which is the reconciling and consummating Spirit of God that resolves the divisions among the divine persons in a new unity. For Hegel, the element of distinction that characterizes the movement of the second person of the Trinity necessarily results in the creation of the physical world because it is the completion of this distinction from God. This is because the created world is graced with the gift of freedom and therefore a limited independence from God. Pannenberg, however, attempts to correct this mistaken understanding through his description of the Son as a personal and free principle of self-distinction in and of himself. The Son's position as the ontological basis for distinction allows him to be the principle of distinction in creation. Creation, thus, finds its independence rooted in the distinction of the Son from the Father.

Pannenberg sums up his understanding of creation as a divine act in the following statement:

On the Christian view creation can be thought of as God's free act because it does not derive from a necessity that flows one-sidedly from the Father, nor from a mistake of the Pnuma, but from the free agreement of the Son with the Father through the Spirit in the act of the Son's self-distinction from the Father, insofar as we have here the transition from the self-distinction of the Son from the Father within the unity of deity to self-distinction from the Father as the one God, and thus to the otherness of creaturely existence, which is the form of the existence of the Son only in the man Jesus. Thus the Son is the origin of creaturely existence not only as the principle of distinction and self-distinction but also as the link with that which is thus distinct. As in the intratrinitarian life of God the self-distinction of the Son from the Father is the condition of his unity with the Father through the Spirit, so creatures are related to their Creator by their distinction from God and to one another by their distinctions from one another.³⁴

This statement not only points to the significance of the doctrine of creation to Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology, but also to the role of the Son in the act of creation. He extrapolates from the understanding of the Trinity which he develops at the end of volume one of the *Systematic Theology* to discuss God's free act of creation and that creation's intimate relation to its Creator. Pannenberg is arguing throughout this line of reasoning that the characteristic of distinction is a necessary element of relation and unity. Pannenberg is also stating that the Son's self-distinction from the Father is not only an element of their intratrinitarian relations, but that it also is constitutive of the Son's involvement in the act of creation which is extended in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Spirit too is active in the work of creation, especially as the origin of life in creatures. "On the one side the Spirit is the principle of the creative presence of the transcendent God with his creatures; on the other side he is the medium of the participation of the creatures in the divine life, and therefore in life as such."³⁵ The Spirit is thus the principle of fellowship between creatures and God and consequently the principle of fellowship of creatures with one another. This work is closely related to the work of the Son who is the principle of self-distinction in creation, which is the prerequisite of fellowship with God. This close relation between the work of the Son and the Spirit in creation points to the "indissoluble interrelation of the Son and the Spirit."³⁶ Creatures need the fellowship with God that is the work of the Spirit, because their continuing existence depends on participation in the divine

34. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2 trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 31.

35. *Ibid.*, 32.

36. *Ibid.*

Being. Moreover, the very constitution of creatures finds fulfillment only in the transcendence of their own finitude in relation to the infinite. Thus, Pannenberg describes the dynamic of the life of creation “as a process of the increasing internalizing of the self-transcendence of creatures.”³⁷ This evolutionary process is the result of the work of the Spirit that brings creatures to ever new levels of self-transcendence without ever eradicating their distinction from God. According to Pannenberg, following the work of others like Teilhard de Chardin, this evolutionary process which is the work of the Spirit in creation finds its high water mark in the Incarnation and its ultimate consummation in the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God.

Throughout Pannenberg’s exposition of the doctrine of creation and his theological anthropology, he is careful to point out that God’s act of creation cannot be limited solely to the beginning of the world as is suggested in the creation accounts in Genesis. Rather, Pannenberg wants to argue that the entire history of the world can and ought to be seen as the one eternal act of the Trinity on behalf of the world. Although the work of God changed in a meaningful way on the seventh day, God’s work in caring for his creatures and bringing them to their fulfillment did not come to an end. Thus, in Pannenberg’s systematic theology, creation is closely related to the redemption that is achieved in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ and to the Spirit’s work of bringing the kingdom of God to its eschatological fulfillment.

This concept of the fundamental unity of God’s acts on behalf of humanity underscores the importance of these doctrines for Pannenberg’s understanding of the Trinity. From this perspective, Creation is not simply the work of the Father, but rather it is the work of each of the divine persons in the unity of the divine essence. Moreover, this work of creation and the providential care for his creatures is extended throughout all of history. Thus from the perspective of eternity, there is only one eternal action on God’s part in favor of all of his creatures.

The World of Creatures

After describing creation as an act (perhaps *the* external act) of the Trinitarian God, Pannenberg turns his attention toward addressing the Christian vision of creation and the apparently competing claims of more scientific views of nature. He sees the importance, validity, and advantage of scientific investigations into the natural laws that govern the universe. However, he is anxious to point out that these abstract laws are not able to capture the

37. *Ibid.*, 33.

concrete uniqueness of each individual creature. As a result, there is a certain imprecision in creatures that natural law cannot integrate into the unity of its perspective. Nonetheless, if the truth claims advanced by Christianity are to be validated, there must be some underlying principle of unity in all creatures which parallels the scientific notion of natural law.

Both traditionally and in Pannenberg's system, this task is accomplished by the relation of the Logos to the individual *logoi* of each creature. The Logos is thus the unity of creation in its plurality. "The Logos is not the abstract order of the world but its *concrete* order. It is so because in the concept of the divine Logos we cannot separate the eternal dynamic of self-distinction (the *logos asarkos*) from its actualization in Jesus Christ (the *logos ensarkos*)."³⁸ This quote explains how the Incarnation allows Jesus Christ to act as a mediator between God and creatures.

Because the Logos who permeates the world of creation came to full manifestation in this man, all things in heaven and on earth are summed up in him (Eph. 1:10). As the creative principle of the cosmic order, then, the Logos is not a timeless universal structure like natural law or a theoretical system of order in terms of natural law. It is the principle of the concrete, historically unfolded order of the world, the principle of the unity of its history.³⁹

Thus, the Incarnation is not to be seen as a separate contingency plan on the part of the Creator. Rather, it is integral to the very act of creation and in this sense an eternal aspect of the divine plan. This perspective is in perfect concert with the earlier discussion of the Son's work in creation as the origin of the principle of distinction. Here, however, the link between God and creation is reversed. The Son is also able to act as the foundation of the unity of all creation and thus as mediator between Creator and creatures. Therefore the Son as the Logos is the basis for the unity and plurality in creation.

If the Son is to be viewed as the basis for the plurality of creatures in their distinction from God and also as the principle of order through which the variety of creatures are related to one another and to God, then the Spirit is the principle of life to which all of creation owes life, movement, and activity. In scriptural language, the Spirit is described as the wind or breath of God that brings life into motion. Thus, the Spirit is the transcendental and immaterial force that is the creative principle of movement and life.

Pannenberg is concerned with showing how such a view of the Spirit, which attributes the principle of motion to an invisible transcendent force, is

38. *Ibid.*, 63.

39. *Ibid.*

reconcilable with modern science and its emphasis on the measurement and analysis of physical bodies. Pannenberg explains the Spirit's work in this regard by appealing to field theory in contemporary physics. Forces are immaterial principles of movement observed in nature and, science describes four fundamental types of forces that are related to the elementary particles of nature: gravity, electromagnetism, strong interactions and weak interactions. These forces exert influence invisibly and immaterially through the space of a field. Thus, if a piece of iron is brought into an electromagnetic field, it will move toward the center and source of that field.

Typically, fields of force are observed in relation to physical objects. However, Michael Faraday hypothesized that forces were naturally more fundamental than matter. One consequence of this insight is that it is possible to have gravity without a body, but not a body without gravity. This hypothesis has found support in the twentieth century in Einstein's theory of relativity (which postulates the interchangeability of matter and energy) and in scientific cosmology and the big-bang theory (which describes the origin of the universe from the explosion of an extremely dense concentration of energy).

Pannenberg notes the theological significance of such concepts as he traces the history of their development. If all forces come from material sources and God is immaterial, then the natural world can be completely released from the concept of God. Pannenberg's appeal to the arena of field theory in physics shows that Christianity's claims about the role of the Spirit are not without connection to modern science. It also draws upon the insights of science to understand the nature of the Spirit of God. First, Pannenberg argues that "the person of the Holy Spirit is not himself to be understood as the field but as a unique manifestation (singularity) of the field of the divine essentiality."⁴⁰ As a result, the notion of a dynamic field can act as a metaphor for the divine essence. However, in creation the Spirit, more than the Father or the Son, has the character of dynamic field operations.

One might question what Pannenberg garners from his appeal to field theory for his understanding of the role of the Spirit in creation. The Spirit of God forms the field of space and time within which creation takes place and is brought to fulfillment. He first describes this field by reducing the concept of space to that of time.⁴¹ He then moves to an interpretation of simultaneity, as

40. *Ibid.*, 83.

41. Such a move is anticipated in modern physics by the theory of relativity. Pannenberg justifies this move as follows: "The differentiation of space from time is [also] a work of reflection that distinguishes the togetherness of things in space from their following one another in time. The simultaneity of what is different constitutes space" (*Ibid.*, 90).

the basis not only of the reduction of space to time, but also in an effort to describe the relation between time and divine eternity. As experienced by creatures on their own level, that which is present to God belongs to different times. However, before God, all events are present simultaneously. Thus, eternity has no need of past or future because all events are present to God simultaneously. Hence, Pannenberg defines eternity as “the undivided present of life in its totality.”⁴² Understood in this manner, eternity comprehends all time, while at the same time surpassing it rather than understanding eternity as pure timelessness. Time thus proceeds from eternity, and it is “constantly comprehended by it.”⁴³

Moreover, Pannenberg argues that the flow of time in creation is meaningful not only for creatures but for the Triune God as well. The eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom of God, which is also the fulfillment of the divine plan for creation, constitutes the completion of God’s self-actualization in history for creation. The Spirit then is the force, active in space and time, which draws all of creation towards its eschatological consummation. Pannenberg describes this drawing forward both in terms of evolution, which connects the work of the Spirit in the dynamics of space and time to the Incarnation, and to the resurrection of Jesus, as the anticipation of the new life that is to come. He states that if humans are to see the working of the Spirit in these later eschatological events, then “we have to regard the dynamic of the Spirit in creation from the very outset in terms of the coming consummation, i.e., as an expression of the power of the future.”⁴⁴ The goal, then, of the Spirit’s work in history is to provide all of creation with forms that are able to withstand the coming of God’s eternity into time at the fulfillment of the kingdom. The Spirit must be seen as actively drawing the world towards its completion from the very outset of time, as a piece of iron is drawn toward a magnet or a satellite is drawn toward the earth. In this way, it is once again clear that Pannenberg affords ontological priority to the future.

In summary, Pannenberg’s doctrine of the world of creatures not only focuses on bridging the apparent gap between theological and scientific commentaries on the origin and nature of the universe, but also seeks to interpret creation as constantly being drawn forward through the order of nature toward its eschatological fulfillment. In this process, the Son and the Spirit are the two hands of God working in creation to bring it to fulfillment. The implications of this insight for Trinitarian theology are manifest. The

42. *Ibid.*, 92.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 98.

description of the Son's relation to the plethora of individual creatures in creation in concrete individuality is predicated upon the Son's eternal self-distinction from the Father. However, and at the same time, these intratrinitarian relations are revealed only through the action of God on behalf of creation. Thus, the Creation of the universe and the Incarnation of the Son are the basis for human insight into the divine life. Further, Pannenberg is here continuing to argue that the creation of the world is indissolubly connected to the Incarnation. As a result, both of these actions of God in history are revelatory of the divine nature. The Son is not only the basis for creaturely distinction and independence from God, but is also the basis for the principle of order and underlying unity of creation. This reality can be seen at its height in the Incarnation, the initial moment toward which the entire evolutionary process has been reaching and in which all of creation is raised to a new level in relation to the Creator. At the same time, the Incarnation is discussed as uniquely related to the Spirit of God who pulls all of life to higher and higher levels until it reaches its intended end in the fullness of time. The Spirit in this way comprehends and infuses the entirety of created space and time with his presence and is the principle of cosmic motion.

The Son and the Spirit are thus shown working together from the very outset of creation. This fact is important because the characteristic work of the Son in redemption and of the Spirit in consummation is not limited to a particular historical period. Moreover, this fact shows how the work of neither divine person can be accomplished without the other. Moreover, the doctrine of creation gives Pannenberg an opportunity to expand upon his understanding of the role and importance of the Spirit. This expanded explanation is important because, while the Spirit plays a significant role in humanity's redemption, it is understandably upstaged by the Son's activity. In addition, the Spirit's field of influence is felt particularly strongly in the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom. However, because this fulfillment is not yet fully accomplished, it is difficult to fully appreciate the work of the Spirit at this stage. This reality lends even greater weight to the work of the Spirit as it is described in the doctrine of creation.

Anthropology

From what has already been learned about the importance of the Incarnation for creation, it is clear that, for Pannenberg, humanity is the current fulfillment of what the evolutionary process of creation is moving toward. Despite the presence of entropy and chaos, the universe has moved forward toward increasingly more complex and independent forms of life. This development

justifies the Christian focus on humanity as in some regards the epitome of creation.⁴⁵ This understanding of the special place of humanity in creation is attested in scripture by the creation of humans in the image and likeness of God and is linked to humanity's destiny for fellowship with God.

However, Pannenberg takes a unique approach to the traditional understanding of the *imago Dei*. He rejects both traditional Lutheran and Protestant interpretations of the effects of sin on the image of God in humanity. Instead he takes the approach that the *imago Dei* was never fully given to Adam.⁴⁶ Pannenberg argues that the language of "image and likeness" from the Genesis text leaves room for understanding varying degrees of intensity of the image of God in humanity. However, the Genesis texts in themselves are insufficient for a proper understanding of the image of God in humanity. "Christian theology must read the Old Testament sayings about divine likeness in light of the Pauline statements that call Jesus Christ the Image of God and that speak of the transforming of believers into this image."⁴⁷ In this respect, Pannenberg sees himself as taking up Irenaeus of Lyon's concept of recapitulation. The Incarnation not only restores fallen humanity but elevates the *imago Dei* in humans to a new level of intensity. Although Adam was created in the image of God, this image is not perfected. Rather, the *imago Dei* in humans is in a historical process of becoming which attains a decisive level in the Incarnation. This insight connects with what has already been said about Pannenberg's understanding of the evolutionary significance of the Incarnation. Yet, the image of God remains incomplete for individuals until the eschaton. For Pannenberg, this eschatological aspect of the *imago Dei* is linked to humanity's destiny to fellowship with God.

This understanding of the image of God is closely connected to Pannenberg's understanding of personal identity. He argues that throughout the course of the life histories of individuals, persons only achieve unity with their own full personhood anticipatorily. This delayed unity is not only because the individual's personhood is intimately related to the *imago Dei*, which is only fully realized in the eschatological fulfillment of the person, but

45. Pannenberg insists that despite this appropriate focus on the place of humanity at the top of creation, humanity (especially in Western societies) is not justified in its wanton destruction and consumption of the fruits of the earth. On the contrary, Pannenberg argues that humanity's special place in creation increases its relation to and responsibility for creation. For a fuller explication of Pannenberg's understanding of human stewardship for creation cf. *Ibid.*, 131-132.

46. Gn 2: 26.

47. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:208.

also because of the fragmentation that is a constitutive element of earthly human life.

The alienation of individuals from their personal identity is experienced in a particularly intense way through the phenomenon of self-consciousness and the exercise of freedom. For Pannenberg, the modern understanding of the interrelatedness of self-consciousness with bodiliness compliments the biblical understanding of the relation between body and soul. Pannenberg rejects attempts both to give predominance to the body in behaviorism and formal primacy to the soul in Aristotelian anthropology. Instead, he prefers to modify the Aristotelian–Thomistic substantial understanding of the soul by use of the term “Spirit.” In his opinion, the term “Spirit” avoids the sense of independence that the substantial description of the soul connotes.⁴⁸ In addition, it connects the human person with the Spirit of God from which it draws its life principle, to which it is oriented, and by which it is sustained. Human beings are thus ecstatically oriented to the Spirit of God for their completion.

According to Pannenberg, it is this unique ecstatic orientation of the human being to the Spirit of God that constitutes humanity’s distinctive place at the pinnacle of creation. The Spirit of God interacts with human consciousness through the fact that humans are able to distinguish between themselves and the rest of the world. “The basic relation of the consciousness to the infinite basis of life may well lie in the sense of life that in adult experience grasps the distinction between the self and the world.”⁴⁹

This distinction is realized in a particularly intense way in relation to others. “Being with others as others makes possible the distinction and relation of different objects and also their distinction from one’s own body as signified by the proper name and the use of ‘I,’ along with the placing of this body in the world of objects.”⁵⁰ Through relations with other persons, humans develop their own self-consciousness in a way which allows them to realize their dependence upon and orientation toward the divine. Further, this self-conscious awareness of the individual’s dependence upon God is the basis of the person’s participation in the Son’s self-distinction from the Father and is the process through which persons actualize their full personhood. “Personality is grounded in the destiny that transcends our empirical reality. It is primarily experienced in the other, the Thou, as the secret of an inwardness that goes beyond all that we perceive outwardly of the other, so that this other

48. *Ibid.*, 185.

49. *Ibid.*, 192.

50. *Ibid.*, 193.

meets us as a *being* that is active not merely of itself but in terms of a ground of existence that we cannot finally see externally.”⁵¹

This insight is significant for several reasons. First, it means that for Pannenberg human personhood is not so much a function of self-consciousness *per se*; rather, as it has already been pointed out, human personhood is a function of the individual’s appropriation of the *imago Dei* which is based in his or her destiny for fellowship with God. Self-consciousness, which is developed through relations to others, allows individuals to recognize their distinction from others and their dependence upon the infinite ground of individual existence. Secondly, this recognition reveals the fundamental significance of the category of relation for human personhood. Human self-actualization through the Spirit is the result of consciousness of the finitude of human existence which develops through relation to others, particularly the Other. Thirdly, underlying the connection between self-consciousness and human personhood through the *imago Dei* is the interaction of the Son and the Spirit on behalf of humans. According to Pannenberg, the Spirit of God is the eternal foundation of self-consciousness through which individuals are capable of recognizing and accepting their distinction from the Father which unites them with the incarnate Son of God and his eternal distinction from the Father. This relationship, then, continues the theme of the interaction of the Son and the Spirit in creation which was developed earlier. However, here they are related expressly to humanity and to the concept of personhood. These themes will continue to be developed in Pannenberg’s Christology and his understanding of the Son’s incarnation and work of redemption.

The significance of these ideas for Pannenberg’s Trinitarian theology is obvious. First, one can see Pannenberg developing his understanding of human personhood here. This development is important because it is intimately related to the divine personhood of the Father and the Son. The category person can be applied to humanity in a way that is analogous to the way that it is applicable to divinity. Secondly, Pannenberg understands personhood as the actualization of the *imago Dei* and his description of this process is dependent upon his understanding of the working of the Son and the Spirit in developing the proper relationship between humans and the Father. Thus, anthropology reveals the Trinity’s economic orientation toward creation. This orientation shows the intimate connection between the economic workings of the Trinity and the intratrinitarian life of the divine persons.

51. *Ibid.*, 198.

In summary, Pannenberg's discussion of the doctrine of creation and the special role and constitution of humans is significant for an understanding of his Trinitarian theology for three reasons. First, he demonstrates his understanding of the relation of the Trinitarian God to all of creation and to humanity in particular. Of particular importance here are his discussions of the work of the Son and the Spirit in creation. Because the Son is the principle of distinction in the Godhead, he is able to act as the foundation for the independence of creation. Seen from the opposite perspective, the Son is also the principle of the unity of creation in which creatures are related to God. The Spirit is the principle of life in creation. As such it sustains the existence of all of God's creatures and is the principle for their fellowship in the Son which leads back to the Father.

Secondly, Pannenberg develops his definition of human personality in a way that is applicable to both humans and God. Human beings are persons only to the extent that they are able to actualize the image of God which is their destiny in their lives. This actualization takes place through the exercise of self-consciousness which is able to recognize the dependence of finite human existence upon the graciousness of the infinite divine ground of existence. Thus, only by imitating the self-distinction of the Son from the Father through the Holy Spirit and fellow creatures can a human be capable of achieving his or her personhood. This process is spread throughout the entire life history of an individual. Thus, divine personhood is constitutive of human personhood, which will have to be discussed more fully later in this study.

Finally, Pannenberg continues his focus on the eschaton as the point at which all of creation, especially humanity, reaches its fulfillment through the permanent establishment of divine fellowship through the kingdom of God. He also refers to the notion of the self-actualization of God in history. By this term he means that when God freely chose to create the universe his very divinity became dependent upon the establishment of the lordship of the Father over creation. As a result, the eschatological fulfillment of creation is of central significance not only for the fulfillment of creation, but also for the divinity of God.

Christology

At the beginning of the last section it was noted the unique relationship of Pannenberg's doctrine of creation to his Trinitarian theology. Pannenberg's Christology faces some of the same challenges, in that in presenting this material in the *Systematic Theology*, he once again assumes familiarity with his

doctrine of the Trinity. However, the relation of Christology and Trinitarian theology is unique in that both most recent approaches to the topic start from the human history of Jesus and his revelation of the Father. Thus, Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology in volume one of *Systematic Theology* presumes much of what is established fully only at the end of volume two. In fact, just as in the patristic development of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is impossible to understand his conception of the Trinitarian God apart from his understanding of the life, person and work of Christ. As a result in this section the distinction between Christology and Trinitarian theology is not always clear. Nonetheless, this fact makes an overview of his Christology indispensable for a proper understanding of his treatise on the Trinity.

The “New Man” in the Person and History of Jesus

Pannenberg's treatment of Christology begins with a chapter dealing with the intersection of anthropology and Christology. His first premise is that Christology must start with the historical understanding of what actually happened to Jesus on the plane of creaturely existence. From this starting point Christology must ascend to an understanding of what happened in Jesus Christ from the perspective of his divine Sonship. This methodology is echoed in Pannenberg's overall approach where priority is given to the role of theology in establishing the truth claims of Christian doctrine. For Pannenberg, the results of such an ascending Christology should be in the end no different than a descending Christology for the personhood of Christ. Nonetheless, an ascending Christological method is required given the scientific nature of the discipline of theology and the centrality of Christ for this overall project.

Intimately related to the concerns of such a point of methodological departure is the question of how the uniqueness of Jesus should be understood in relation to the destiny of all humans toward fellowship with God. If Jesus is only human, what makes his life worthy of the high claims of Christian doctrine? Pannenberg finds this uniqueness in the fact that Jesus originates a new humanity through his triumph over death. He follows Paul in seeing Jesus Christ as “the eschatological form of humanity that, in contrast to the previous Adamic humanity, obeys God and overcomes mortality. Such a description, like John's view of Jesus as the incarnate Logos, express[es] the claim of a universal relevance for Jesus' person and history that goes far beyond the sphere of Jewish faith.”⁵² Jesus is thus the second Adam who through his obedience to the Father is able to overcome the disobedience of the first Adam.

52. *Ibid.*, 297.

Recent attempts to establish the uniqueness of Jesus have started from Sonship and his sinlessness. However, in these views, the particularity of Christ is related only to his individual existence and has no social consequence. "It does not regard the relation to others as constitutive for the uniqueness of the humanity of Jesus, though the goal of the incarnation of the Logos is the lifting of the human race out of the grip of sin and death."⁵³ This trend is contrary to the direction of Jesus' public life and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, which are fundamentally communal. Jesus' ministry was dedicated to the goal of establishing a new fellowship between humanity and God. His message which was directed toward Israel was rejected, and only as "the crucified and risen Lord is he the new and eschatologically definitive man."⁵⁴ This eschatological view of Jesus as the last Adam has a social impact for the human community. "It tells us that 'we' all shall 'bear' the image of the new and heavenly man (1 Cor. 15:49) and shall be changed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). As the last Adam (*eschatos Adam*), Jesus Christ is thus the original of a new humanity that is made anew in his image by participation in his obedience, in his death and resurrection."⁵⁵ Pannenberg attributes this "Adam Christology" to Paul's understanding of the soteriological significance of Christ's work. For Paul, the obedient suffering of Christ means justification for all. This justification must be connected not only with Christ's birth or resurrection, but with his entire earthly history. As a result, Christ's uniqueness must be rooted not only in his relation to the Father, but also in his humanity as well.

Pannenberg argues that the communal importance of Jesus' significance can also be seen in the historical judgment that Jesus did not claim for himself the title of Messiah. Rather, this title was only attributed to him after his death and resulted in the spread of his influence and importance beyond Israel.

By depicting Jesus as the new eschatological Adam, and therefore as the definitive form of humanity, the apostle Paul has given expression to the universal significance of the person and history of Jesus in the light of the Easter event—a significance that reaches far beyond the people of Israel. As the Messiah who does not exercise dominion through political power but through his vicarious suffering for human sins, Jesus not only changed the Jewish hope in the consciousness of his disciples but also opened it up with a view to the reconciliation of the Gentile world with Israel and its God.⁵⁶

53 Ibid., 306.

54. Ibid., 312.

55. Ibid., 304.

56. Ibid., 315.

In making these statements, Pannenberg is summarizing his argument for following Paul in viewing Jesus' uniqueness not only in terms of his divinity, but also in terms of his humanity. Christ establishes the definitive form of humanity which is able to reconcile Israel with its God and extend this fellowship to the entire Gentile world at the same time.

As a result, it is as the eschatological Adam that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. Jesus' role as Messiah and its significance for humanity are accomplished through his resurrection from the dead, in which he is filled and transfigured through the Spirit with God's incorruptible life. Yet at the same time redemption is achieved through the path of obedience to the Father that Jesus walked throughout his life and which led him through Gethsemane to Calvary. Jesus' particularity as the eschatological man is established in his being raised from the dead which, according to Pannenberg, is God's confirmation of his earthly ministry and obedience to the Father. It is this obedience, then, that characterizes Jesus' Sonship. "Obedient subordination to the Father characterizes Jesus as the Son. As Paul puts it, he lets himself be guided by the Spirit."⁵⁷ However, Pannenberg insists that this obedience is not subservience. Rather, it is an expression of Jesus' human and divine freedom that operates through the life of the Spirit in perfect concert with the will of the Father. This Sonship was promised first to the people of Israel. However, Paul is the first to recognize "the inclusion of non-Jews in the filial relation and the linking of the relation to the gift of the Spirit (Rom. 8:14) and to fellowship with Jesus Christ, *the Son*, through whom believers receive the Spirit of Sonship (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6)."⁵⁸ It is the Spirit who is responsible for mediating the incarnation and it is in connection with this mediation that believers receive a share in the Sonship of Christ.⁵⁹

The particularity of Jesus' Sonship, however, is not an event that is established only in the resurrection. The incarnation of the Son in the person

57. *Ibid.*, 316.

58. *Ibid.*, 317.

59. *Ibid.* There have been many recent attempts in Christology to establish in a more precise manner the nature of Christ's humanity and his relation to the rest of creation. While many have tried to establish this relation through the employment of a "Spirit Christology" as opposed to a "Logos Christology," these attempts have frequently come at the expense of Jesus' uniqueness and divinity. Roger Haight's *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999) is an important recent example of this. Pannenberg, however, has managed to show the interrelationship between the approaches of "Spirit Christology" and "Logos Christology" without playing one off against the other and without reducing one to the other. The value of this accomplishment should not be underestimated.

of Jesus means that this man was *the* Son of God throughout the entirety of his life. From the divine perspective, this Incarnation takes the form of the Son's identification with the person of Jesus. However, this identification cannot be seen as a separate moment outside the intratrinitarian life of God. Jesus' obedience to and self-distinction from the Father in his life and ministry is eternally preceded by the obedience and self-distinction of the Son. By the self-fulfillment of a human creature in Jesus, the destiny of all of creation to true independence in fellowship with the Trinity is accomplished. In this destiny humanity is freed from the confusion of sin that suggests that its true independence can only be achieved apart from God. Therefore, the sending of the Son aims at the reconciliation of creation through humanity, which is the function of the Messiah in relation to fellowship and renewal of the people of God. Consequently, the notion of the sending of the Son is connected to the concept of the Messiah and that both of these have their counterpart in the obedience of the second Adam on behalf of many. This insight helps one to understand how Jesus as the Christ has opened up the covenantal relationship that God has with Israel to all people. Our individual destiny for fellowship with God is developed through our relations with one another. This is the role of the Mosaic Law. However, Jesus in his death opens up both the meaning of the law and understandings of the Messiah. Through his cross and resurrection, Jesus is the Son of God "who wills to unite all people to himself, and through himself to God, after the image of the new eschatological man that is manifested in him."⁶⁰

The importance of this material is intimately connected to the material of both the previous and subsequent sub-sections. Nonetheless, it is important to make a few comments at this point. Pannenberg's proposed Christological method which starts from the human history of Jesus and then ascends upward is intimately related to the starting point of his Trinitarian theology. In both, he emphasizes that even though from the divine perspective it may be appropriate to start elsewhere, theology must start with Jesus' revelation of the Father through his individual life history. Because, as discussed above, theology must defend its own truth claims in a scientifically verifiable manner. The historical human existence of Jesus is the only starting point that available that can meet this requirement and still remain faithful to the Gospel. These comments on method, however, are more than simply a change in the order of presentation. As will become clear, they have serious repercussions for the content of Pannenberg's Christology and Trinitarian theology. For example, Pannenberg's identifying the Sonship of Christ with his role as eschatological

60. *Ibid.*, 323.

man is intimately related to this methodological presupposition. Pannenberg here is inverting traditional approaches to the uniqueness of Christ that start from his divinity. Pannenberg, while not denying the findings of this approach, insists that it is much more important to show the human uniqueness of Jesus for contemporary theology. In this way, Pannenberg further explicates his comments about the role of the Son in creation. Jesus is the eschatological Adam, who initiates a new stage in the evolution of creation. As a result, the humanity of Jesus is the basis for a new fellowship with God that is able to fulfill the destiny of every individual through his or her creation in the image of God. The next subsection will discuss how Pannenberg uses his understanding of the human life of Jesus to talk about the divinity of Christ.

Jesus' Personal Unity with the Father

After developing his understanding of the special humanity of Jesus, Pannenberg uses this humanity as the basis for what can be said about his divinity. In this way he begins his argument for maintaining the personal unity of Jesus with the Father. The argument for the divinity of Jesus starts with the content of his preaching. Pannenberg believes that the entire focus of Jesus' ministry to the people of Israel was to proclaim the imminence of the divine rule. This proclamation was a common theme of Jewish eschatological hope in first century Judaism. However, Jesus preached that the coming divine rule was not for all of the covenant people, but only for those "who set their hope wholly on the imminence of the future of God, whether in response to the appeal of his own message or for some other reason, as in the case of those whom he called blessed."⁶¹

This insight points to a major difficulty that needed to be faced in putting faith in Jesus' message. Pannenberg argues that it is a mistake to think that Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God was an expression of the authority that filled him. On the contrary, the authority of Christ was the consequence of Jesus' preaching. This position can be seen in the fact that Jesus rejected titles such as Messiah, Son of Man, and Servant of the Lord.⁶² Nonetheless, Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom does indirectly imply a claim to special authority. "This was due above all to the claim that the eschatological salvation of the divine rule was breaking into the present for those that received his message.

61. *Ibid.*, 327.

62. The historicity of such claims is of central importance to Pannenberg's argument. However, exegetes and those involved in historical research have hardly come to a consensus on such issues. For more on Pannenberg's historical argumentation cf. *Ibid.*, 334-5 particularly notes 28-30.

With this claim he presented himself as the mediator of that salvation.”⁶³ Thus the content of Jesus’ message contained implicit, yet unavoidable claims about his role in bringing about the divine rule Pannenberg draws in particular on John’s theme of Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father. In Jn. 8:13, Jesus is accused of bearing witness to himself and is unable to refute this charge because only the Father could act as an additional witness on his behalf. Pannenberg describes this tension between Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father and the claim of special authority implicit in his preaching as the ambivalence of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom. This ambivalence accounts for the rejection of Jesus’ preaching which culminated in his eventual condemnation and crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish and Roman leadership. The combination of this ambivalence and the rejection of Jesus’ preaching led Pannenberg to assert that Jesus’ claims were in need of divine confirmation. This assertion is of particular importance not just from the perspective of historical curiosity or Jewish-Christian relations, but because it shows that Jesus’ rejection was directly related to the ambivalence of his God-given message and therefore directly connected to the question of Jesus’ relation to God.

Pannenberg finds this divine confirmation of the person and message of Jesus in the resurrection. The resurrection event not only overturned the public rejection of his ministry, but more importantly, confirmed the in-breaking of God’s rule into history in a way that harmonized with Jewish eschatological expectation. Thus, only in light of Jesus’ resurrection is there any basis for the apostolic proclamation of Christ. This confirmation is intimately linked to the person of Christ and sheds new light on his life history. As a result, the confirmation of Jesus’ message could not have been equally well served by the resurrection of some other person; neither is it adequate to say that all that is revealed in the resurrection was already present in his ministry or crucifixion. Pannenberg’s argument in favor of the historicity of the resurrection is thus the historical element in Jesus’ life that warrants the claims of divinity with primitive Christianity and is thus the main reason for maintaining the unity of Jesus with God. However, it was only in light of the reflection upon the significance of this event that its full implications began to be uncovered.

For Pannenberg, this confirmation of Jesus’ life and ministry means that the accusations brought against him were false.

63. *Ibid.*, 335.

Jesus did not make himself equal to God, even in the sense of declaring himself to be the Son of God (Mark 14:61). He differentiated himself from God by subordinating himself to the Father so that he might serve the Father's lordship by all that he did. In this way he gave the Father the honor that all creatures owe him as the one God. Only in this self-distinction from the Father by subordination to his royal rule, and in service to it, is he the Son.⁶⁴

This explains the ambivalence in Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. Jesus' Sonship can only be understood in the sense of his subordination to the Father as the one God. It is only as a result of Jesus' not claiming equality with the Father that he is the Son. However, this divine confirmation of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom extends back to the entirety of his life. Since it was not only the work and content of Jesus' message about the imminent in-breaking of the divine rule that was caught up in the preaching of the kingdom, but Jesus' person as well, Jesus' Sonship extends back through his entire life to the moment of his conception. In this sense, Pannenberg seeks to differentiate his theology from adoptionism, which claims that Jesus is the Son of God not from his conception, but from a later point in life (e.g. his baptism or his resurrection). He argues that only when the resurrection is understood as a confirmation of Jesus' work and person "do ideas of the basis of the Sonship of Jesus in his baptism on the one hand, or his birth on the other, not come into conflict with one another, or with the early statement that he was instituted into the dignity of Sonship by his resurrection from the dead."⁶⁵ Further, he says that any overemphasis on any one of these stages in Jesus' life rather than focusing on his entire life history will result in an incomplete understanding of Jesus' Sonship.

Pannenberg's understanding of Jesus' Sonship is the basis for his approval of the New Testament statements about the indwelling of the pre-existent Logos in Jesus. Again, the confirmation that is brought about through Jesus' resurrection has a retroactive effect. The resurrection reveals elements of his person that were always present but not always evident. Thus, the relation of Jesus to the Father that is confirmed in the resurrection can not be one that simply began at the moment of Jesus' birth, but rather it must be part of God's eternal existence.

If the relation to the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth in eternity characterizes the identity of God as Father, then we must speak of a preexistence of the Son, who was to be historically manifested in Jesus of Nazareth, even before his earthly birth. . .

64. *Ibid.*, 363.

65. *Ibid.*, 366.

Theologically the eternal relation of the Father to the Son may not be detached from the incarnation of the Son in the historical existence and work of Jesus.⁶⁶

However, as can be seen in this citation, the relation of the Father and the Son that is confirmed in the resurrection is of importance not only for the deity of the Son but also for the deity of the Father. While it is true that the Son can not be the Son without his Father, so it is also true that the Father can not be the Father without the Son. The nature of this relationship establishes that the divine Sonship of Jesus can lie only in the eternity of God himself.

It will be necessary to return to this line of thinking later on to see its full ramifications. Nonetheless, it is clear at this point that the self-distinction from the Father, which characterized Christ's preaching of the Kingdom, finds its basis in the life of the eternal Son. The self-distinction from the Father which is characteristic of the relation between the Father and the Son is not only the basis for all creaturely existence but is also brought to fulfillment in the incarnation of the Son as the self-emptying of the eternal Son. This self-emptying of the divine Logos is not a renunciation of his divine essence, but simply a refusal to make any claim at equality with God. In doing so, he moves out of the unity of the deity and "actively expressed his divine essence as the Son."⁶⁷ The kenosis of the Son is thus not a denial of his divinity but its activation. Understood in this way, the self-emptying and self-humbling of the Son in the incarnation is primarily understood as an expression of the self-giving of the Son in obedience to the Father which is characteristic of their intratrinitarian relation.

From this point, Pannenberg turns to the two natures in one person formula that grew out of Christological controversies of the fifth century.⁶⁸ Pannenberg's Christology has thus far developed with little reference to the categories of these debates, and it is at this point that he seeks to relate his Christology to those of the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of antiquity.

66. *Ibid.*, 368.

67. *Ibid.*, 370.

68. In the fifth century, a series of controversies developed between the so-called Alexandrian and Antiochene schools of theology. While the theological tradition of each city saw itself in keeping with the decrees of the Council of Nicea (325AD), each took a different approach to the question of the nature of the unity between the humanity and divinity of Christ. The differences between these approaches were exaggerated by differing doctrinal concerns and differing exegetical practices. The resulting clash led among other things to the creed of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. For more on the history of these two schools and the resulting doctrinal definition, cf. J.N.D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 284-338. and Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1993), 189-219.

He argues that the focus on divine Sonship that dominates the Christological reflection of this period is justified in light of the New Testament witness and also by the life of Christ himself. However, he views the emphasis on Jesus' birth as *the* moment of the union of his humanity and divinity in one person as a fateful shift in emphasis from the primitive Christian witness of the New Testament.⁶⁹ This shift in emphasis results in a dilemma which Pannenberg argues has dominated the entire subsequent history of Christology. He states the dilemma as follows:

At the incarnation the Logos assumed either a complete man or only human nature in general. In the former position, held by the Antiochenes, the full humanity is assumed to be independent. In the latter, held by the Alexandrians, the human nature was fashioned into an individual only at the incarnation, and then Jesus had no specific human individuality, no independence, no creaturely freedom. The dilemma is insuperable as long as we think that the event of the incarnation was complete with the birth of Jesus.⁷⁰

This quote helps to explain Pannenberg's consistent emphasis on the confirmation of Jesus' entire life history in the resurrection. He argues from the presupposition that human nature in and of itself is incomplete and has no proper independence apart from the creator. In fact, as was seen in the discussion of Pannenberg's anthropology, he holds that humanity was created from the very beginning with the incarnation in mind. Thus, the incarnation is the completion of humanity's relation to the Father through the obedience and self-distinction of the Son. Pannenberg thus concludes that

The special relation of the human nature to the Logos as its creative origin is thus the condition of the possibility of the incarnation as the union of the Son with a individual human life, a union that was mediated by our relation to God the Father and that thus had the form of a life history in which this relation unfolded. The process of this history is the concrete form of the human reality of Jesus. Only here does he have identity as a person. In this history he is the Son of the Father, so that of one and the same Jesus Christ we may say that as the one who was crucified, raised, and exalted, he was and is both true man and true God. In this sense, and only in this sense, there

69. As was suggested above, Pannenberg is not suggesting that the union between humanity and divinity in Jesus was something that developed gradually over the course of his life. However, he does think that his relationship with the Father developed with greater depth over the course of his life. This is to say that if Jesus had freely chosen a different path over the course of his life and had failed to preach the kingdom, or failed to preach it to its end on the cross, then he would not be the Son of God. Cf. Pannenberg, ST 2:384.

70. Ibid.

is truth in the otherwise misunderstood and misleading doctrine of the two natures of this one person.⁷¹

Pannenberg thus holds out strongly for the personhood of Jesus' human reality and indeed casts his whole Christology not in the category of two natures but in one truly human/truly divine person.

Pannenberg concludes his discussion of the deity of Jesus Christ by briefly discussing the implications of the Trinity for the intratrinitarian life of God. While he insists that the triune God's creation of the world was a totally free act, he is equally insistent that once the world is created, God has certain obligations to it if he is to be God. Key in this regard is Pannenberg's concept of the lordship of the Father over creation. If God is to be God, the Father must actualize his royal rule over creation. With the creation of the world, the establishment of the lordship of the Father over creation became "the condition and proof of his deity" for humanity; without this lordship God would not be God.⁷² The incarnation then is not only the action of the merciful God on behalf of a lost and fallen humanity; it is also the self-actualization of the Triune God in history which brings creation into relationship with the Father in the Son and through the Spirit. In the sending of the Son, the future consummation of the Father's lordship breaks into creation and establishes both the kingdom and the community of believers. Thus, the Father remains absent to creation, except for the work of the Son (and the Spirit) in glorifying the Father.⁷³ Because the deity of God is inseparable from his royal lordship in creation, the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus, and its subsequent confirmation by his resurrection, is the actual bringing about of the divinity of the deity by the deity in creation. Pannenberg finds this theme echoed in the Johannine discussion of the glorification of the Father by the Son and the glorification of the Son by the Spirit. This theme points once again to the interrelatedness of the Son and the Spirit.

71. *Ibid.*, 386.

72. *Ibid.*, 390.

73. According to Pannenberg, the Father's absence from creation reaches its climax in the dereliction of the Son on the cross. In this way, Jesus suffered the death of sinners as the result of the ambivalence of his preaching of the kingdom. However, Pannenberg does not at this point elaborate any further on the effect of the cross on the intratrinitarian life of God (Cf. *Ibid.*, 392.). Nonetheless, it is the clear implication of Pannenberg's focus on the unity of the humanity and divinity in the one person of Jesus Christ that there can be no shielding of the Trinity from the suffering of the cross.

The implications of Pannenberg's understanding of the divinity of Jesus Christ for his Trinitarian theology could not be more apparent. The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early centuries of the Church was inescapably linked to the issue of the Sonship of Jesus and his relation to the Father. However, the confessional formula of the Church latched onto the language of two natures in one divine person to describe its understanding of the union of the human and divine in Christ as a consequence of its focus on the conception and birth of Jesus as the center of the incarnation. Pannenberg sees both of these tendencies as misleading and chooses instead to focus on the personhood of Jesus as he developed this category in his presentation of creation and anthropology. The one person of Christ thus becomes the center of gravity for his understanding of the incarnation and the revelation of the Trinitarian God. In particular, the Sonship of Jesus is constituted by his relation of self-distinction from the Father, which is confirmed in his resurrection by the power of the Spirit. Moreover, Pannenberg's understanding of the incarnation reveals that the work of the Son is part of the self-actualization of God in history. Thus, the Son not only receives his divinity from the Father, but in a very real sense the Father too is constituted in his very divinity by the working of the Son and the Spirit. As a result everything that can be said of Jesus is of direct relevance not only for understanding God's interaction with creation, but also for the intratrinitarian relations of the immanent life of the Trinity.

The Reconciliation of the World

Pannenberg finishes his treatment of Christology with his discussion of soteriological themes and the work of Christ in reconciling the world. First Pannenberg insists that soteriology must be seen as an outgrowth of the discussion of the person of Christ; it is neither separable from Christology nor prior to it. This salvation, which is the result of God's reconciling the world to himself denotes a wholeness and integrity that cannot be achieved completely in this world. Thus, salvation always is connected to God's future. However, as has been discussed above, Jesus' preaching of the kingdom referred to its immanent presence in the life of those who believed and put their faith in Jesus. Consequently, Pannenberg sees a more immanent dimension to his understanding of salvation as well. It is this more immanent dimension of soteriology that refers most directly to the work of Christ on the cross as seen in light of the confirmation of his ministry in the resurrection.

Pannenberg is particularly concerned with the notion that it is God alone who reconciles the world to himself and not that humans reconcile themselves with God. It is Christ in his role as mediator of salvation who enacts salvation

for the world. Seen from this perspective, Pannenberg places a great deal of emphasis on the role of Christ's divinity in the work of redemption. Thus, Pannenberg views the "reconciliation of the world by Christ as an outworking of the love of God in the face of the opposition of humans who are hostile to God, a love of God that we see operative through Jesus Christ."⁷⁴ Reconciliation is then the result of a divine act in history (focused in the crucifixion) which embraces humanity and extends once again the possibility of fellowship with God. Christ is the author of a new situation in which the misery of humans who have fallen into sin is overcome by the obedience and righteousness of Jesus. This Christological authorship is what is meant by the descriptions of Jesus' death as an expiation for the sins of the world. Jesus acts as our representative by taking on the punishment that we are due for sin. While it is God who is primarily active in the process of reconciliation, room must be left for human freedom, both in Jesus and in believers, in the appropriation (or not) of this reconciliation. It is this need for human agreement with the reconciling work of Christ that opens the way for the role of the Gospel and the Church in the process. Paul, for example, in the second letter to the Corinthians encourages the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, through Christ's own ministry of reconciliation.⁷⁵ Immediately connected to this idea for Paul is his work as an ambassador of Christ making this plea. This connection indicates not only the role of the Christian community and the Gospel in the work of redemption, but also emphasizes that the reconciliation is not a completely solitary affair. Nevertheless, Pannenberg constantly an appeal to Paul in order to insist God, and not humans, is active in the work of redemption.⁷⁶

Two additional concepts are fundamental for understanding Pannenberg's soteriology: exclusive representation and inclusive representation. Exclusive representation is defined as doing "something that others ought to have done, or suffer[ing] something that they ought to have suffered."⁷⁷ This understanding of representation takes center stage in Anselm's theory of satisfaction. However, it fails to take into account the criticism that no one can represent others as moral objects, and it does not do full justice to the New Testament witness that Jesus represents humanity insofar as he is a human. This insight is what Pannenberg means by inclusive representation. According

74. *Ibid.*, 407.

75. 2 Cor. 5: 20.

76. 2 Cor. 5: 19.

77. Pannenberg ST, 2:429.

to this view “there takes place in [Jesus] paradigmatically that which is to be repeated in all the members of the humanity that he represents.”⁷⁸ In addition, it has the advantage that it does not limit itself to any one interpretation of Jesus’ death and therefore can incorporate the whole of Jesus’ life just as Pannenberg’s Christology has.

Nonetheless, inclusive representation too can be interpreted in such a way that it violates the independence and freedom of creatures by suggesting that individual humans can add nothing to the redemptive suffering and death of Christ. This understanding of representation is better described as replacement. Pannenberg argues against this misunderstanding that “in the expiatory character of the death of Jesus the exclusive element of his vicarious death, the death of the one who is innocent for sinners comes to expression. But obedience to God, for the sake of which Jesus accepted death, is paradigmatic for all of us.”⁷⁹ This emphasis helps to show the relation between the particular and irreplaceable work of Christ in redemption and the accompanying requisite free human acceptance and participation in the work of Christ. In other words, Pannenberg is arguing that neither an exclusive nor an inclusive understanding of representation alone is sufficient for understanding Christ’s role as mediator of redemption.

Pannenberg sees the reconciliation of the world as the result of the action of each of the Trinitarian persons. Although scripture attests to the fact that reconciliation is first to be understood as the work of the Father in the death of the Son, Pannenberg argues that a Trinitarian understanding of the crucifixion is the only way to explain the work of the Son and the Spirit that are also a part of the work of redemption. Equally important for Pannenberg is the idea that only through understanding the Triune God as the reconciler of the world can adequate justice be done to the proper form of human participation in the making of reconciliation. Finally, Pannenberg argues that a Trinitarian understanding of the work of redemption will help to explain the relation between exclusive and inclusive representation in Christ.

Pannenberg supports these claims by beginning with the relation between the work of the Father and the Son in redemption. Here, he continues to follow 2 Cor. 5: 18ff in arguing that reconciliation is the work of the Father. The Father accomplishes this by sending the Son⁸⁰ and through his providential direction of history. However, he recognizes that other texts refer

78. *Ibid.*, 430.

79. *Ibid.*, 435.

80. In this way, we can see that the reconciliation between God and man, which establishes divine fellowship, was an eternal element of the incarnation of the Son.

to the Son as the subject of the act of reconciliation.⁸¹ Pannenberg explains this along traditional lines by talking about the cooperation of the Father and the Son in the work of redemption. The Father gives up the Son, but he does so without objectifying the Son. As a result, the Son goes freely to his death and offers himself up in obedience to the plan of the Father. “The obedience of the Son corresponds to the giving up of the Father.”⁸² Jesus in his humanity clearly must have come to realize the eventual results of his preaching and the ambivalence that accompanied this message. However, because the confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God came only as the result of the post-Easter experience of the risen Christ, the full cooperation of Jesus in his humanity and divinity can only be seen in retrospect and thus is explicitly dependent upon the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel. This description indicates three levels of the event of redemption in Christ. First, there is the human historical level of the fate of Jesus. Second, there is the same historical event seen this time as the medium of the working of the Son of God. Third, the same event is dealt with again as “the medium of the active presence of the exalted Lord through the apostolic proclamation that explains to the world at large the saving significance of this history.”⁸³ Pannenberg argues that the interrelation of these three levels is fundamental for understanding the work of Jesus in redemption.

Thus it can be seen that the Father does not act alone in the work of redemption. However, Pannenberg encounters difficulty explaining how Jesus is active in his own death given the doubt that exegetical research has cast upon Jesus’ interpreting his own death as atonement. Pannenberg then needs to show how Jesus is both active and passive in his death at the same time. He finds the basis for Jesus’ activity in his atoning death in the soteriology of the titles that were assigned to him in the post-Easter apostolic proclamation. Of particular importance in this regard is the title “Messiah,” which was radically reinterpreted from its previous Old Testament connotations in light of Jesus’ crucifixion. Pannenberg at this point follows the same logic that dictated his understanding of the Sonship of Jesus: if Jesus is shown to be the Messiah in light of his death and resurrection, then Jesus must have been the Messiah throughout his life. “From this angle we may also find the action of the Son of God in those aspects of the history that from the standpoint of the human reality of Jesus do not seem to be actively done by him but passively suffered.

81. eg. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2.

82. Pannenberg, *ST*, 2:439.

83. *Ibid.*, 441.

Nothing unforeseen or unplanned can happen to the Son of God.”⁸⁴ Thus, throughout the history of the human reality of Jesus, the Son of God was active in the work of the reconciliation of the world to the Father. Yet, this activity still explains how the earthly human reality of Jesus did not actively aim at the atonement for sin in his death. It also shows how Pannenberg understands the relation between the first level of the human life of Jesus and the active work of the Son of God in this same series of events.

The third component, that of the apostolic proclamation of the life of Jesus and the work of the Son of God in this life, is connected to the first two by the fact that Jesus’ death can be seen as redemptive only if humans accept and appropriate the reconciliation that was won through Christ. In other words, the work of Jesus in redemption can only be completed through the work of the Spirit “who will glorify Jesus in human hearts as the Son of God.”⁸⁵ This connection between the work of the Son and the Spirit points once again to the anticipatory character of Christ’s atoning death. Pannenberg means that while looking at human history it is hard to say beyond a shadow of a doubt that humanity has been saved because the salvation of humanity will only be complete in the consummation of the Kingdom of God when the work of glorifying the Son is completed in humanity through the work of the Spirit. At the same time, however, Pannenberg insists that the Son of God offered himself up to atone for the sins of humanity. Thus, Jesus is active both in the definitive moment of reconciliation, which occurs in his death, but also in his ongoing intercession for humanity at the right hand of God, through which the Father sends out the Spirit.

The Spirit is active in the work of reconciliation in his allowing human beings to enter freely into reconciliation with God. Reconciliation in this way not only respects the freedom and independence of humans, but renews the independence of humans and them for true independence in relation to their origin and destiny in fellowship with God. This renewal of independence took place in exemplary fashion in the life of Jesus. Through his union with the Father as the Son of God and his self-distinction from the Father, Jesus vicariously reconciles humanity to God and thus is the mediator of salvation from God to humanity. However, it is only through the work of the Spirit in believers that they can enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus through baptism and into fellowship with the Father. Thus, just as the offering up of the Son by the Father and the self-offering of the Son to the Father are to be seen as the same event, so too the mediation of reconciliation to humanity through

84. *Ibid.*, 442.

85. *Ibid.*

the work of the exalted Christ and the Spirit's work in humans which allows them to enter freely into reconciliation are two sides of a single, undivided process. The Spirit lifts them above their own finitude by actualizing the ecstatic nature of humans and allowing us to share in the life of Jesus who is outside of us, for, as has already been demonstrated, it is the particular nature of human beings to be oriented to the infinite and dependent upon it for its own personal identity. Therefore, the Spirit's work within humans cannot be seen as an unnatural imposition upon their independence and freedom. Rather, it is the work of the Spirit in us that allows them to actualize the image of God which is the basis of their personhood and is their fulfillment.

Believers enter into this process through faith, acceptance of the Gospel, and realization of their distinction from Jesus. In other words, believers are incorporated into the body of Christ through the Spirit by imitating the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father. Humanities filial relationship to the Father is thus accomplished without obliterating individuality, but rather precisely through humanities acceptance of its distinction from both Jesus and the Father. This is accomplished once again through the Spirit "who is himself God, [and] brings with him the fellowship with God, but only as he distinguishes himself from the Father and the Son, and with himself all those whose hearts he fills and lifts up to God."⁸⁶ The Spirit in this way makes it possible to rejoice in humanity's distinction from God and be at peace.

From this line of argument, it is clear that Pannenberg's understanding of the reconciliation of the world that is won through the death of Jesus is the work of the whole Trinity. Reconciliation begins, first of all, with the Father's sending of the Son to suffer on behalf of the sins of all humanity. The Father also is active in his providential guiding of history which resulted in the brutal suffering and death of Christ. The Son, however, does not suffer all the work of the Father passively. Rather, the Son freely accepts the mission that is given him by the Father and offers himself on the cross for us. He is thus humanity's representative and through his vicarious suffering he offers atonement for sins. But the Son cannot complete the work of reconciliation without the free incorporation of humanity into his representation. Humans are freely and naturally incorporated into the body of Christ through acceptance of the Gospel in faith through the action of the Spirit in believers. The Spirit accomplishes this incorporation first by raising Jesus from the dead, which brings to light the life of the Son that was always at work in the life of Jesus but shrouded in the ambivalence of his preaching of the kingdom. The Spirit is then sent by the Father as the result of the intercession of the exalted Christ

86. *Ibid.*, 453.

into the hearts of believers and allows them to be incorporated in the body of Christ through faith in the Gospel and baptism. Pannenberg is also insistent that while the reconciliation of the world can be broken down and analyzed in segments, the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit is all part of one seamless process. This work is accomplished in the death of Jesus but will be completed only in the future return of Christ when the Spirit will glorify the Son and the Son will glorify the Father.

Summary

Our exposition of Pannenberg's Christology, doctrine of creation, and fundamental theology as presented in the first two volumes of his *Systematic Theology* has aided the process of understanding his Trinitarian theology in three ways. First, it has laid out the themes of his overall theological project that are characteristic of each element of his theology. Secondly, this study has also revealed the centrality of Trinitarian theology for his entire systematic project. Finally, it has shown how Pannenberg has made use of the category "person" in other important contexts.

This overview of Pannenberg's systematic theology has revealed certain themes that are constantly recurring. These themes were discussed most clearly in the context of his overall theological method. Included among these themes is Pannenberg's theology of history and the central role that he affords eschatology. It has been demonstrated that his work is characterized by a constant dual emphasis on the proleptic revelation of truth in history and the fulfillment of this truth in the eschaton. Connected to this dual emphasis is another important theme. Pannenberg's methodology is always to start with what has been revealed anticipatorily in history and then to discuss its eternal and ontological ramifications. This methodology was seen most clearly in Pannenberg's insistence that Christology must start from the human history of Jesus. While he insists that there should be no difference in the conclusions that are drawn between a Christology from above and one from below, the task of theology to substantiate its truth claims in a way that is able to dialogue with other academic disciplines requires such an approach. This highlights the idea of the complementarity of faith and reason that is characteristic of all of Pannenberg's theological enterprises. This complementarity can be seen most clearly in the role that he affords to philosophy and natural theology in systematic theology. The concept of God which is the subject of any true theology must never be in absolute conflict with reason. Thus, natural philosophy acts as a negative criterion for the concept of God. As this study

turns more explicitly to Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology in the upcoming chapters, these themes will each surface once again.

Since Pannenberg argues that God is the subject of theology, it should be no surprise to discover that the doctrine of the Trinity is a recurring theme in Pannenberg's systematic theology. This fact became clear first of all in Pannenberg's treatment of creation. Creation is the act of the whole Trinity. The Father is the origin and destiny of the universe and all of its creatures. The Son is the principle of distinction and thus the basis for the independence of creatures. The Spirit is the source of life and motion which always seeks to flow and evolve back toward fellowship with the divine. However the centrality of Trinitarian themes is no less clear in Pannenberg's presentation of the life, person, and work of Jesus. The work of the Spirit in raising Jesus from the dead confirms the validity of his preaching of the imminent arrival of God's kingdom. This also reveals that Jesus is the Son of God in whom the Father is glorified through his obedience and self-distinction from the Father. Further, the Son freely accepted in the life of Jesus the Father's mission to reconcile the world through his sacrifice on the cross. The Spirit brings this work to completion by making possible the free acceptance of the redemption won by the Son in individual believers. Therefore, Pannenberg makes the relation of the Trinitarian God to humanity in its creation, redemption and consummation the expressed theme of his systematic theology. This relation underscores the importance of his Trinitarian theology for the entirety of his work and foreshadows issues that will be treated more explicitly in the upcoming chapters of this study.

Finally, Pannenberg explicates the meaning and centrality of the term "person" in his anthropology and his Christology. As this chapter has established the term "person" is of central significance for his anthropology. Human beings are persons to the extent that they take possession of the image of God which is their destiny. However this destiny can be attained only in a limited sense at any one moment and therefore must be the work of an individual's entire life history. This process is achieved by self-conscious awareness of the finitude of one's own life and the necessity of its dependence upon the infinite. Thus, the individual's relation to the divine, which is mediated by relations to others, is central for personhood. This same understanding of personhood is employed in Pannenberg's Christology. However, here the term also bears the burden of being the central category through which the humanity and divinity of Christ are united. The unity of the Son of God and the human history of Jesus of Nazareth was thus the result of the work of his entire life history. This work was accomplished through obedient acceptance of the distinction between Jesus and the Father and was

confirmed through his resurrection by the Spirit. The next chapter will turn more explicitly to Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" as it developed in the Christian tradition in relation to the Trinity. Consequently, it will explain how Pannenberg's understanding of human personhood and the personhood of Christ relate to his understanding of divine personhood.

Pannenberg's Reading of the Historical Development of the term "Person"

Pannenberg's theological approach is appropriately categorized as historical. The appropriateness of this categorization is evident in the importance he gives to historical research into the life of Jesus, his stress on the eschaton, and his approach to Trinitarian theology beginning with the revelation of the economic Trinity in history. Consequently, it is necessary to begin a study into Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" with at least a summary account of his reading of the development of the meaning of this key term. This need is also clear because Pannenberg's own manner of theological exposition tends to follow a historical framework. He regularly develops his own theological position by presenting his interpretation of the key historical developments of a theme or question while at the same time raising his own criticisms of the tradition. This approach also allows him to emphasize the elements of the tradition that most strongly reflect his own positions. While this approach is far from novel, it does make Pannenberg's reading of the history of the theological and doctrinal development of the term quite important and worthy of closer attention. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of Pannenberg's reading of the historical development of the term "person" in Trinitarian thought from the patristic period up to the contemporary debate.

However, such a task poses several methodological challenges. First, despite the strong historical orientation of Pannenberg's approach, much of his work is highly systematic in orientation and presentation. Thus, Pannenberg does not provide a single comprehensive presentation of the historical developments related to the term "person." Instead, this material is spread out in various forms through his major works and lesser articles. Consequently, any attempt to provide an overview of Pannenberg's reading of the history of the term "person" must reassemble the pieces of this narrative as they have been spread throughout the body of his work. Secondly, these various

presentations of his reading of the historical development of the term have appeared over the course of his entire career and generally are matters of secondary focus. As a result, one finds some major themes repeated over and over again, while some other aspects of the tradition are presented with differing emphases depending upon the context of the presentation. This fact reflects a nuanced appreciation of the tradition and the various major figures who played decisive roles in its development. Finally, while Pannenberg's presentation of the historical development of the term "person" is in general the subject of little controversy, undoubtedly many questions could be raised about some point of his interpretation of an individual author or of the relative importance of individual figures. One need only point to the importance of Hegel for Pannenberg's own understanding of the development of the term "person" and the wide range of scholarly debate about the correct interpretation of Hegel's philosophy in general to understand the kind of debate that Pannenberg's reading might engender.

Yet, it would be impossible in the course of the current study to produce a fully nuanced portrait of Pannenberg's reading of the historical tradition of the development of the term "person" which takes fully into account every possible source and every possible objection. Neither is such a portrait necessary. The current chapter rather seeks to provide only an overview of Pannenberg's understanding of the development of the term. As a result, the chapter is organized chronologically and grouped into three periods: Patristic, Medieval and Reformation, and Modern. This grouping reflects the somewhat unusual step of grouping together the Medieval and Reformation periods. However, while Pannenberg recognizes that there were many conversations about the meaning of personhood during this vast span of centuries, this chapter will find that the gradual development during these centuries differs from the more concentrated developments that took place in Christian antiquity and since the beginning of modernity. In each period, the presentation will focus on Pannenberg's understanding of the contributions of a series of key figures without providing a fully detailed exposition of the historical and theoretical context for that individual's contribution. Despite obvious disadvantages, such a limited presentation will allow the study to focus primarily on Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" and the importance he affords the history of the term's development.

The Patristic Period

Before looking at the specifics of Pannenberg's appraisal of the history of the term "person" in the patristic period, a few comments about his overall approach to this period must be addressed. It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of the developments that took place in Christian doctrine during the first five hundred years of Christianity. However, not all scholars have viewed the influence of this period in a positive manner. Pannenberg points to this phenomenon when he writes, "In the golden age of the writing of Protestant histories of dogma around the beginning of our century, a markedly negative judgment about the theological contribution of the earliest Christian apologists became standard."¹ Historians of dogma such as Adolf von Harnack viewed the wedding of the originally Palestinian-Christian theology with Greek philosophical categories as a concession to the predominant culture of the period and a critical step in the Hellenization of Christianity. Writing in the late 1950's Pannenberg notes that "the thesis that religious and metaphysical understandings of God are irreconcilable and the corresponding assessment of the Early Christian doctrine of God are still widely taken as self-evident today. . . ."² Despite this fact, Pannenberg does not share this negative attitude toward the developments of the patristic period. Rather, in Pannenberg's view metaphysical language and categories are indispensable elements of religious inquiry. Thus, he is not ill disposed to philosophical language as a matter of principle. However, in Pannenberg's judgment, the recasting of the authentically Christian notion of God into the language of Greek philosophical categories did not perfectly succeed in its task of challenging every element of the predominant culture which failed to harmonize with the authentically Christian vision of God.³ Thus, Pannenberg holds a highly nuanced vision of the integration of Christian theology and Greek philosophy that took place early in the patristic period. He does not dismiss the developments of the patristic period out of hand, neither does he romanticize the developments of this period as the peak of Christian consciousness which ought to somehow be recaptured. The following section

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol 2, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 119. This essay was originally published as "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs as dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 70 (1959): 1-45.

2. *Ibid.*, 121.

3. *Ibid.*, 182-3.

will demonstrate that Pannenberg's general attitudes toward the period are echoed in the specifics of his reconstruction of the early history of the term "person" in Trinitarian theology.

Pre-Christian History of "Person"

Pannenberg argues that few complex themes in the history of thought demonstrate the influence of Christianity and Christian thinking on the understanding of humanity more thoroughly than the concept "person." The word stems from pre-Christian antiquity and can be dated back at least to Homer, who used "*prospon*" to indicate a face.⁴ From there, the word came to be used to indicate an actor's mask and the portrayal of a particular role. The Latin term *persona* also held this meaning. From the sense of an actor's role, the term (both in Greek and in Latin) came to be applied to the social role that an individual plays. Eventually, in later Hellenism, the term came to be used to signify an individual and from this sense entered in the juridical language of antiquity. However, Pannenberg argues that the term took on its deeper significance in the Christian conviction of human dignity.⁵ This claim is supported by Jesus' preaching about the worth of each individual in the eyes of God in the parable of the Good Shepherd.

By the second century, the infinite worth of the individual human and its connection to each person's decision for God became associated with the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Pannenberg sees this merging of relatively diverse trains of thought as an advance in the Christian notion of person rather than a concession to the thought forms of the prevailing culture.⁶ This view is not only because the Apologists rejected the associated Platonic doctrine of reincarnation, but because it helped to bring to deeper expression the significance of the human mind and its relation to the divine. At this time, *hypostasis* became the term to describe both the relation of the Father, Son, and Spirit to the divine essence and to describe the basis for the union of humanity and divinity in Christ. *Hypostasis* described individuality. Pannenberg argues that this connection between person and individuality

4. On Pannenberg's reading of the Pre-Christian treatment of the term "person" cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, s.v. "Person" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band V, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961) 230. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Person und Subjekt" in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Band 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980) 81 and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985) 235 n. 116.

5. Pannenberg, "Person und Subjekt," 81.

6. *Ibid.*

caused considerable difficulty for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and the unity of God and man in Jesus⁷. At least in the Aristotelian understanding of person, a Trinity of persons led naturally to the idea of a Trinity of substances or essences. Thus, *hypostasis* was identified with tritheism in the third century.

Tertullian and Origen

During the second and third centuries Christianity moved into ever increasing contact with the Greco-Roman world and its prevailing thought forms. At the same time, it became increasingly important for Christian thinkers during this period to give greater clarity to both the belief in one God and the uniqueness of the Son and his relation to the Father. Christian writers during this period identified two erroneous efforts to preserve the unity of God in relation to the Son; both of which fall under the general title of Monarchianism.⁸ Modalistic Monarchianism (also known as modalism and Sabellianism) resolved the tension between the unity of God and the lordship of the Son, by arguing that there is fundamentally one God who reveals himself in three modes or masks in history. These are the Father, Son, and the Spirit. However, no actual distinction exists among these divine modes; rather, they are simply referred to as the one God by three different names depending on the point in history to which one refers. In the West, the modalist Praxeas could thus say that the Father and the Son were one and the same divine *persona*. The same also appears to be true in the East with regard to *prosopon*. Dynamic Monarchianism is more frequently referred to as Adoptionism. Here, the *monarchia* of the Father was insured by suggesting that the man Jesus became God's Son through adoption during the course of his lifetime. Thus, Christ was a mere man and not only a distinct person from the Father, but also a distinct substance or nature (*ousia* or *physis*).

During this period, Tertullian (c160–c.225) is of particular importance because he is the first to use the term person to describe the distinctness of the Father, Son and Spirit without denying their substantial unity.⁹ Tertullian's

7. Pannenberg, "Person," 230.

8. On the following presentation of Monarchianism cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978) 115–123. And for Pannenberg's own brief comments on Monarchianism cf. Wollhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol 1 trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 274.

9. Much of Tertullian's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is developed in his response to the heretic Praxeas. Cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, in J. P. Migne, ed, *Patrologiae*

theology also reflects the early concern “to uphold the biblical confession of the unity of God,” while at the same time affirming the deity of the Son and the Spirit.¹⁰ This concern is reflected in Tertullian’s use of “monarchy” to describe the primacy and rule of the Father which resulted in the tendency to subordinate the Son and the Spirit. However, Pannenberg agrees with Adolf von Harnack’s assertion that the distinction between Tertullian and the Monarchians “was only a ‘gradual’ one, for on both sides the self-development of the God into several hypostases was wholly conditioned by the history of revelation.”¹¹ Tertullian’s emphasis on the monarchy of the Father prevented him from overcoming the subordination of the Son that he shared with the Logos Christology of the second century Apologists, because he was not able to carry over the distinctions between the divine persons that were revealed in history all the way back to the divine essence.

In the East, Origen (c. 185–252) also laid the groundwork for a major breakthrough with his doctrine of the Father’s eternal generation of the Son. Here, the distinctions of the Trinitarian persons are eternally present in the life of God. Thus, the distinctions that are revealed in history are considered constitutive of the divine essence. Nonetheless, Origen still defended the unity of God by subordinating the Spirit to the Son and the Son to the Father. In making this advance, Origen introduced the term *hypostasis* to refer to the distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit. *Hypostasis* was originally synonymous with *ousia*, both of which meant real existence or essence.¹² While this basic sense is retained in Origen, he tends to use the term to refer to an individual subsistence which added emphasis on individuality. From this point on, *hypostasis* became the primary term in Greek-speaking theology to discuss the distinctness and individuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy

In many ways, the decisive moments in the patristic history of the doctrine of the Trinity during came in the fourth century as a result of the Arian heresy. Arius laid claim to Origen’s Christology and subordinated the Son to the Father by claiming that the Son was a creature. He proclaimed that “the Son,

Cursus Completus. Series Latina (Paris: Migne, 1844 - 1865), 2.0153B-0196C. Hereafter abbreviated as PL.

10. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 274.

11. Ibid., 275. and Adolf Von Harnack, “Monarchianismus,” in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 13, 3d ed. (Leipzig: J. B. Metzler, 1913), 332.

12. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 129 and Pannenberg, “Person,” 230.

begotten by the Father, created and founded before the ages, was not before he was begotten.”¹³ Thus, the Son was both personally and substantially distinct from the Father. The Council of Nicaea met in 325 to condemn the teaching of Arius and proclaimed that the Son is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father. In the subsequent decades, it was the achievement of Athanasius (300–373) and the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea c. 330–379; Gregory of Nyssa c. 335–c. 395; Gregory of Nazianzus c. 329–390) to ensure the victory of the Nicene position over Arianism (and Semi-Arianism) amidst a fury of political and theological opposition. Pannenberg argues that they too laid claim to the teaching of Origen, but instead did so in a manner that focused on the eternal generation of the Son (and the Spirit) from the Father which emphasized his essential unity with the Father.¹⁴

Athanasius was most active in the first half of this period, arguing primarily against Arians and Semi-Arians.¹⁵ Pannenberg summarizes Athanasius’ contributions in the following statement: “Defending the Nicene belief in the *homousion* of the Son (and Spirit) with the Father, their equal deity, Athanasius vanquished subordinationism, insisting that we cannot think of the Father as Father without the Son and the Spirit.”¹⁶ In this passage, Pannenberg points out not only Athanasius’ defense of the Nicene formula, but also his insistence upon the equal deity of all of the divine persons as well as the importance of the relations between them as the basis for their distinctions. In fact, Pannenberg states that Athanasius’ most important argument against the Arians was that the Father could not be conceived of as Father without the Son; Pannenberg returns over and over again to this argument in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Systematic Theology*.¹⁷

13. Arius, *Epistle ad Eusebius Nicomedia*, in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, ed. William Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 29–30.

14. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:272–275.

15. Semi-Arianism here refers to a large moderate group of Church fathers who tended to argue for the full deity of the Son, but were uncomfortable with the use of the term *homoousios* because of its lack of basis in scripture and because of the problems it seemed to pose for the unity and simplicity of the divine essence. Instead, this group rallied around the term *homoiousios* which means “of like substance” or “of similar substance.” Nonetheless, the title Semi-Arianism remains a misnomer because of the fundamental opposition of most of these father’s to the teachings of Arius. For more information cf. Kelly, *Christian Doctrines*, 247.

16. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:275.

17. Pannenberg makes the claim that this is Athanasius’ most important argument in *Ibid.*, 273. For other references to this argument in chapter five of *Systematic Theology* cf. pp. 278, 279, 280, 312, and 322–323.

This line of argumentation points to several things for Pannenberg. First, the argument is significant because it defends the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. In particular, it accomplishes this by rooting the divine persons in the concept of their relations to one another. In this way, Athanasius is the first to bring out the significance of the relationality for personhood. Even more significantly for Pannenberg, Athanasius argued that the person of the Father was dependent upon the personhood of the Son just as much as the Son was dependent upon the Father. In this light, Athanasius' claims that Jesus' statement that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Light in the Gospel of John meant that he is the Truth and the Life of the Father as well.¹⁸ For Athanasius, the Son is also the power and wisdom of the Father. This point leads Pannenberg to conclude that "The deity of the Father is thus seen in the Son (*C. Arrian.* 3.5). As the Father is not the Father without the Son (3.6; cf. 1.29.34), he does not have his Godhead without him."¹⁹ This dependence of the Father upon the Son, of course, does not prevent Athanasius from admitting that the Father is also the source of the deity of the Son. However, it is this insight, first developed by Athanasius, which was left behind in the traditional view of the deity of the Father.

Athanasius intended this argument first and foremost to defend the full divinity of the Son. As a result, it still left him with the problem of explaining how the separate *hypostases* could be seen as perfectly united in such a way that the monotheistic character of the Christian faith was not lost. The unity of the Son with the Father was, for Athanasius, based in the logic of the relation that is posited when we call God "Father."²⁰ However, this position was not worked out in detail, and it fell to the Cappadocians to provide a more complete defense of the unity of the divine persons as well as to substantiate the full deity of the Spirit.²¹

18. *Ibid.*, 322; "For if the Son was not before he was begotten, the truth would not always be in God. But to say this would be wrong. For if the Father was, there always was with him the truth which the Son is who says: 'I am the truth.'" Athanasius, *Contra Arians*, 1.20.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, 278; Athanasius, *Contra Arians*, 1.26-28; 2.59-60. Cf. also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 244-5.

21. The controversy with the Pneumatomachians (also known as the Macedonians) ensued in the 370's and 380's with the Cappadocian Fathers as the primary defenders of the full deity of the Spirit. However, the assertion of the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son was supported by Athanasius in the previous decades and seen as a natural corollary to the teachings of Nicaea. Cf. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 255.

One of the ways that the Cappadocians tried to develop the work of Athanasius was thus to defend the divine unity. They put forward two more detailed theories to explain the unity of the three *hypostases* in the one divine *ousia*. In the first theory, the Cappadocians attributed the unity of the three persons to the unity of their activity.²² However, Pannenberg argues that the unity of the divine activity is insufficient to insure the unity of the divine persons because it is based upon a circular argument. While the theology of the second and third centuries based the distinction of the Trinitarian persons in the idea of three spheres of operation, this basis for the Trinity of persons was undermined by the doctrine of the one divine activity. As a result, “another basis has to be found for the trinity of persons.”²³

The second theory put forward by the Cappadocians was established in the relations of origin that exist between the Father, Son and Spirit. Put simply, the relations define the persons. For example, the Cappadocians referred to the Father as the fount of deity of the Son without the additional qualification that this fact is true only from the perspective of the Son. But Pannenberg does not see this argument for the divine unity as a helpful solution to the problem.²⁴ “Without the addition of this qualification the Son and the Spirit are ontologically inferior to the Father—something which the Cappadocians no less than Athanasius strove to avoid.”²⁵ In making this move the Cappadocians returned to the older idea that the Father is the source and principle of the deity from whom the Son and the Spirit receive their divinity. “But this thought had been linked to subordinationsim in pre-Nicene views of the Trinity and it had been an obstacle to the recognition of the full deity of the Son in the battle for the Nicene formula.”²⁶ Basil tried to counter this tendency by forging a distinction between the fact that the deity is without origin and the fact that the Father is unbegotten.²⁷ But this point fails to go as far as Athanasius “who applied the relational conditioning of personal distinction, as mutual conditioning, to the Father as well, so that the Father can

22. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:278.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 279. Cf. Gregory of Nazianus, *Orations 2 in Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeca*, 161 vol., J.P. Migne ed. (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857-1866), 35. 445 BC, hereafter abbreviated as PG; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Maced.*, 13 (PG, 45, 1317A).

25. *Ibid.*, 323.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Basil, *C. Eun.* 2.17 (PG, 29, 605A); *Ep.* 38.7 (PG, 32, 337C).

be thought of as unbegotten only in distinction from the Son.”²⁸ As a result of this weak argument, Pannenberg holds that the person of the Father became so fused to the idea of the origin of deity that the divine substance can only be accurately attributed to him.²⁹ As a result, the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity entailed an unintended relapse into subordinationism “since the idea of the mutual defining of the distinctiveness of the persons does not lead to the thought of an equally mutually ontological constitution of their personhood but is interpreted in terms of relations of origin, of which it can be said that strictly they are constitutive only for the personhood of the Son and the Spirit if the Father is the source and origin of deity.”³⁰

However, Pannenberg’s treatment of the contribution of the Cappadocians is not wholly negative. He is aware and appreciative of the fact that the Cappadocians analyzed the conception of *hypostasis* much more thoroughly than either Origen or Athanasius. Originally, this move was made to defend the distinctions in God from the charge of tri-theism. The Arians argued that the hypostatic distinctions of the Father, Son and Spirit must either be substances or accidents. However, neither of these options was acceptable to the Cappadocians. On the one hand, if they admitted that the *hypostaseis* of the Father, Son and Spirit were each unique substances, they would be forced to renounce the use of *homoousios* to describe the essential relationship between the Father and the Son. On the other hand, it was universally agreed among the Fathers that the divine essence was utterly simple and therefore devoid of all accidental properties. To sidestep this apparently inexorable dilemma, the Cappadocians developed the notion of defining personhood in terms of relation. They argued that the category “relation” implied neither a proliferation of substance nor accident in the Godhead and therefore protected its unity and simplicity. Thus, *ousia* and *hypostasis* are differentiated in precisely the same way as universal and particular.

Pannenberg’s assessment at this point is markedly ambivalent. On the one hand, Pannenberg approves of the association of the terms “relation” and “person.” Later it will be shown that the concept of relation is absolutely essential to his understanding of personhood. In addition, the Cappadocian Fathers’ distinction of *ousia* and *hypostasis* made a decisive advance in the significance of the individual. “For this reason it was possible to think of three subjects, three *hypostaseis*, in God regardless of the unity of the divine

28. *Ibid.*, 280.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

essence.”³¹ However, in this clarification of terms, the distinctions of the persons are still subsumed under the unity of the divine essence. So, Pannenberg points out that for the Cappadocians the term “relation” has no ontological weight for the person of the Father and thus leads to the aforementioned problem of associating the divine substance with the person of the Father.³²

Fifth Century Christological Controversies

The first phase of the debates over the relation between “person” and “substance” came to a close in the fourth century advances in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, the second great phase of the Christian development of the term “person” came as a result of the clash between the schools of Antioch and Alexandria over the question of the union of humanity and divinity in Christ. The last chapter briefly discussed Pannenberg’s understanding of the fifth century Christological controversy and its conclusion in the doctrine that Jesus possessed two natures in one person.³³ However, it did not at that point fully discuss the significance of these debates for understanding the term “person.” It demonstrated that Pannenberg is critical of both the Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to the divine/human union in the person of Christ, because, in his opinion, both overemphasize the importance of Jesus’ birth for his Sonship. This overemphasis results in a dilemma that can not be resolved in the paradigm established by both major parties. On the one hand, the Antiochenes argued that in the incarnation the Son assumed a complete human being. This complete human being is assumed to be independent and for this reason, the union of a complete human nature and the complete divine nature results in a third thing. Consequently, this position destroys the unity of the man Jesus with God. On the other hand, the Alexandrians argued that at the incarnation the Logos was united only with the universal human nature and not with a human individual (person). Pannenberg sees this move as equally troublesome because it reduces Jesus’ humanity to an abstraction. “Accordingly, Jesus as an individual Jesus was never a man, but from the very

31. Pannenberg, “Person und Subjekt,” 82–3: “Dadurch wurde es möglich, unbeschadet der Einheit der göttlichen Wesenheit drei Subjekte, drei ὑπόστασεις, in Gott zu denken.” (author’s translation).

32. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:279–80.

33. Cf. pp 51ff. in chapter two.

beginning was a superman, the God-man.”³⁴ The consequence of this position is that the Alexandrian understanding of the incarnation always tends toward the heresy of monophysitism.

Moreover, Pannenberg argues that the resolution attempted at the Council of Chalcedon was insufficient to overcome the dilemma that he believes is apparent in the conflict between the Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to Christology.³⁵ Rather, the Chalcedonian formula merely expressed the truths that were present in both traditions and established negative criteria for Christological theory. For this reason, the Chalcedonian formula was unable to resolve the actual theological dilemma set before it, and its position “was inevitably suspect from both sides.”³⁶ From this perspective, it is no surprise at all to see that the debates over Christology continued for centuries until the inheritors of the Alexandrian Monophysite tradition were weakened and almost wiped out by Islam in the seventh century.³⁷

Regardless of its inability to transcend the framework laid out by the clash between the Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to Christology, the Council of Chalcedon did have a profound impact on the development of the term “person.” In particular, the Chalcedonian formula deepened the divide between the concepts “person” and “substance” once again.³⁸ Here, the person of Christ is defined as the principle of unity for both the human and divine natures. This approach highlighted the relational structure of the personality of Christ and paved the way for Leontius of Byzantium’s thesis of the enhypostasis of the human nature of Christ in the Logos.³⁹ In addition to this repeated emphasis on the relational component of the term “person,” Chalcedon once again widened the gap between the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* (or in this case *physis*). During this period, the Greek term *hypostasis* came to be seen as synonymous with the Latin term *persona* and was used to describe the individuality of an entity, despite the previous connection between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. Understood in this way, the term “nature” is identified with the substantial and essential elements of humanity and divinity, while the

34. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 2d ed., trans. Lewis L Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) 291.

35. H. Denzinger and A Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei Fet Morum*, 36th ed. (Barcione: Herder, 1965) 300–313. (Denzinger will hereafter be abbreviated as DS).

36. *Ibid.*, 292.

37. *Ibid.*, 293–4.

38. Pannenberg, “Person und Subjekt,” 83.

39. Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestor. et Eutych*, 1 (PG 86, 1277CD).

ontological significance of “person” is limited only to the notion of individuality.

Pannenberg is cautiously critical of this development. He argues that the Antiochene School, which consistently concerned itself with insuring the protection of the full humanity of Christ, failed to see in the term “person” a reduction of the Incarnation of the Son into the *totality* of human existence.⁴⁰ More specifically, the Antiochene notion of personhood raises the question of how it is possible that Jesus poses a genuinely human individuality at the same time that he possesses a genuinely divine personality. At this point, Pannenberg’s criticism of the tradition comes into play. He argues that when Christology begins from the Sonship of Christ (seen from the perspective of the birth of Christ) this dilemma is inevitable. However, if one starts from the life of the man Jesus, as seen through the irreplaceable interpretative lens of his resurrection, the individuality of the man Jesus can be seen as always united to the individuality of the divine Son. Thus, Pannenberg is arguing against a static substantial notion of personhood. This argument, however, does not mean that Pannenberg is looking to do away with a philosophical and ontological understanding of personhood. Quite the contrary, Pannenberg is looking to replace the traditional metaphysics of substance with a metaphysics of the person or a relational metaphysics. Thus, it would be a grave misunderstanding of Pannenberg’s position to associate his theology with other approaches that are completely averse to metaphysics and ontology.

Augustine

In opposition to the Cappadocian approach to the doctrine of the Trinity which began with the divine persons and then proceeded to explain their unity, Augustine (354–430) began his reflections on the Trinity by “insisting on the unity of the divine prior to all Trinitarian differentiation and by defining this unity in such a way as to rule out any idea of substantial distinction even at the cost of making the differentiation of the three persons an impenetrable secret.”⁴¹ As a result, Augustine’s insistence on the lack of any substantial basis

40. This key point in Pannenberg’s appreciation of the Christological controversies of the fifth century is repeatedly the focus of a great amount of concern. Cf. *Ibid.*, 231. Pannenberg, *Jesus*, 287–293. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 379–389 (especially 384–5).

41. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 283. Pannenberg is very intentional here in using the term “secret” rather than “mystery” because the latter term is meant to point to the nature of revelation (cf. *Ibid.*, 211; 215–6). The use of the word “secret” here furthers Pannenberg’s opinion that a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity requires one to begin from the divine persons and then only secondarily move to develop the notion of the unity of these three persons.

for the Trinitarian distinctions made him reluctant to call the persons *hypostases*, because he associated *hypostasis* with *substantia*. All the same, Augustine recognized the authority of the term *hypostasis* and followed the Cappadocians in their relational definition of the Trinitarian distinctions. In fact, in Augustine's Trinitarian theology, the relations took on increased importance. Thus, for Augustine, even calling the Father ingenerate is a relational attribute.

Despite the importance of the relational definition of "person" in Augustine, he did not further develop Athanasius' concept of the mutuality of the relations in divine personhood. However, this lack of development was not because Augustine was unacquainted with the notion.⁴² Augustine saw this doctrine as requiring that the Father does not have Wisdom unto himself, but rather receives it from the Son. Augustine was also concerned that this understanding of personhood led to the conclusion that neither the Father nor the Son could be called God for himself. Pannenberg paraphrases Augustine's concerns as follows: "How can the Son be consubstantial with the Father if the Father has no substantiality of his own? Similarly, if the Son has the divine essence only relative to the Father, his essentiality would not be essentiality but would only be something relative to it."⁴³

Against this concern, Pannenberg takes up the thesis of Robert Jenson, who believes that in holding this position Augustine is not defending the doctrine of Nicaea from an erroneous interpretation, but rather missing one of its central points, "namely that the relations between the persons are constitutive not only for their persons but also for their deity."⁴⁴ This critique, of course, does not mean that Augustine intended to deviate from the teaching of Nicaea or its defense by Athanasius. Rather, he was seeking a better conceptual framework from which to understand the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. But in doing so he rejected the approach to the definition of substantiality in terms of the reciprocity of personal relations. He insisted that each person directly had a share in the one deity and its attributes rather than an indirect share by way of the personal relations. For Augustine, this argument seemed to guarantee the equality of the persons and to keep their unity as a central concern. However, Pannenberg sees this emphasis as a

42. Augustine attributed the idea of the mutuality of the persons to Eusebius of Vercelli. Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. 50 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1968), 228 lines 20-21. For relevant writings of Eusebius cf. J. Migne, PL, 12.947-54 and 10.713-14.

43. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:323.

44. *Ibid.*; cf. Robert Jenson, *Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 119.

reduction of the mutuality of the personal relations, which created difficulties for Augustine's own acceptance of the term "person" and for the rest of the traditional Western doctrine of the Trinity.

Pannenberg also argues that Augustine played an important role in the development of the term "person" as indicating the creative subjectivity that accompanies the rational mind and human personhood in his critique of the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*.⁴⁵ In Platonic thought, *anamnesis* refers to the existence of ideas from a previous incarnation of the soul. Augustine's rejection of the doctrine of reincarnation led him to postulate that the soul possesses itself in knowledge. In this way, his understanding of personhood became increasingly associated not only with the rational nature, but also with human self-possession or self-realization through knowledge and action. Pannenberg sees this as an important development because it lays the first seed for the notion of the creative subjectivity of the human person. This approach has only grown in importance in contemporary theories of personhood.

Finally, Augustine is important for the history of the term "person" because the Western notion of the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is traceable back to Augustine, who described the Spirit as the eternal communion of the first two persons of the Trinity.⁴⁶ Augustine took this position because the Spirit is the love (*caritas*) that unites the Father and the Son. However, Pannenberg agrees with those writers who say that this tendency eliminates the personhood of the Spirit.⁴⁷ Despite this negative appraisal of Augustine's pneumatology, Pannenberg does find redeeming value in Augustine's characterization of the Spirit as the love that unites the Father and the Son. Pannenberg argues that the work of the Spirit is to glorify the Son, which in turn is based in the Son's work in glorifying the Father. For this reason, Pannenberg holds that

Augustine rightly described the Spirit as the bond of union between the Father and the Son. But we cannot agree with his closely related thought that the Spirit proceeds from both. He presents an interpretation of the Spirit-mediated mutuality of the relation between the Father and the Son in the language of relations of origin. This step is perhaps understandable if one presupposes that the intratrinitarian relations are solely relations of origin and if one seeks on this presupposition to describe the

45. Pannenberg, "Person und Subjekt," 81.

46. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 6.5.7; 15.19.37.

47. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:316. In n. 177, Pannenberg cites with approval Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik* (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus, 1984), 284 as an example of an Orthodox theologian who advances this critique of Augustine.

fellowship of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. But the result is not in keeping with the witness of scripture.⁴⁸

Thus, while Pannenberg denies that the *filioque* is heretical when understood in its proper context, it still is “inappropriate because it describes the fellowship (of the Father and the Son) in the vocabulary of the relation of origin.”⁴⁹ However, Pannenberg’s critique of the *filioque* should not be seen simply as a concession to a more Eastern doctrine of the Trinity. On the contrary, Pannenberg sees the unfortunate division in Christianity over the Western addition of the *filioque* as a result of the tendency in both the East and the West to reduce Trinitarian persons to the relations of origin.

Yet, Augustine did not attempt to derive the Trinitarian distinctions from the unity of the divine substance, according to Pannenberg. Even Augustine’s famous psychological analogies were “simply meant to offer a very general way of linking the unity and the trinity and thus creating some plausibility for Trinitarian statements.”⁵⁰ Moreover, Augustine “stressed the inadequacy of all psychological analogies.”⁵¹ The importance that Pannenberg attributes to this fact will be seen more clearly in the next section where the development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the intervening centuries between the patristic period and the rise of modernity will be discussed.

Thus, Pannenberg pays a great deal of attention to the development of the term “person” during the patristic period. In particular, Pannenberg focuses on the importance of the term “person” in the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the fifth century Christological controversies. Nonetheless, important contributions were also made by Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine and the development of the understanding of the term “person” throughout this period cannot be overestimated. However, Pannenberg does not see all the developments as equally valuable. He is especially critical of the trend throughout this period to diminish the ontological significance of the term *hypostasis* and the tendency to associate the divine essence with the person of the Father.

48. *Ibid.*, 317.

49. *Ibid.*, 318–9. cf. also Pannenberg, “Die Bedeutung des Bekenntnisses von Nicaea-Konstantinopel fuer den oekumenischen Dialog heute,” *Oekumenische Rundschau* 31 (1982): 129–140.

50. *Ibid.*, 284.

51. *Ibid.*, 285.

The Medieval Period and Reformation

Over the course of the centuries between the close of the patristic period and the beginning of modernity, the meaning of the term “person” continued to develop, albeit at a different pace. Pannenberg’s interest in this development during the period of high Scholasticism and the dogmatics of the Reformers focuses largely on the classical placement of the doctrine of the Trinity after the treatise on the unity of God in systematic presentations of Church doctrine. As will be demonstrated, this orientation also directly affects his understanding of the term “person” and his appraisal of the history of its use. He criticizes this approach because discussing the doctrine of the Trinity after the treatment of the existence, nature and attributes of God gives the impression that the doctrine of God is complete without a discussion of the Trinitarian distinctions and that this doctrine is merely an appendix.⁵² Pannenberg traces this approach back to the twelfth century. However, before moving to the developments of the twelfth century and beyond, we must first briefly consider the contribution of Boethius (c. 480–524).

Boethius

It is important to address the work of Boethius at this point because he formed an important bridge between the history of the Patristic understanding of the term “person” and the history of this term for the Latin Middle Ages. Boethius’ definition of “person” as “*rationalis naturae individua substantia*” (i.e. an individual substance of a rational nature) provided an excellent summary of the patristic understanding of “person.”⁵³ His definition of the personhood of an individual is defined primarily by two elements: substantiality and rationality. Both of the characteristics were present and highly important in the patristic period. However, Boethius is best discussed at the beginning of a treatment of the medieval period because his definition of the term “person” was decisive for this period. Nonetheless, Pannenberg does not dwell long on the significance of Boethius’ classic definition of a person as an individual substance of a rational nature, despite the fact that it bridges the entire history of the term’s use from its Hellenic foundations to the modern emphasis on self-consciousness.⁵⁴ In part, this decision is because the

52. *Ibid.*, 282.

53. Boethius, *De Persona et Duabus Naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, 2 (PL, 64, 1343C).

54. Pannenberg, “Person,” 231.

definition covers up the significant developments which happened during the history of this formula's dominance.⁵⁵ But more importantly, Pannenberg believes that this definition hides the distinction between person and substance through its combination of the concepts of individual and substance. It is precisely this confusion that resulted in many toilsome disputes over the doctrine of the Trinity, the union of humanity and divinity in Christ, and the tendency toward monophysitism which Pannenberg detects in the incarnational theories of later medieval thinkers.⁵⁶

Peter Lombard, Anselm, and Richard of St. Victor

Early Scholasticism witnessed a renewal of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular, this renewal focused on attempts to provide a rational foundation for this Christian belief. These attempts tended to proceed by presuming the unity of God and then deriving the Trinitarian persons from this unity. For example, Peter Lombard (c.1100–c. 1160) addressed the doctrine of the Trinity after a short general introduction to his *Sentences*.⁵⁷ While his approach made use of the idea of natural human knowledge of God to substantiate the Trinitarian claims of scripture, his Augustinian approach did so by using the concept of vestiges of the Trinity in creation and in the human psyche. Anselm of Canterbury's (c. 1033–1109) *Monologion* was, according to Pannenberg, another attempt to derive the Trinity from the divine unity. In this attempt, Anselm made extensive use of Augustine's triad of *mens, notitia, and amor*.⁵⁸ However, Pannenberg believes that Anselm has lost something important that Augustine was able to maintain. Anselm draws upon the notion of God as Spirit and thus starts from the unity of the divine essence, while Augustine regarded the Spirit that knows and loves itself as "only a remote copy of the Trinity."⁵⁹ Pannenberg is critical of attempts that start from the notion of the divine Spirit, as he believes Anselm does, because he argues

55. Pannenberg, "Person und Subjekt," 82.

56. These thinkers include Abelard, Lombard, and Gilbert of Portiers. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:295ff.

57. *Ibid.*, 282. Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor* (Paris: Migne, 1853) 15ff., 19ff.

58. Anselm, *Monologion*, 9.

59. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:286. In this passage Pannenberg speaks of "God as Spirit" which appears to be a way that he has of speaking of the unity of God rather than of the person of the Holy Spirit. In particular he seems to have in mind John 4: 24 where the essence of God is described as Spirit. For more on Pannenberg's understanding of the essence of God as Spirit cf. *Ibid.*, 382 ff.

that this approach has consistently made it difficult to think of the Father, Son, and Spirit as persons. Yet, Anselm's derivation of the Trinity from the unity of the divine Spirit is developed from the relation of the trinity to unity prior to creation. According to Pannenberg, Anselm accomplishes this task in such a way that the Trinity is derived from the unity and "embraced by it."⁶⁰ Pannenberg's point here seems to be that even though Anselm follows the Western tradition of giving priority of place to the unity of God, he does so in such a way that the doctrine of the Trinity remains an indispensable aspect of the doctrine that is thoroughly integrated into the understanding of God. However, the intimate connection between the doctrines of the unity and Trinity of God was not always retained in later attempts to derive the divine persons from the unity of the divine essence.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) provides another example of an early Scholastic attempt to provide a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity by deriving it from the unity of God.⁶¹ Richard is of particular interest to Pannenberg because he develops his understanding of the Trinity from the concept of God as *summum bonum*, which includes the notion of love. Richard argues that love can only be perfected in the act of loving another person. Further, God's love can only find a truly worthy partner in another divine person. Hence the perfect love of the one God demands a plurality of persons. Thus while Richard's approach is characterized by the trend to derive the Trinity from the unity, he too does so in such a way that the two concepts remain intertwined.

Pannenberg favors Richard's Trinitarian theology above others from the same period for two reasons. First, Richard's system of thinking of God in terms of love avoids many of the problems associated with thinking of God as Spirit.⁶² As has already been noted, Pannenberg holds that thinking of God in terms of spirit has consistently made it difficult to think of a plurality of divine persons. Thinking of God as love, however, is able to bypass these difficulties because it places the notion of personal encounter at the very center of the divine essence. Secondly, Richard's argument is better able to elucidate the full personhood of the Holy Spirit. This concern forms a consistent theme in Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology that will have to be dealt with more fully in the next chapter. At this point it is sufficient to say that Pannenberg agrees with Richard's assessment that love that is *caritas* demands a third to share in it.⁶³

60. Ibid.

61. Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, 3.8 (PL, 196, 916).

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 287. Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, 3.11; 3.15 (PL, 196, 122; 925).

Richard argues that the perfection of love requires not only loving another perfectly and being loved perfectly, but also the perfect sharing of a love for another. Thus, the love between the Father and the Son requires the person of the Spirit.

Despite this generally positive assessment of the contribution made by Richard of St. Victor's Trinitarian theology, Pannenberg recognizes that his unique starting point inevitably made Richard less influential. However Pannenberg has a more serious concern with Richard of St. Victor's Trinitarian theology because Richard draws his inspiration from book nine of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, where Augustine describes the Father as the perfect lover, the Son as the perfect beloved, and the Spirit as the love they shared between them.⁶⁴ However, Pannenberg points out that in *De Trinitate* Augustine sees an intimate connection between love and knowledge because one cannot love what is not known.⁶⁵ Thus, Pannenberg argues that Richard's doctrine of the Trinity is bound up with the derivation of the doctrine of the Trinity from concept of God as spirit because it is developed from the concept of charity.⁶⁶

Gilbert de la Porrée

Gilbert de la Porrée (c 1075–1154) made a significant contribution to the history of Trinitarian theology when he argued that reason can know only the existence of God in his unity and that any attempts to argue for a natural knowledge of the Trinity of God through the use of the Augustinian concept of vestiges of the Trinity should be seen as Sabellianism.⁶⁷ Pannenberg explains more fully the importance of Gilbert's insight into the doctrine of the Trinity in the following passage:

To derive the trinitarian distinctions from the self-differentiation of the divine Spirit in its self-awareness is to subsume the threeness of the divine persons into the concept of a single personal God. This derivation, then, comes into conflict with the doctrine of the Trinity itself. Gilbert of Portiers had seen this already in the 12th century in his criticism of using the analogies of Augustine to arrive at a psychological derivation of trinitarian statements, and in his rejection of this procedure as Sabellianism. But if

64. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 9.2.

65. *Ibid.*, 9.3.

66. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:287. In the next chapter of this study we will further discuss the role of love and the spirituality of God in Pannenberg's own understanding of the divine essence.

67. *Ibid.* Gilbert de la Porrée, *Commentaries on Boethius*, PL 64,1262Cff; PL 64, 1279Cf.

speculative psychological interpretations of the essential Trinity are identical with Sabellianism, which sought to relate and restrict the trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit to different phases in the economy of salvation, the charge is right to the extent that a psychological interpretation ultimately involves a reduction to nontrinitarian monotheism. For all the differentiation in the self-consciousness, the God of this understanding is a single subject. The moments in the self-consciousness have no subjectivity of their own. From the very outset, then, those who take this line have difficulty with the dogma that there are three persons or hypostases in the one God.⁶⁸

Thus, Pannenberg agrees with Gilbert's assessment of the difficulties entailed in making use of psychological analogies for the Trinity. However, this criticism does not apply equally to all who made use of psychological analogies for the Trinity. For example, Pannenberg points out that Augustine is keenly aware of the limited value of vestiges of the Trinity in the human person. As a result, despite the time and attention that is devoted to such analogies in *De Trinitate*, Augustine does not argue that these signs of the Trinity are sufficient to establish the doctrine of the Trinity through rational argumentation.

Thomas Aquinas

The next figure Pannenberg addresses as making a significant contribution to the development of the term "person" in the Middle Ages is Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274). Pannenberg notes the similarity between Aquinas and Augustine in that the former argued that the Trinity of persons can not be rationally demonstrated with any compelling necessity. But Aquinas appears to be even less confident than Augustine in the value of vestiges of the Trinity in creation for rational discourse.⁶⁹ Aquinas thus follows Gilbert of Portiers in stressing the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is a matter of faith that finds little support in natural knowledge. For this reason, Pannenberg finds it surprising that the structure of Thomas' *Summa Theologica* proceeds by deriving Trinitarian statements from the concept of the one God.⁷⁰ Aquinas develops all of the divine attributes from his understanding of God as the first cause of the world, including God's spirituality as a knowing and willing being. From here, Aquinas is able to advance his understanding of the divine processions, "namely the procession of the idea of the known in the intellect

68. Ibid., 294–5. Gilbert de la Porrée, *Commentaries on Boethius*, PL 64, 1279C f.

69. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super librum Boethii de Trinitate*, Bruno Decker ed., *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*. Bd. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959.) 1.4.1.

70. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:287–8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1981).

(1.27.1) and that of a turning in love to the object of this knowledge in the will (1.27.3).⁷¹ These processions can then be seen as actions and from this point of view, Aquinas is able to think of intradivine relations, which leads to his definition of divine personhood as being composed of subsistent relations. The result of this line of argumentation is a logical progression from the idea of God as the first cause to the definition of divine personhood. Thomas squares this argument with his previously stated position on the revealed character of the doctrine of the Trinity by saying that such arguments can only serve to provide congruent reasons for what is already presumed, rather than providing a sufficient basis for belief.

Despite Aquinas' innovation of the doctrine of subsistent relations to describe the basis for the distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit, Pannenberg argues that Aquinas' understanding of the relations remains "artificial."⁷² His brief argument is here reproduced in full:

The artificiality is that in a relation the things are related over against one another, and this is still true of a divine relation even though, like all else, it is coincident with the divine essence. In another place Thomas says the relations are distinct from the divine essence (1.39.1). Relations or persons in God can only be conceptually distinct. Only in relation to the opposing member is there real distinction. On this basis Thomas thought there could be a real distinction of persons. But if the distinction is only conceptual, this applies to the opposition too, and therefore the independence (Selbständigkeit) of the persons as subsistent relations is only conceptual.⁷³

Although Aquinas' understanding of the basis of the Trinitarian persons in the notion of subsistent relations was intended to produce the idea of real relations between the divine persons, this concept fails to accomplish its task because the relations remain only conceptually distinct. As a result, the persons fail to attain their own subjectivity and are thus not fully personal. Pannenberg sees this shortcoming as a continuation of the traditional difficulty in the Western doctrine of the Trinity to speak of three distinct divine hypostases.

Nicholas of Cusa

While Pannenberg spends a great deal of time discussing medieval and scholastic thinkers, as a part of the trend to derive the doctrine of the Trinity

71. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:288.

72. *Ibid.*, 295.

73. *Ibid.*, 295, n. 122.

from the unity of the divine essence, he is also interested in the medieval precursors for the modern understanding of personhood which focuses largely on the human person. In the last section, we mentioned briefly the roots of the modern notion of creative human subjectivity in Augustine. This idea found another important precursor and was again advanced in the medieval debates over the Aristotelian doctrine of the active mind.⁷⁴ Aristotle detected in the abstracting active intellect the external working of a divine force leading the upper part of the human soul toward creativity. In the Christian framework of medieval Scholasticism, the ability to abstract from the self was reinterpreted not as a part of the intellect, but of the human soul. Pannenberg argues that this decision became the starting point for later investigations of the activity of the human intellect in realization and its significance for the modern idea of creative subjectivity. This development can be seen especially clearly in Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1462) “who described man as a second god, as a creator of a world of thought, just as God is the Creator of all things.”⁷⁵ This aspect of the development of the term “person” will be further developed when this study discusses the modern period.

Reformers

In the Trinitarian theology of the Reformation, the problems associated with starting from the unity of God and the notion of the divine Spirit worsened. Aquinas separated the treatment of the one God from the doctrine of the Trinity and addressed them in that order. For Pannenberg, Aquinas’ structure is minimally acceptable in that it at least progresses from the existence of the one God, to the divine substance and its attributes, and then finally to the Trinity. Thus, the treatment of God is intimately connected to the doctrine of the Trinity. “But without a derivation of the trinity from the unity this sequence, which puts the unity first, would make no sense.”⁷⁶ However, it is precisely this connecting piece that was lost in subsequent centuries. In particular, Pannenberg focuses on the loss of this tight systematic structure in Reformation theology which resulted from its emphasis on the basis of the Trinity in revelation. This required the dogmatists of the Reformation to focus on the basis for the Trinity in scripture. While the first generation of Protestant dogmatics largely retained the statements made about the essence

74. On the following cf. Pannenberg, “Person and Subjekt,” 81-2.

75. *Ibid.*, 82: “der den Menschen als zweiten Gotte beschrieb, als Schöpfer einer Welt von Gedanken, so wie Gott der Schöpfer der Dinge selbst ist.” (Author’s translation)

76. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:288.

and attributes of God formulated in terms of Scholastic philosophy, it was content “to establish and define the statements of the church’s teaching [about the Trinity] on a scriptural basis.”⁷⁷ Although Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) used the psychological analogies in his doctrine of the Trinity, this decision produced a backlash among subsequent Lutheran and Reformed writers.⁷⁸ “The result was that many older Protestant expositions of the Trinity were not developed in any close conceptual connection with statements about the unity of the divine substance and attributes.”⁷⁹

Pannenberg blames the estrangement of the doctrine of the Trinity from the doctrine of the essence and attributes of God for the anti-Trinitarian backlash that ensued beginning with the Socinians in the sixteenth century. However, Pannenberg finds the arguments of the early seventeenth century Arminians even more damaging and influential. “They subordinated the Son and the Spirit to the Father and became pioneers of the later thesis that theology must be content with a mere Trinity of revelation as distinct from an eternal and essential Trinity.”⁸⁰ In addition to their arguments from scripture and reason, they traced the doctrine of the Trinity back to the Platonism of later antiquity and strengthened the impression that the doctrine of the Trinity was not biblical. This move anticipates the criticisms of Trinitarian theology that will come to prominence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pannenberg argues that in disposing of the Scholastic derivations of the Trinity from the unity, early Protestant theology made it necessary to reconceptualize the notion of the divine unity. Frequently this connection was simply considered a matter of faith. So, once it became more convenient to understand the one God without the Trinity, rather than with it, the doctrine of the Trinity came to be seen as a superfluous addendum and even incompatible with the notion of one God. Further, Pannenberg states that it is only after this chasm had developed between the doctrine of the one God and the doctrine of the Trinity that the latter is exposed to the attacks of modern biblical and historical criticism.

77. *Ibid.*, 290.

78. Philipp Melancthon, *Loci Praecipui Theologici*, ed. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 21 (Halis Saxonum: Schwetschke and Sons, 1863), 615–6. (*Corpus Reformatorum* hereafter abbreviated as CR).

79. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:290.

80. *Ibid.*, 291.

The Modern Debate

Up to this point in this study of Pannenberg's reading of the history of the term "person" the focus has been largely centered on two aspects of the term. First, it has concentrated almost exclusively on the way in which "person" is applicable to the divine distinctions. This emphasis is appropriate not only because the overarching goal of this study is to investigate Pannenberg's understanding of Trinitarian personhood, but also because of the importance that the doctrine of the Trinity has had for the understanding of the human personhood. However, in the modern period, the understanding of personhood which developed in association with the doctrine of the Trinity was modified to fit the characteristics of human nature. Secondly, it has focused to a large extent on what Pannenberg refers to as the substantialist understanding of personhood. This aspect of personhood was first evident in Origen's application of the term *hypostasis* to signify the individual subsistence of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This discussion of the modern period, however, will see a shift in both of these previous emphases.

Fichte

In Enlightenment thinkers, the element of rationality found in Boethius' definition of "person" and carried through the centuries became increasingly identified with self-consciousness. Pannenberg states that it was customary to think not only of humans in this sense, but also of the self-consciousness of God until the late eighteenth century. Here, the personality (i.e. self-consciousness) of God was a characteristic associated primarily with the unity of the divine substance. However, this understanding of the personhood of God came under attack in 1798 by J.G. Fichte (1762-1814). During *Der Atheismustreit* (the Atheism Controversy), Fichte argued that God could in no way be seen as personal because he is eternal and infinite.⁸¹ Self-consciousness (and thus personhood) is characteristic only of finite creatures because "self-consciousness always presupposes the existence of an other, distinguishing oneself from whom one becomes conscious of one's self."⁸² Thus, Fichte argued that God was an impersonal supreme being whose sole purpose is to act as the infinite and absolute ground for the moral order. The

81. Cf. J. G. Fichte, *Die philosophischen Schriften zum Atheismustreit in Philosophische Bibliothek* vol. 129 (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1920).

82. Pannenberg, *Person*, 231. Author's translation. "Selbstbewußtsein setzt die Existenz eines anderen, von dem sich abgrenzend man seiner selbst bewußt wird, immer schon voraus."

effect of this argument was that the “personality of God” became the rallying cry for the struggle against German idealism, its associated Pantheism, and, consequently, the connection between self-consciousness and personhood came to be seen as problematic.⁸³

In the subsequent theology which reacted against Fichte’s argument, the personality of God became closely associated with the personality of humanity. This tendency became the foundation for a personal humanism developed in the sense of individuality and freedom. This understanding of personhood was also able to reach back and draw upon the connection between “person” and relation that played an important role in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819) reformulated Fichte’s argument that self-consciousness only occurs through self-differentiation by stating that the “I” is impossible without the “Thou.”⁸⁴

Hegel

G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) picked up on Jacobi’s formulation and used it to try to resolve the rationalistic argument against the impossibility of the unity of the Trinity. He argued that it was the nature of persons to gain themselves in relation to the other and also in giving themselves away to the other.⁸⁵ “Thus the unity of God is conceived as the unity of love achieved in the reciprocal self-gift of the three persons.”⁸⁶ Pannenberg holds that in this way Hegel managed to overcome Fichte’s argument against the personhood of God by reaching a deeper understanding of “person” through the doctrine of the Trinity and the notion of God as Absolute Subject.

However, the importance of Hegel for the modern understanding of “person” is not limited to his response to Fichte’s arguments against the personality of God. Pannenberg also credits Hegel with renewing the doctrine of the Trinity after its loss of significance at the hands of the Socinians and Arminians. Hegel was able to accomplish this renewal because theology

83. Ibid. Despite the charges of Pantheism that are regularly leveled against Idealism, Pannenberg argues that this error probably only really existed in Schelling.

84. F. H. Jacobi, “Über die Unzertrennlichkeit der Freiheit und Vorsehung von dem Begriffe der Vernunft” in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s *Werke*, ed. J. F. Köppen, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1815).

85. Pannenberg, *Person*, 232 and G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, One Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), especially 417–432.

86. Ibid.: “Die Einheit Gottes wurde so als die in der wechselseitigen Hingabe der drei Personen sich vollbringende Einheit der Liebe erfaßt.” (Author’s translation)

“needed a rediscovery of the derivation of the Trinity from the concept of Spirit to give it central significance once again in the Christian understanding of God and even in the philosophical concept of God.”⁸⁷ Pannenberg traces this rediscovery of the concept of Spirit to Lessing in the eighteenth century and Hegel in the nineteenth. Lessing first reasserted the ground of the doctrine of the Trinity in the concept of Spirit as “an expression of the self-understanding of God in self-awareness.”⁸⁸ But it was Hegel who for Pannenberg provided the classic reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of self-conscious Spirit. However, even Hegel was not able to do away with the deeper problem of the Trinitarian persons. Hegel was able to speak of a plurality of persons in terms of the concept of love, “but he could not make it plausible as a development of the self-consciousness of the absolute Spirit, and he described it as subsumed in God from the standpoint of love.”⁸⁹ Thus, Hegel dissolves the concept of love and the otherness of the other within God into the single personality of the absolute Spirit.

Pannenberg argues that Hegel’s renewal of the doctrine of the Trinity took place in knowing opposition to the trends of speculative theology of his day and helped to save the doctrine of the deity of Christ. The tendency to dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen in its classic form in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher based his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity on the historical revelation of God without making any claims about its significance for the essential being of God. Pannenberg asserts that the doctrine of the Trinity never overcame this difficulty in the nineteenth century despite the advances made by those influenced by Hegel. To many it seemed that “the step from the biblical statements about the Father, Son, and Spirit to the idea of essential Trinitarian distinctions in God was a leap to a very different speculative approach since the idea of an essential Trinity does not arise out of the data of the biblical revelation but out of mere concepts of the divine essence, whether the concept be that of the divine Spirit or that of the divine love.”⁹⁰ Thus, it is no surprise that in the later nineteenth century under the criticism of metaphysics advanced by Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and his school the doctrine of the immanent Trinity was eclipsed by other theological interests. During this time, the deeper problem of deriving the Trinitarian distinctions from the concept

87. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 292.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, 295.

90. *Ibid.*, 293-4.

of the divine essence was never delved into, despite emphasis on the historicity of revelation and its associated reservations about the revival of the Trinity.

Dialogical Personalism

Yet, much of theology did not appreciate this advance that was accomplished in Hegel's understanding of "person," but rather misunderstood it as suggesting pantheism.⁹¹ Nonetheless the theology of the time was unable to overcome Fichte's argument against the personhood of God. At the same time, many of the early Hegelians also dismissed the importance of Hegel's doctrine of the Trinity as a concession to ecclesial influence. Thus, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) reduced Hegel's Trinitarian statements to their anthropological content, but held on to the "I"- "Thou" dynamic as the fundamental human relation. In the early twentieth century, men such as Ferdinand Ebner (1882-1931) and Martin Buber (1878-1965) helped to spread the influence of dialogical interpretations of the person throughout the world.

While in many ways Pannenberg is appreciative of the advances that have been made by dialogical personalism, such as the renewal of attention that has been given to the relational aspect of the term "person," he does have some serious reservations about this approach. While in Scholasticism and even in the philosophy of Hegel the term "person" has been associated with the ontological problematic, since the end of the eighteenth century personhood has increasingly been understood in a way that separates personhood from being. Pannenberg sees this association as a reaction to the objectification of modern life and thought. Thus, the mechanisms of the natural sciences and of social apparati have become the focus of this reaction.

Pannenberg sees two major difficulties arising from this trend. First, in turning on the social structures which surround the human person, some forms of personalism have worsened the individualistic idea of the person.⁹² Pannenberg rejects this tendency because he argues that the "I"- "Thou" relationship can develop itself only through the conduit of communal experience and surrender to communal interests.⁹³ Second, in its move away from the mechanism of the natural sciences, personalism has created a divorce between personal and objective forms of evidence which has led to an

91. Pannenberg, "Person," 232.

92. *Ibid.*, 233.

93. *Ibid.* 234.

epistemological relativism. According to Pannenberg, this divorce is untenable “[also] since personal expressions always has an objectifying form.”⁹⁴

Despite these difficulties, Pannenberg thinks that the problems of personalism can be overcome by working towards a complete ontological anthropology. In this effort, it is the special role of theology to develop an understanding of human personhood that sees the unity of the objective life with the spiritual destiny of humanity.

Barth

Karl Barth (1886–1968) also fails to break out of the problem of Trinitarian personhood as Pannenberg understands it. Barth follows Isaac Dorner (1809–1884) in stating that theology should not speak of three persons, but rather should speak of three modes of being (*Seinsweisen*).⁹⁵ Barth was not seeking to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from the concept of God as Spirit; rather, he sought to understand it as an expression of the self-revelation of God. However, Pannenberg argues that “this model of a Trinity of revelation is easily seen to be structurally identical with that of the self-conscious Absolute, especially when God’s revelation has to be viewed primarily as self-revelation. The subject of the revelation is only one.”⁹⁶ Given that there can only be one subject of revelation in Barth’s exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no room for a plurality of true persons.

While men such as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner saw the difficulties associated with the term “person” as a result of the development of the use of the term in the modern period and its growing association with self-consciousness and action, Pannenberg argues that a deeper difficulty with the notion of personhood goes all the way back to Augustine. Thus, it is not at all a modern problem. Rather, for Pannenberg the root of the problem lies in not taking seriously enough the Trinitarian form of revelation and Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father. When these concerns are taken seriously theology must think of God first in terms of the Trinity of his persons and only later in

94. Ibid: “weil auch personale Aussagen immer objektivierende Form haben” (Author’s translation).

95. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol 1.1, 2d Edition, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 358–368.

96. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 296. For fuller exposition of this argument and the parallels that Pannenberg sees between the Trinitarian thinking of Hegel and Barth cf. Wollhart Pannenberg, “Die Subjectivität Gottes und die Trinitätslehre: Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels,” in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 96–111.

terms of their unity. As a result, Pannenberg does not feel completely wedded to the notion of self-consciousness as constitutive of divine personhood, even though it seems clear that he thinks that such an approach is thoroughly defensible and perhaps even preferable in the current theological and philosophical context.

Summary

After reviewing Pannenberg's reading of the term "person" from its pre-Christian roots up to the beginning of the twentieth century, it is time to summarize what has been learned from this history. The preceding study has highlighted seven major areas in the development of the term "person" of which Pannenberg is critical to some degree. To conclude, this chapter will briefly summarize these criticisms citing the most relevant examples that have already been explained.

First, Pannenberg is critical of the increasing separation between "substance" and "person." This trend can be seen throughout the development of the understanding of the term "person." When used by Origen, the term *hypostasis* indicated an individual subsistence. However, during the controversies of the fourth and fifth century, the emphasis fell increasingly on individuality and decreasingly on the ontological importance of this term. Thus in the Council of Chalcedon, the term "nature" came to signify the substantial humanity and divinity of Christ, while the term "person" is restricted to defining that which is the basis for the union of these two natures. In the modern period, the separation between "substance" and "person" has radically increased. For example, Pannenberg sees dialogical personalism as a reaction against the excessive objectification of modern society which resolves the problem by totally removing the question of personhood from that of being.

Pannenberg is also highly critical of attempts to derive the divine trinity from the divine unity. He argues that at least since Augustine, the Western doctrine of the Trinity has been dominated by the attempt to derive the trinity of God from his unity. This attempt has consistently failed to do justice to the divine distinction in the Godhead and has tended toward Sabellianism. He states, "Any derivation of the plurality of trinitarian persons from the essence of the one God, whether it be viewed as spirit or love, leads into the problems of either modalism on the one hand or subordinationism on the other. Neither, then, can be true to the intention of the doctrine of the trinitarian

dogma.”⁹⁷ Pannenberg sees this tendency as the major difficulty with the doctrine of the Trinity from the patristic period to the modern Protestant theology. For example, Pannenberg is quick to point out that Augustine’s starting point from the unity and simplicity of God makes it difficult for him to accept the term *hypostasis* for describing the divine persons.⁹⁸

Associated with the tendency to derive the Trinitarian persons from the unity of the divine essence is the traditional procedure of treating the existence, essence, and attributes of the one God before the doctrine of the Trinity. This systematic approach was established particularly under the influence of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, and its results can be seen in the disastrous severing of the two treatises in the early dogmatic theology of the Reformation. When the irreplaceable link between the doctrine of the Trinity and the unity of God was severed during this period, it was only a matter of time before Trinitarian theology came to be seen as an unnecessary embarrassment that could find no place in modern theology.

In a similar vein, Pannenberg is quite critical of approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity which identify the Father as the principle of unity of the other persons. During the Arian controversy, a great deal of attention was given to the question of the unity of God in opposition to the defense of the distinctions within God, which was the focus during the second and third century controversies with the modalists. As a result, the Cappadocians identified the Father alone as the source and true principle of divinity within the Trinity. However, despite their best intentions, Pannenberg believes that this move undermined the full equality of the Son and the Spirit. Thus, despite the fact that the Cappadocian approach to the doctrine of the Trinity begins from the personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit, the traditional Eastern approach tends toward subordinationism. In this way, Pannenberg argues that the Father became identified with the divine substance in the Eastern tradition, and implicitly the divinity of the Son and the Spirit was assigned an inferior place within the divine life.

Despite this methodological critique of Eastern Trinitarian theology, Pannenberg joins the Orthodox Churches in their critique of *filioque*. This critique can be seen most clearly in Pannenberg’s appraisal of Augustine. Although Augustine is right to understand the Spirit in terms of the love that exists between the Father and the Son, Pannenberg argues that he goes too far when he makes the claim that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This evaluation derives from Pannenberg connecting the role of the Spirit

97. *Ibid.*, 298.

98. *Ibid.*, 284. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 7.5–6; cf. 8.1.

as the love which unites the Father and Son with his personal work in giving glory to the Father by giving glory to the Son. Augustine's appreciation of the connection between the Spirit and love, however, results in the de-personalization of the Spirit, because in this approach the mission of the Spirit to the world is not adequately incorporated into his role in the life of the immanent Trinity.

Another major criticism that can be seen in Pannenberg's reading of the term "person" is found in his reaction to individualism and the rejection of scientific naturalism. In responding to the over-objectification of personhood which characterized the early modern period, contemporary approaches to the human person have tended to react against the structures of human society and the natural world that restrict human freedom. Pannenberg sees this move as an overreaction which has resulted in the isolation of the human individual from the totality of his or her being in relation to the world and in relation to others. As a result, he favors what he describes as an ontological anthropology which does not fail to develop its understanding of personhood in terms of the human relatedness to the being of others.

It should be clear at this point that Pannenberg is quite critical of those who want to remove or replace the term "person" from Trinitarian theology. Pannenberg attributes this phenomenon to the tendency to derive the Trinitarian distinctions from the divine unity which can be traced all the way back to Augustine. The difficulty with this position is its leaning toward modalism and the frequent reduction of the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

The preceding paragraphs have emphasized negative elements in Pannenberg's reading of the tradition. However, it is clear that Pannenberg does not wholly reject the meaning of the term "person" as it has developed over the centuries. For example, Pannenberg approves of the developments made by Athanasius and the Cappadocians in the wake of the Arian controversy. He sees the insistence upon the substantial unity of the Son and the Spirit with the Father as a decisive advance in theological insight. Further, he admires the Cappadocian development of Origen's recognition that the distinctions seen in history actually reveal aspects of the divine life in itself (such as the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit). Moreover Athanasius' argument for the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, which is rooted in the relation between the Father and the Son, is of particular importance to Pannenberg. In this approach, the mutual relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit result not only in the definition of the divine persons and their distinctions from one another, but also are the foundation for the very divinity of each of the persons. As a result of Pannenberg's insistence upon the mutuality of the relations, he is critical of those who, like

Augustine, reduce the personal relations of the Father, Son, and Spirit to relations of origin.

In addition, Pannenberg sees the elements of the tradition that emphasize the unity of the Trinity in terms of love as providing a way to side-step some of the problems that he associates with conceiving the divine essence in terms of Spirit. The most important example of this approach can be seen in Richard of St. Victor. However, Richard develops his Trinitarian theology by building off of Augustine's insights into the nature of the Spirit as the person who unites the Father and Son in love. Finally, there are some distant echoes of this approach to personhood in dialogical personalism, which deals with the human "I" that exists in loving relation to the "Thou."

This condensed analysis of Pannenberg's reading of the history of the development of the term "person" is important because it gives an initial insight into the direction that he intends to take his Trinitarian theology. His substantial criticism of the way that the term "person" has developed, particularly in its application to the doctrine of the Trinity, the major problem areas he identifies in Trinitarian theology. However, this same analysis also gives some hints into the important role that "person" will play in his Trinitarian theology and the unique contribution that this irreplaceable component of his doctrine of God makes to the broader theological enterprise. However, it is precisely these issues that will have to be examined more fully in the next chapters.

Trinitarian Personhood

The previous chapters of this study have served to establish a framework within which Pannenberg's understanding of the use of the category "person" in Trinitarian theology can be analyzed. First, the study provided a brief overview of the contemporary debate surrounding Trinitarian theology and a discussion of the general outlines of Pannenberg's overall theological program. Then it turned to Trinitarian theology itself in chapter three, focusing in particular on Pannenberg's reading and critique of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Now, this study has arrived at the central chapter of its investigation, in which the task remains to address Pannenberg's more positive contributions to Trinitarian theology while focusing in particular on the way in which he defines divine personhood. In approaching this task, the focus will largely be upon the first volume of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*. Such an approach is warranted in that his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the unity of the divine persons in chapters five and six of this crowning achievement of his theological career provides his longest and most comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity. While there are earlier, shorter treatments of specific elements of Trinitarian theology, their contents have been reproduced, elaborated upon, and contextualized in Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*.¹ As a result, this chapter will once again focus on this most important of Pannenberg's works.

This chapter will proceed by following the order of Pannenberg's treatment of the themes of Trinitarian theology that is found in his *Systematic*

1. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Father, Son, Spirit: Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God," trans. Philip Clayton, *Dialog* 26 (1987): 250-257 and two essays on the Trinity in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Band 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980). Since the publication of the first volume of *Systematic Theology* two other significant articles have appeared on the topic: Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Eternity, Time and the Trinitarian God," *Dialog* 39 (2000): 9-14 and Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Trinitarian Synthesis: Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology I & II*," *First Things* 103 (2000), 40-53.

Theology. This methodology is followed not only in an effort to be faithful to the style and content of Pannenberg's treatment of the subject, but more importantly because he makes very strong arguments about the importance of methodology in treating the subject of the Trinity and the divine persons. As a result, it is quite clear that Pannenberg has put serious thought into the ordering of the questions and themes taken up in this work. Therefore, this chapter will begin by discussing Jesus' preaching of the kingdom and his self-distinction from the Father to which scripture attests. Then, the issues of methodology, reciprocal or mutual relations, and the connection of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity will be addressed. In this material, Pannenberg is primarily concerned with addressing and defining the distinctions within the Godhead. From here, the study will look at Pannenberg's treatment of the unity, essence, and attributes of the Godhead. This chapter will make clear that this material must be treated because it is only in addressing these topics that Pannenberg takes up the more philosophical questions of the nature and essence of divine personhood and the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Finally, the conclusion to this chapter, while summarizing its findings, will offer a concise definition of Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood.

Jesus' Self-Distinction from and Unity with the Father

Pannenberg's understanding of the nature of theology and revelation centers on rational and historical argumentation. All argumentation that seeks to establish the truth claims of the Christian faith must do so in a way that corresponds to the structure of revelation. As Pannenberg sees it, revelation is centered in the historical event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection which establishes the reign of God here on earth in an irreversible way. The fullness of what is known and can be known about God is revealed in this historic event.² The only proper way to begin proper theological reflection on the nature of God is to start with the person of Jesus and the self-distinction from the Father which characterizes his ministry. In particular, Pannenberg traces Jesus' self-distinction from the Father back to his preaching of the nearness of

2. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:214 ff. Although Pannenberg sees Christ as the fullness of revelation, the process of God's manifesting himself in history begins prior to the life of Christ and continues after it. Thus, God's covenant with Israel reveals God's working in history and this process will not be fully realized in the life of the world until the consummation of the kingdom of God in the eschaton.

the divine reign and his act of naming the God whose reign was so near “Father.”³

In this way, Pannenberg begins his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity with the person of the Father. However, he is first interested in the Father neither as the principle of unity of the Godhead, nor as the unbegotten origin of the Son and the Spirit, but rather as the *subject* of the imminent reign of God which formed the center of Jesus’ preaching and earthly ministry. Pannenberg goes on to explain the significance of the title Father for the first person of the Trinity.⁴ God shows himself to be Father not primarily in terms of his role in the work of creation, but rather in his providential care for this creation and his special election of the Israelites. Thus, the God of Jesus’ preaching, the God whose reign has come, is no other than the God of the Jewish faith. However, in the Hebrew scriptures, “Father” is merely one name among many for God, while according to Pannenberg, “On the lips of Jesus, ‘Father’ became a proper name for God. It thus ceased to be simply one designation among others.”⁵ “Father” is the name of the divine Other in relation to whom Jesus defined himself and to whom he referred all of his disciples and followers. In addition, Pannenberg alludes to the eschatological significance of God’s fatherhood. This relation to eschatology is highlighted in the fact that it is the kingdom of God that is being established in the work of Christ and the Church and that this kingdom is the kingdom of the Father.

Most importantly, Pannenberg points out that the notion of God as the heavenly Father cannot be eliminated from the life and message of Jesus.⁶ Here, Pannenberg is arguing against the work of Herbert Braun, who held that the words “God” and “Father” are merely time-bound constructs from which the true meaning and significance of the Gospel’s demand for radical obedience can be extrapolated.⁷ From this position, Braun concluded that the

3. *Ibid.*, 259.

4. Pannenberg defends the special place and significance of the name “Father” for God against the criticisms of feminist theologians. While he acknowledges the influence of sociological concerns on the Hebrew title “Father” for God, he argues that the sexual differentiation that is central to the notion of Fatherhood has no place in this title. Thus he is able to state, “There are links, then, between the Jewish idea of God as Father and patriarchal forms of the family, but the importance is limited. They are not the basis of the concept of God which comes to expression in calling him Father. Instead we are to seek this basis in the divine election or in God’s covenant relation to Israel” (*Ibid.*, 261–2).

5. *Ibid.*, 262.

6. *Ibid.*, 263.

7. Cf. Herbert Braun, *Jesus: der Mann aus Nazareth und seine Zeit*, 2d ed (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1969), 160–161.

love of God could be reduced to the love of neighbor that Jesus preached. As a result, he equated Jesus with God in a simple and unnuanced fashion. Pannenberg takes a contrary position not only by pointing out that this idea deifies the creaturely life of Christ, but also in recognizing that it is expressly contradicted by Jesus' habit of praying to the Father. Moreover, many passages in the Gospels point to the fact that Jesus distinguishes himself from the Father. For example, in John 14:28 Jesus states that the Father is greater than he is, and in Mark 10:17-18, Jesus rejects the title "good teacher," because only the Father is good. Perhaps most importantly of all, in Jesus' preaching of the kingdom, he makes a distinction between the presence of the kingdom of God that is connected with his own ministry and its future consummation which is connected with the coming of the Father's reign.

Thus, the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father is constitutive for Jesus' message. However, Pannenberg does not lose sight of the fact that Jesus and his ministry are also intimately related to the heavenly Father. For example, Jesus claims to reveal God in an eschatologically definitive way. It is this insight that forms the basis of Jesus' identity as the Son of the Father. This insight forms the foundation not only of primitive Christian Christology but also of the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus' resurrection also plays the important role of a divine confirmation of the claims made by Jesus during his earthly ministry. At this point, Pannenberg cites Romans 1: 3-4 to the effect that Jesus' resurrection institutes his divine Sonship. However, this insight is not to insinuate that the Son of God is not by the side of the Father from all eternity. Rather, Christ's pre-existence is made manifest in the event of his resurrection from the dead and will be fully revealed in the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom of God. The full deity of the Son also has its primitive Christian foundation in the *Kyrios* title for the exalted Jesus. In various places in the New Testament the titles "God" and "Lord" are expressly set alongside of one another. However, their relationship is not one of competition but of integration and honor.

In some New Testament texts, the person of the Spirit is added to the dyad, indicating the mediating presence of a third between the Father and the Son. The Spirit is thus the medium of Jesus' communion with the Father as well as the medium of the Christian community's communion with Christ. The role of the Spirit as medium is demonstrated first and foremost for Pannenberg in the fact that it is through the power of the Spirit that Jesus was raised and instituted into divine Sonship. At the same time, it is the Spirit of the Lord who dwells in believers and who will bring their mortal bodies also to

eternal life.⁸ Thus, the Spirit is the mode of God's presence in Christ just as he was previously in the prophets and in creation as a whole, but this time, he is present with eschatological ultimacy.⁹ While discussions of the relationship between the Father and the Son do not necessarily have to imply a third, when the presence of God in believers is brought into the picture, the person of the Spirit is indispensable. This necessity is because only by the Spirit-God himself—can fellowship with God be extended to believers. As a result, it is not surprising to find the person of the Spirit included in the Trinitarian form of the baptismal formula.

The baptismal formula undoubtedly made an important contribution to the early development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Despite this fact, Pannenberg finds the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity more in the development of Christian teaching and catechesis rather than in its liturgical life. Thus, the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity is found “in all that the NT has to say about the relation of the Son to the Father on the one side and to the Spirit on the other. The NT statements do not clarify the interrelations of the three but they clearly emphasize the fact that they are interrelated.”¹⁰ The New Testament's statements about the relations among the Father, Son, and Spirit and, perhaps even more importantly, the ambiguities of these statements and the questions they raise, are the basis for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. Pannenberg highlights three problems in particular that grew out of the New Testament's statements about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. First, scripture does not clearly define the relationship between the Father and the Son—despite the presence of statements about the pre-existence of the Son. Secondly, it is also unclear in the writings of the New Testament how the Spirit is to be distinguished from the Father and the Son. Finally, the scriptures are even less clear about how the statements regarding the Lord and the Spirit are to be harmonized with the tenets of monotheism.

Pannenberg points out that these ambiguities have been exploited by modern anti-trinitarian thinking. For example, G. W. H. Lampe has argued that the hypostatic differentiation of the Spirit is simply a result of the hypostatic differentiation of the Son.¹¹ If this lack of clarity is true, there is no

8. *Ibid.*, 266. Pannenberg here is drawing upon Paul's letter to the Romans particularly 1:4 and 8:11–15.

9. *Ibid.*, 267.

10. *Ibid.*, 268–9.

11. G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 210; 132–133.

need to differentiate the Spirit from Son; the Spirit can be seen simply as the power of God which filled the Son. From here, it is not difficult to advocate a return to the view of the one God as Spirit “who works in and through Jesus Christ and by whom again Christ is vitally present to believers.”¹² Pannenberg argues against this view in that it derives the distinction of the Trinitarian persons primarily from their activity in the world. However, as has been pointed out in the last chapter, he believes that this starting point is insufficient to ground the basis of the persons. Rather, the theological basis for the doctrine of the Trinitarian persons must be established in the life and ministry of Jesus and what is revealed in his life about his relation to the Father. In Jesus’ ministry, the basis for the differentiation between the Son and the Spirit is also based. At this point, Pannenberg still finds persuasive the arguments for the distinctions between the Father, Son and Spirit found in Origen and Tertullian.¹³

As Pannenberg sees it, the distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to be established by starting with the concrete history of Jesus and his self-distinction from the Father. However, scripture still leaves open two key questions: how are these three persons related to one another, and how is the monotheistic character of Judaism to be preserved in Christianity? The previous chapter demonstrated that Pannenberg does not find a fully adequate answer to this question in the tradition. He is critical of the Cappadocian solution to the problem of the unity of the Trinity, which equates the person of the Father with the Godhead and the divine essence. Such an approach, he feels, undermines the full equality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father and thus leads to subordinationism. On the other hand, the Western tradition followed Augustine who in effect bypassed the problem by presuming the unity and simplicity of the divine essence before moving on to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity and the unity of the divine persons. Pannenberg’s problems with this methodological approach were also discussed in the previous chapter, the chief of which were an innate tendency toward modalism and the ever increasing danger of separating the doctrine of the Trinity from the doctrine of the unity, essence, and attributes of the one God.

Pannenberg brings to a close his first section on the doctrine of the Trinity by drawing the conclusion that

12. Ibid., 269.

13. Ibid., 272. cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, 9 (PL 2.1.164B); Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, 12.1 (PG, 12, 656ff).

It is hard to maintain, therefore, that in the process of the debate about the dogma of Nicea and the full deity of the Son and the Spirit the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit had been adequately elucidated in the unity of the divine substance. There can also be no doubt as to the monotheistic intention of the Cappadocians or of pre-Nicene theology. Only with reservations, however, can we say that their line of thinking did justice to their intention.¹⁴

Given this assessment of the most important period in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, Pannenberg moves on in the second section of chapter five to discuss the subsequent history of that development and, perhaps more importantly, the place of the doctrine of the Trinity in the dogmatic structure.

Pannenberg's decides to begin his treatment of the Trinity with the history of the person of Jesus, because he wishes to treat the scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity. This move makes perfect sense given his confessional background. More importantly, however, this procedure coincides with his methodological insistence upon starting with the historical event of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. From this initial point, Pannenberg is able to flesh out the specifics of the persons of the Trinity both in how they relate to each other and in the way they relate to the world. Thus, the Father is described as the subject of the reign of God and as the one whose providential care brought about the covenantal election of Israel and the mission of Christ. The Son is described primarily in terms of his distinction from and relation to the Father which forms an important theme in his teaching ministry and in primitive Christology. From this point, Pannenberg moves to the divine confirmation of Jesus' ministry and preaching of the kingdom (which includes this element of relation and distinction). From here it is a short step to the pre-existence of Christ and his title as Lord. The Spirit is first described as the one who helps to provide this confirmation of the work of Christ. However, it is also the work of the Spirit to bring about the fulfillment of the kingdom that was preached by Jesus in the life of the Church.

Another interesting point about Pannenberg's starting point is that he begins with the immanent Trinity as it is revealed in the economic Trinity. Pannenberg methodology originates with Jesus' self-distinction and unity with the Father as it is revealed in his ministry, death, and resurrection. Intimately connected with this beginning point is the distinction and relation between the Spirit and the Son and the Father, as it is revealed in creation and the Christian community. In this way, Pannenberg is beginning with both the economic and immanent Trinity at the same time. It seems that the approach

14. *Ibid.*, 280.

to Trinitarian theology that begins from below is too often associated with a distaste for metaphysical thinking and ontological concerns. However, this proclivity is not at all the case with Pannenberg. He is able to see that the modern interest in epistemology is the proper place to begin, but it must always lead to knowledge about something. In this way, philosophy and theology are not merely a form of mental gymnastics that exercises the mind. Rather, they can be, are, and must be knowledge of something—something that is really real. In this way, Pannenberg is able to wed the ancient and medieval world views with the modern and post-modern.

The Importance of Methodology

As previously noted, the place for the treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in High Scholasticism as well as in the theology of the early Reformers was immediately after the treatment of the existence, essence, and attributes of the one God. Pannenberg argues that this methodological distinction led to the unfortunate consequence that the doctrine of the Trinity came to be seen increasingly as an unnecessary appendix to the doctrine of the one God. While these two treatises were originally integrally related, over time, the basis for this relation was eroded, and the doctrine of the Trinity increasingly came to be seen as an unnecessary, illogical, and irrelevant addendum to the doctrine of the divine essence. However, Pannenberg believes that the modern apathy and confusion about the doctrine of the Trinity can be overcome by reversing the traditional Western methodology and treating the divine persons before discussing their unity in the divine essence.¹⁵

In this regard Pannenberg is following Moltmann and others who have opted for the same reversal in methodology. Moltmann is highly critical of the development of the Western doctrine of the Trinity that begins with the idea of the one divine substance or subject and then moves on to derive the Trinitarian persons from the divine unity. To help correct this difficulty, Moltmann argues that the doctrine of the Trinity must take its starting point in the concrete history of Jesus. Further, if theology is to begin its reflection on God by starting from the contents of revelation, as Karl Barth and Karl Rahner argued it must, then theological systematics must treat the doctrine of the Trinity of persons before it takes up the question of their unity.¹⁶ Pannenberg's understanding of these issues is obviously closely in tune with

15. This approach dates back to Peter Lombard. Cf. Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 1.2.

16. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1, 296; Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, 21–23; 82–83.

that of Moltmann. However, some important differences in their approaches are significant. For example, Moltmann's criticism of the Western doctrine of the Trinity seems to include a complete rejection of ontological categories. He argues that

A return to the earlier Trinity of substance is practically impossible, if only because the return to the cosmology of the old way of thinking about being has become impossible too, ever since the beginning of modern times. To carry on with the more modern 'subject' Trinity is not in fact very fruitful either, because modern thinking in terms of 'subject' is increasingly losing force and significance. Anthropological thinking is giving way to new, relativistic theories about the world, and anthropocentric behavior is being absorbed into social patterns.¹⁷

However, as has been established, Pannenberg is not at all interested in completely disposing of metaphysical categories in the doctrine of the Trinity. Pannenberg continues to argue that the revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity give Christians access to knowledge of those things that are most real. On the other hand, this perspective does not prevent him from agreeing with Moltmann's general critique of the Western tradition and his proposed corrections to these missteps. In fact, the second section of Pannenberg's chapter five in *Systematic Theology* is dedicated to a detailed historical defense of this critique, the likes of which cannot be found in Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom* in terms of dealing with the breadth and depth of the history. Most of this material has already been discussed in the treatment of the history of "person" found in the previous chapter.

It is interesting and perhaps important to note here that Pannenberg and Moltmann are both critical of Barth and Rahner on the implementation of their methodological goals. Barth and Rahner each in his own way advocated treating the doctrine of the Trinity by beginning with the Trinity as it is revealed in the economy of salvation. For Barth this argument took the form of an analysis of the statement, "God reveals himself as Lord" which found the basis for each of the Trinitarian persons in the divine act of self-revelation.¹⁸ In Rahner, this same idea is encapsulated in the maxim, "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity."¹⁹ Here, Rahner is arguing that there are not in actuality two Trinities, but only one whose inner life and deepest truth is revealed in the economy of

17. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 18-9.

18. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1, 306.

19. Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, 22.

salvation. Barth and Rahner each proceed from his formal starting point to his discussion of the Trinity. However, Moltmann points out, and Pannenberg agrees (explicitly in the case of Barth and implicitly in the case of Rahner), that in both Barth and Rahner these statements are merely a formal indication of the appropriate starting point which both men fail to realize. For Pannenberg, it is insufficient to begin merely with a formal statement about the importance of starting from the revelation of Father, in the Son and in the Spirit—it must be the actual starting point. According to Pannenberg, it is because of the formalism of both Barth and Rahner that each of them ends up dissolving the notion of Trinitarian personhood into the doctrine of the divine essence.²⁰

Nonetheless, a few more remarks must be made about this material from a more systematic perspective. First of all, while Pannenberg definitely prefers the method of beginning with the doctrine of the Trinity and only then proceeding to the doctrine of the unity of the divine essence, he does not argue that it is the only suitable method. On the contrary, he argues that it is at least theoretically possible to begin a systematic discussion of the doctrine of God from the idea of the unity of God.²¹ However, if one is to begin with the unity of God, it must be treated in such a way that the idea of God does not already appear to be complete. This tendency leads to the idea that the doctrine of the Trinity is merely an afterthought or an appendix to the doctrine of God and not an essential element of the Christian understanding of God. On the other hand, the same must be said of the doctrine of the Trinity. When dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity prior to the discussion of the unity of the divine essence, one must not give the impression that the doctrine of God is complete simply with a discussion of the Trinitarian persons without adequately taking up the question of the essential unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Pannenberg addresses this issue not as a mere matter of methodological formality, but rather as a way of gaining insight into the relationship between the divine unity and trinity. In the history of theology, he believes, it has proven difficult to derive the Trinitarian persons from the unity of God, because the treatment of the divine essence and attributes appears to be complete in and of itself. However, if one starts with the revelation of the Father through the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation, the necessity of treating the unity of these three persons is much more apparent. Such a methodological procedure has the additional advantage of following

20. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:300–4.

21. *Ibid.*, 283.

more closely the structure and content of the New Testament and of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom.

Thirdly, Pannenberg admits that all Christian talk of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit must presume some prior monotheistic understanding of divinity. However, that in Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* this role is filled by the general phenomenon of religion. In particular, Pannenberg credits the understanding of God that was established in Judaism with forming the basis for the Christian understanding of the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This achievement was the result of the long struggle between Israel and the religions of the people of the Middle East during the same period. The Hebrew understanding of God, however, was modified by Jesus' preaching and his relation to the Father. This modification finds explicit presentation in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

For all these reasons, Pannenberg asserts the importance of placing the doctrine of the Trinity before the doctrine of the divine essence and attributes in his systematic theology. "To find a basis for the doctrine of the Trinity we must begin with the way in which Father, Son, and Spirit come on the scene and relate to one another in the event of revelation. Here lies the material justification for the demand that the doctrine of the Trinity must be based on the biblical witness to revelation or on the economy of salvation."²² From here, Pannenberg is able to move on to address more specifically the nature of the divine personhood and the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Distinction of the Divine Persons

While Pannenberg insists that the doctrine of the Trinity must begin with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, he is aware that there are difficulties in basing this approach in scripture alone. This difficulty is because he is unable to find any explicit statement of the doctrine of the Trinity either in what can be historically re-constructed of the message of Jesus or in the witnesses of the New Testament. In this way, he rejects older Protestant attempts to prove the doctrine of the Trinity from scripture. However, Pannenberg does find, both in the New Testament and in the preaching of Jesus, evidence of what will later be developed into the doctrine of the Trinity.²³ Further, he argues that

22. *Ibid.*, 299.

23. *Ibid.*, 301–2. In particular, Pannenberg sees the baptismal formula of Matt 28: 19 as early evidence of the divine Triad of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, this formula does not deal with the relations between the divine persons and thus is far from the developed

the scriptures clearly attest to the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. As a result, he follows Barth in arguing that it is not necessary for the New Testament directly to express the doctrine of the Trinity.

Yet, while the deity of the Son and the Spirit is clearly affirmed in the scriptures, it is not at all clear from them how these two relate to one another. Traditionally, attempts to answer this question have based themselves on what is said about the deity of the Father. In Greek theology this answer took the form of deriving the deity of the Son and the Spirit from that of the Father as origin and source of the Godhead. In Western theology after Augustine, this same procedure was followed along the lines of the psychological analogies wherein the Son and Spirit are seen as expressions of the divine self-consciousness.²⁴ It has already been established that Pannenberg finds these solutions in the end to be untenable and argues instead that the doctrine of the Trinity must be based on Jesus' revelation of the Father.

To base the doctrine of the Trinity on the content of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ we must begin with the relation of Jesus to the Father as it came to expression in his message of the divine rule. The NT statements about the deity of Jesus all presuppose his divine sonship and are ultimately grounded in his relation to the Father.²⁵

Thus, for Pannenberg, the doctrine of the Trinity finds its roots in the message and work of Jesus, in which his Sonship is grounded and the divine confirmation of this Sonship, which is found in Jesus' resurrection.

Pannenberg continues on to argue that if "the doctrine of the Trinity is an exposition of the relation of Jesus to the Father and the Spirit, this has some incisive implications for the terminology which the classical presentation of the doctrine worked out to describe the relations among the Father, Son, and

understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity that can be found in the fourth century. Nonetheless, this formula and other triadic formulas can be seen as important precursors to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

24. Despite Barth's attempt to derive the doctrine of the Trinity from revelation, Pannenberg sees his doctrine of the Trinity as an example of this approach. Pannenberg argues that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is primarily another reincarnation of Augustine's psychological analogies for the Trinity which are developed on the notion of the self-relation of God in his self-consciousness (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.1, 295-304; Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 9.1-2). Cf. *Ibid.*, 304 and Wollhart Pannenberg, "Die Subjectivität Gottes und die Trinitätslehre: Ein Beitrag zur Beziehung zwischen Karl Barth und der Philosophie Hegels" in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Band 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 96-111.

25. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:304.

Spirit.”²⁶ In Eastern theology, the doctrine of the Trinity distinguished between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. In the West, especially during the Middle Ages, theology spoke of two processions, one of the Son, the other of the Spirit, the difference between the two being that one was described as begotten while the other was described as spirated or breathed. These processions were then used to describe the relations between the divine persons. For example, the Father actively begets while the Son is passively begotten. The doctrine of the processions was then carefully distinguished from the divine missions of the Son and the Spirit, by which they are sent into the world for its salvation. The basis for this distinction lay in the fact the processions are an eternal aspect of the divine life, while the missions are undertaken in time for the sake of the world. Pannenberg argues that these distinctions between the processions and the missions may be linguistically justifiable, but they are not exegetically. While providing a variety of examples of passages from the New Testament, Pannenberg argues that the scriptures do not distinguish between the processions and the missions.²⁷ For example, when the Spirit is given to the disciples in John 20: 22 and in Acts 2: 1-4, there is no reference to a divine breathing of the Spirit. Similarly, he finds no basis for the concept of the eternal begetting of the Son until Origen combines the Johannine concept of Jesus as the only-begotten Son of the Father with Prov. 8: 23.²⁸ As a result, Pannenberg concludes that the biblical statement about the begetting of the Son relates no less to his earthly existence than do statements about his sending.

Thus, in contrast to the traditional starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity in the notion of generation, Pannenberg finds that the biblical concept of preexistence provides a more compelling basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. The idea of preexistence does a better job of expressing the relationship between the Father and the Son. However, Pannenberg is also aware that the biblical concept of preexistence falls short of the fourth century formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in that it fails to express what he sees as the central element of this later formulation: consubstantiality. If this central thesis is to be demonstrated, then the implied relation between the Father and the Son needs to be demonstrated. Pannenberg expresses his confidence that the church correctly managed to work out the doctrine of the Trinity, even though this belief cannot be substantiated by the individual verses of scripture. However, if the doctrine of consubstantiality is to be proven true, then it must

26. *Ibid.*, 305.

27. For more on Pannenberg’s use of scripture at this point cf. *Ibid.*, 305-6.

28. Origen, *De Principiis*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester: P. Smith, 1973), 1.2.1-4.

be true in such a way that the relations of the Trinitarian persons are not reduced to the traditional concepts of processing, begetting and breathing.²⁹

This insight leads Pannenberg to agree with Karl Rahner's thesis that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. Pannenberg takes this position because Rahner too uses this axiom to argue that the traditional subordination of the economic sendings to the intratrinitarian processions was in need of revision. However, Rahner's exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity works itself out in terms of the idea of divine self-communication which bases itself in the one divine subjectivity. Pannenberg sees this move as the basis for the difficulties that Rahner has with the idea of three divine subjectivities. For this reason, Pannenberg is critical of the way Rahner carries out his own revision of the relations between the economic sendings and the immanent processions. Even though Rahner argues that the sending of the Son is not just appropriated to his person, but is unique to his person, he starts his Trinitarian theology from the idea of divine self-communication.³⁰ Eberhard Jüngel also agrees with Rahner and Pannenberg that the missions must be the starting point for the doctrine of the Trinity. However, Jüngel takes the personal distinction between the Father and the Son as the basis for his doctrine.³¹ Pannenberg also finds this decision insufficient for the grounding of the doctrine of the Trinity. "Due to [Jüngel's] focusing on the identification of God with the crucified Jesus the drift is still toward the idea of a one-sided movement. This idea thus achieves normative significance in the structuring of the doctrine."³² Thus, while Jüngel's starting point comes closer to that of Pannenberg than does Rahner's, his too falls short of the desired goal of dealing with the fullness of the divine relations as they are revealed in history.

In conclusion, Pannenberg moves from his starting point in the revelation of the Father in the person of Jesus as is evidenced in scripture to the more developed notions of pre-existence and consubstantiality by making use of Rahner's axiom regarding the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity. Having established this notion, Pannenberg makes the transition from developing a doctrine of the Trinity that is based solely upon the economic revelation of God in the person of Jesus. Thus, in the next section, Pannenberg is able to argue that Jesus' act of self-distinction from the Father is

29. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:307.

30. Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, 28-30.

31. Eberhard Jüngel, "Das Verhältnis von ökonomischer und immanenter Trinität," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72 (1975), 362 n.2.

32. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:308.

not merely a historical reality, but that it also has implications for the intratrinitarian life of God.

Reciprocal Self-Distinction of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Pannenberg begins his analysis of the relationship between the Father and the Son by turning to the content of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. He argues that "the aim of the whole message of Jesus is that the name of God should be hallowed by honoring his lordship. All else, especially his message of salvation proceeds from this."³³ Thus, the entire goal of the mission of the Son is to establish the lordship of the Father. Jesus' salvific work is a part of this mission in that it aims to enable humans and all of creation to give proper honor to the Father. The title "Son" reflects the fact that Jesus' message about the Father is real in such a way that it affects his person. This definition can be seen in Jesus' self-distinction from the Father, so that he can bear witness to the Father. This insight is particularly clear in the Johannine presentation of Jesus as the Word and Son of the Father. However, the synoptic tradition also echoes Jesus' practice of distinguishing himself from the Father. This can be seen in the fact that he will not allow his disciples to call him "good teacher" and in the fact that only the Father knows the exact time of the end.³⁴ While in the anti-Trinitarian theology of the Socinians passages such as these were used to argue against the full deity of the Son, Pannenberg uses them to make the point that Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God precisely through his self-distinction from the Father, through which he is able to glorify him. Pannenberg summarizes this part of his argument as follows: "Precisely by distinguishing himself from the Father, by subjecting himself to his will as his creature, by thus giving place to the Father's claim to deity as he asked others to do in his proclamation of the divine lordship, he showed himself to be the Son of God and one with the Father who sent him (John 10: 30)."³⁵ This self-distinction of the man Jesus from the Father then is constitutive not only for his Sonship but also for the adoptive Sonship and daughterhood of the members of the Church.

33. *Ibid.*, 309.

34. Mk 10:18; 13:32par.

35. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:310.

Through his self-distinction from the Father, Jesus gives glory and honor to the Father and accomplishes the mission for which he was sent by the Father. In the process, he is so at one with the Father that “God in eternity is Father only in relation to him.”³⁶ The result is not only that Jesus’ Sonship acts as the mediator or conduit for humanity’s filial relation to the Father, but also that he is the only one who truly reveals the Father and thus shares in the divinity of the Father. “As the one who corresponds to the fatherhood of God, Jesus is the Son, and because the eternal God is revealed herein as Father, and is Father everywhere only as he is so in relation to the Son, the Son shares his deity as the eternal counterpart of the Father.”³⁷ Because Jesus is the only true Son and because the Father can be truly known only through him, Jesus has a share in the deity of the Father since the Father cannot be thought of apart from the Son. This thought process involves a transition from the relation of Jesus to the Father, which is elucidated in his preaching and in his creaturely distinction from the Father, to the eternal sonship of Jesus, which bears a unique relation to the Father. This distinction within the person of Jesus is, of course, the basis for the doctrine of the two natures of the one Christ. Nonetheless, the key point that Pannenberg is trying to communicate is that the Son is revealed as divine precisely as the result of his act of self-distinction from the Father.³⁸

However, Pannenberg also points out that Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father is simultaneously an act of self-distinction of the one divine essence. “The self-distinction of Jesus from the Father applies not merely to the Father as a person in the unity of the divine life, but also the Father as the one God from whom Jesus distinguishes himself.”³⁹ Part of the difficulty with this approach is that Pannenberg challenges the traditional Eastern understanding of the Trinity which associates the person of the Father with the unity of the divine essence. On the one hand, Pannenberg sees the validity of the insight in that the relation between the Father and the Son that is established by the act of begetting is irreversible. From this perspective, the Father alone is the source of the deity of the Son. On the other hand, for Pannenberg, the differentiation between the Father and the Son that can be found in Jesus’ self-distinction from the Father raises the question of whether there exists a parallel distinction on the part of the Father from the Son. In this way, the

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, 311.

39. *Ibid.*

differentiation between the Father and the Son would be based in two corresponding acts of self-distinction: one on the part of the Father, and one on the part of the Son. Pannenberg is encouraged in this line of thinking by St. Athanasius' insight that the Father would not be the Father without the Son and concludes that there must be another relation between the Father and the Son that better expresses the Father's self-distinction from the Son.⁴⁰

Pannenberg finds this new relation between the Father and the Son in the Pauline idea that Christ has been given the authority of the Father to establish his reign here on earth.⁴¹ He understands this concept in such a way that the Son is not merely a representative of the rule of the Father; he is the bearer of it. This insight is true particularly of the risen and exalted Lord, but it is also true in a preliminary way of his earthly ministry which prepares the path for the kingdom. Just as the sending of the Son by the Father constitutes a relation between the Father and the Son, the Father's handing over of his lordship to the Son and the Son's returning of this lordship at the eschaton constitutes a person-defining relation between the Father and the Son. Pannenberg sees this idea primarily as the result of the sending of the Son; however, it does have decisive implications for the intratrinitarian relations between the Father and the Son.⁴² The Father's act of handing over his lordship to the Son in order to establish his divinity over creation is for Pannenberg a defining event in the life of the Father. However, this event can not be viewed in isolation from the Son's establishing of the kingdom on earth and his handing the lordship over creation back to the Father, which is a central aspect of the consummation of creation. Thus, Pannenberg sees these two moments as different aspects of one fundamentally, indivisible, divine action.

Pannenberg views the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son that comes into focus in light of the eschatological relation between the two persons as fundamentally different from the relation that is defined in terms of begetting and being begotten. "In the handing over of lordship from the Father to the Son, and its handing back from the Son to the Father, we see mutuality in their relationship that we do not see in begetting. By handing over lordship to the Son, the Father makes his kingship dependent on whether the Son glorifies him and fulfills his lordship by fulfilling his mission."⁴³ Thus, for Pannenberg, the intratrinitarian distinction between the Father and the Son is

40. Ibid. 312; Athanasius, *Contra Arians*, 1.29; cf. 14.34 and 3.6.

41. Phil. 2:9ff, Heb 2:8, 1 Cor 15:24-25; 28.

42. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:312.

43. Ibid., 313.

not simply that the Father begets the Son, but also that he hands all things over to the Son. Understood in this way, the very deity of the Father is dependent upon the Son. More will have to be said about this aspect of the mutuality of the personhood of the Father and the Son later.

The Father's act of handing over his lordship to the Son is thus the Father's act of self-distinction from the Son. Since the nineteenth century the term "self-distinction" has been used in Trinitarian theology to express the processes by which the Son and the Spirit are brought forth from the Father. In this traditional sense, the concept of "self-distinction" does not apply to the Father. Pannenberg's starting point with the Son and his understanding of the Father's handing over of his lordship to the Son, however, enables him to redefine the term. As a result, he understands self-distinction in such a way that "the one who distinguishes himself from another defines himself as also dependent upon that other."⁴⁴ Thus, the acts of self-distinction by which the persons of the Trinity are revealed to creation are also acts through which the very divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is dependent upon the other persons.

This dependency upon the other divine persons is true no less of the Father than it is of the Son and the Spirit. Of course, Pannenberg argues that in and of himself the Father does need creation to authenticate his divinity. However, in Pannenberg's theology, once the reality of the world is a given, it is impossible to conceive of the divine Father apart from his lordship over his creation. Thus, in the Father's act of handing over his lordship to the Son for the kingdom to be established in creation, the Father is entrusting and risking his very divinity to the work of the Son and the Spirit in creation.

Pannenberg insists that it is only in light of this understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son that it is possible to speak of the intratrinitarian significance of the cross. "The Passion of Jesus Christ is not an event which concerned only the human nature that the divine Logos assumed, as though it did not affect in any way the eternal placidity of the Trinitarian life of God. In the death of Jesus the deity of his God and Father was at issue."⁴⁵ Despite this bold statement about the intratrinitarian implications of Jesus' death on the cross, Pannenberg is quite careful and nuanced in his statements about the consequences of the crucifixion. For example, Pannenberg agrees with the traditional doctrine of the Church which says that it is strictly speaking only the person of Jesus who suffered and died. As a result, Pannenberg rejects the kind of direct statements about the death of God on the cross that

44. *Ibid.*, n 167.

45. *Ibid.*, 314.

have become popular since Hegel and Nietzsche.⁴⁶ However, he is clear that the Son of God was “affected” by suffering and death on the cross. He further explains this point by stating that on the cross Jesus accepted the full consequences of his self-distinction from the Father in his humiliation and in his acceptance of death. Moreover, Pannenberg holds that the Father too was affected by the death of the Son, thus echoing the arguments of Moltmann and others about the sympathetic nature of love. More specifically, he argues that the Father was not only affected by the crucifixion because Jesus’ death calls into question Jesus’ divine power, but also because the divine power of the Father that Jesus proclaimed was called into question as well. Thus, the crucifixion placed a question mark over the Trinitarian work of establishing the Father’s lordship over creation. For this reason, Pannenberg argues that the crucifixion refers both the Father and the Son to the person of the Spirit.

Pannenberg follows Romans 1:4 and 1 Timothy 3: 16 in attributing the resurrection primarily to the work of the Spirit. This attribution is not to say that the resurrection of Jesus is not also to be seen as the work of the Father who acts through the Spirit in the raising of the Son, or the Son, who also accomplishes this work through the Spirit. “All three persons of the Trinity are at work in this event. Decisive significance attaches, however, to the work of the Spirit as the creative origin of all life.”⁴⁷ Thus, for Pannenberg, the Father and the Son “are referred to the working of the Spirit” in the resurrection.⁴⁸ Pannenberg sees this work of the Spirit as most clearly expressed in the Johannine theology of glorification. As the Father is glorified in the Son who makes his deity manifest on earth, the Spirit glorifies the Son in the resurrection and continues to do so in the church. In this way, the Spirit completes the revelation of the Father that is begun in the Son and also gives glory to the Father in giving glory to the Son.

The work of the Spirit in giving glory to the Father and the Son in the resurrection and in the consummation of the kingdom constitutes his self-distinction. In these acts the Spirit differentiates himself from the Father and the Son. Just as the Son defines his personhood through his work of glorifying the Father, so too the Spirit defines his personhood through his work of glorifying the Son and the Father. He accomplishes this work, not by referring to himself, but by bearing witness to the Son and reminding us of his teaching and bearing witness to his truth. Pannenberg stresses this element of self-

46. “It is incorrect of course to speak point-blank of the death of God on the cross as has been done since the time of Hegel.” Ibid.

47. Ibid., 315.

48. Ibid.

distinction in the life of the Spirit because he believes that Augustine's pneumatology, which conceives of the Spirit as the eternal communion of the Father and the Son which unites them, naturally led to the tendency to view the Spirit as something less than a distinct person within the Trinitarian life of God. He thus agrees with the traditional Orthodox argument against Augustine's understanding of the role of the Spirit.⁴⁹

Despite Pannenberg's concern for the reduction of the complete personhood of the Spirit, which he argues is the result of Augustine's pneumatology, he also sees a deeper meaning and truth to Augustine's language about the Spirit as the loving communion of the Father and the Son. The Spirit's place in the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son is assured because he is the medium and condition of this fellowship.⁵⁰ In other words, the role of the Spirit in the immanent life of the Trinity is to act as the mediator and condition for the communion of the other two persons of the Trinity. However, Pannenberg insists that this role of the Spirit cannot be separated from his personhood, which is defined in terms of the role that the Spirit plays in uniting believers in Christ. Thus, the work of the Spirit is to glorify the Father in, through, and with the Son. Pannenberg expresses the relationship in the following terms:

For Jesus, himself, then, the work of the Spirit was to glorify the Father, as in John, where the Spirit glorifies the Son in his fellowship with the Father, and in this way glorifies the Father as well (16:14). Since the whole work of Jesus, aiming as it does at the knowledge and acknowledgment of the Father and the coming of his kingdom, has the glorifying of the Father as its ultimate goal, it is to be viewed as a work of the Spirit in him.⁵¹

Thus, Pannenberg supports Augustine's understanding of the Spirit as the communion and fellowship between the Father and the Son. Regardless, Pannenberg rejects the associated Augustinian claim that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* because Augustine describes the Spirit primarily in terms of his relations of origin.⁵² As has already been mentioned, Pannenberg views the tendency to define the divine persons solely in terms of

49. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 6.5.7; 15.19.37.

50. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:316. In making these comments, Pannenberg refers the reader to an earlier passage in this chapter where he discusses the influence of the notion of God as Spirit and the traditional methodology in Trinitarian theology which starts from the idea of the One divine subject or Spirit.

51. *Ibid.*, 316-7.

52. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 5.11.12.

their relations of origin as unscriptural and dangerous. Of particular interest in this regard is the idea that the Son receives the Spirit, which is found especially in Luke, and also the idea that he is glorified by the Spirit, which is found in John.⁵³ “Hence we can say only that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and is received by the Son.”⁵⁴ This position should not suggest that Pannenberg does not recognize the validity of the idea that the Son gives his Spirit to the community of believers; rather, he sees this relationship as the Son’s sharing in the Father’s act of sending the Spirit. Thus, Pannenberg accepts that the impartation of the Spirit to believers incorporates them into the Body of Christ and the impartation of the Spirit takes place through the Risen Lord. Yet Pannenberg still sees the sending of the Spirit as primarily the work of the Father. The Son cooperates with the Father in the sending of the Son, but is not the proper center of action. In this way, Pannenberg’s understanding of the person of the Spirit is intended to act as middle ground between the diverging Trinitarian theologies of the East and West. He rejects the inclusion of the *filioque* clause into the creed as unscriptural and theologically unsound.⁵⁵ However, he avoids calling it heretical and points out that the *filioque* is based in the Augustinian understanding of the Spirit as the communion between the Father and the Son, which he does accept and embrace as making an important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. However, as has already been mentioned, he remains critical of both the East and the West for their over-emphasis on the relations of origin in the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁶

In summary then, Pannenberg centers his understanding of divine personhood in the idea of relations as does the rest of the Christian tradition. Nonetheless he differs from this tradition by emphasizing that the Trinitarian relations can not be limited solely to the relations of origin. Pannenberg

53. Cf. Lk 1:35; 10: 21–22; 16:14 and Jn 16:13–14; 17:4. Pannenberg rejects the notion that the Son’s reception of the Spirit can be limited solely to his humanity arguing that it is an entire person that the Son receives the Spirit.

54. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:317.

55. Cf. Robert M. Haddad, “The Stations of the Filioque,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 46 (2002): 209–268.

56. Pannenberg mentions at this point the important contribution of the doctrine of perichoresis or circumincession. The notion of the interpenetration of the divine persons as expressed by St. John of Damascus truly does give credit to the mutuality and reciprocity of the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while at the same time explaining the unity of the persons. However, Pannenberg argues that the doctrine has only had a limited impact because of the over-emphasis on understanding the divine persons in terms of their relation of origin. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:319.

summarizes his full understanding of the divine relations in the following statement:

The Father does not merely beget the Son. He also hands over his kingdom to him and receives it back from him. The Son is not merely begotten of the Father. He is also obedient to him and he thereby glorifies him as the one God. The Spirit is not just breathed. He also fills the Son and glorifies him in his obedience to the Father, thereby glorifying the Father himself. In so doing he leads all into all truth (John 16:13) and searches out the deep things in the Godhead (1 Cor 2: 10-11).⁵⁷

Pannenberg encapsulates this more complex understanding of the interaction between the divine persons in the term mutual relations, which refers to the fact that the divine persons are defined not only by their relation to the Father but through all of their relations to one another. This term also points to Pannenberg's idea that not only is the divinity of the Son and the Spirit dependent upon the divinity of the Father, but also that the divinity of the Father is dependent upon the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. More will have to be said about this in a section below.

Three Persons but Only One God

Pannenberg relies upon the notion of relation to define the concept of person as the tradition has since the Cappadocian Fathers. However, Pannenberg argues that it is insufficient to define divine personhood solely in term of relations of origin. Rather, the divine relations are characterized by mutual self-distinction and thus form a "richly structured nexus of relationships" that ought not to be reduced.⁵⁸ Thus, the person cannot be completely identified with any one relation.

The self-distinction of each person of the Trinity also relates to the divinity and attributes of the divine essence. "This is indeed the point of the self-distinction of one person from one or both of the others."⁵⁹ It is only in the mutual self-distinction of the persons that each one receives his deity from the others. For the Son, the Father is the only One who is truly good and therefore truly God. As a result, the Son commits himself to perfect obedience and service to the Father. For this reason, the Spirit honors the Son and confirms his mission and service which make him one with the Father through

57. *Ibid.*, 320.

58. *Ibid.*, 320.

59. *Ibid.*, 321.

the resurrection. In his act of glorifying and confirming the Son, the Spirit also joins the Son in giving glory to the Father. The Father sends the Spirit to the Son and through Him hands over his kingdom to the Son. Through the Spirit, the Father also sheds his love to all believers. These examples show not only that each person of the Trinity relies upon the others for his divinity but also that the concept of self-distinction applies differently to each member of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all play a unique role in the divine life. This notion rounds off Karl Rahner's argument that only the Son could become have become incarnate.⁶⁰ Pannenberg agrees with Rahner's insight that there is something unique about the person of the Son such that only he could be incarnate. However, Pannenberg also goes a step farther by explicitly saying that the persons of the Father and the Spirit are unique as well, which Rahner leaves implied. He bases this insight in the mutual self-distinction of each of the persons. Thus, he argues that the "different structure of the persons comes out the more clearly, however, if we consider the full complexity of the relations among Father, Son, and Spirit, and do so precisely in respect of the different forms of their mutual self-distinction."⁶¹

Pannenberg does not limit the importance of the mutual self-distinctions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit only to the definition of personhood. The very deity of each of the members of the Trinity depends upon the mutual relations. He explains the relations in the following terms:

Only of the Son may we say that the other person from whom he distinguishes himself, i.e., the Father, is for him the only God, and that the Son's own deity is grounded in the fact that he thus subjects himself to the deity of the Father. The Spirit, of course, also shows his deity by teaching us to recognize and confess the Son as Kyrios (1 Cor. 12:3), i.e., by recognizing and confessing the deity of another person, namely the Son. Nevertheless, the Son is not the only God in the confession of the Spirit—he is Kyrios only as the Son of the Father—nor is doxology the only work of the Spirit. The Spirit was earlier given to the Son permanently and without measure so as to equip him for his work. Thus the form of the self-distinction of the Spirit from the Son and the Father is different from that of the Son in relation to the Father.

Again the self-distinction of the Father from the Son and the Spirit with respect to the deity of both takes yet another form. The Father does not recognize the one God in the Son in distinction from himself, but he hands over his lordship to the Son so as to have it anew in him as Athanasius puts it. His love is not diminished by this shedding it abroad in the hearts of believers by the Spirit. Nevertheless, in respect of the relation of the Father to the Son and the Spirit we must still speak of a self-distinction

60. Karl Rahner, *Trinity*, 28–30.

61. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 321.

of the Father as regarding his deity, for the revelation of the deity and lordship of the Father depends on the work of Son and the Spirit.⁶²

As a result the Father, as well as the Son and the Spirit, depends upon the other members of the Trinity for his own divinity. As is indicated in the quotation above and in the previous chapter, Pannenberg attributes this daring insight to St. Athanasius. He argues that Athanasius was so audacious that he held that Jesus is completely the way, the truth, and the life (John 14: 6) to such a degree that he is the truth and life of the Father as well.⁶³ The Son is also for Pannenberg, again drawing on Athanasius, the power and wisdom of the Father.⁶⁴ The deity of the Father is, thus, to be seen in the Son. And Pannenberg means this statement in such a radical way that the Father is not the Father without the Son, and that he does not possess the Godhead apart from him.

Obviously, the subsequent tradition did not develop the relations between the divine persons along this line. Rather, the tradition accepts the deity of the Father unconditionally and posits that the origin of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit is rooted in the deity of the Father. Once again, however, Pannenberg argues that this development is unacceptable because it contradicts the reciprocity of the self-distinctions of the divine persons that he finds evident in Scripture and because it subordinates the divinity of the Son and the Spirit to that of the Father. Pannenberg cites Augustine's theology as a classic example of such an attempt to reduce the divine relations to the relations of origin. Pannenberg states that Augustine was aware of the notion of mutual self-distinction that Athanasius originated and that he associated this concept with the theology of Eusebius of Vercelli.⁶⁵ Augustine rejected the idea of the mutual self-distinction of the divine persons and the associated concept of interdependence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for their very divinity because it necessitates that the Father does not have wisdom of himself. He also detected that this self-distinction meant that the Father and the Son could not be truly called God in themselves, because the interdependence of the divine persons means that the divine essence is not held substantially by any one member of the Trinity. Rather, the divine

62. *Ibid.*, 321-2; includes footnote 186 (after reference to Athanasius) *C. Arian.* 3.36 (PG, 26, 401 C): "Since the Father has given all things to the Son, he possesses all things afresh in the Son."

63. *Ibid.*, 322; cf. Athanasius, *C. Arian.*, 1.20

64. *Ibid.* cf. Athanasius, *C. Arian.* 1.11

65. *Ibid.*, 323; cf. chapter three note 42.

essence is held substantially in the relations of the divine persons. Thus, “the mutuality of the persons has the relation of each to the one Godhead and its attributes as its content.”⁶⁶ This mutuality means that the concept of substance needs to be drastically revised in terms of the reciprocal personal relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From this perspective, substance is a much more fluid and dynamic concept than it was in the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle.

At this point, Pannenberg approvingly cites Robert Jenson, who commented that in rejecting the mutual self-distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit, Augustine is missing one of the implications of the Nicene doctrine. While it is clear that Augustine envisioned himself as a defender of the doctrine of the Council of Nicaea, Jenson and Pannenberg argue that “the relations between the persons are constitutive not merely for their distinctions but also for their deity.”⁶⁷ Pannenberg argues that Augustine was unable to accept this position because of the new understanding of substantiality that it necessitates.

One of the most interesting features of Pannenberg’s understanding of the mutuality of the divine persons is that, in contrast to Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, it leaves intact the monarchy of the Father. Moltmann saw the doctrine of the *monarchia* of the Father as irrevocably leading to the subordination of the Son and the Spirit and destroying the perfect equality of the divine fellowship.⁶⁸ However, for Pannenberg, the monarchy of the Father must be retained because of its basis in scripture and in Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God. Thus, Pannenberg envisions the work of the Son and the Spirit as establishing the *monarchia* of the Father of creation and handing it back over to him in the eschatological fulfillment of time. Thus, the Son subjects himself in obedience to the Father and the Father depends upon the Son for the establishment of his monarchy. Pannenberg’s understanding follows not only as the undeniable consequence of what is revealed economically, but also as the truth of the intratrinitarian relations among the persons. Yet, the Son’s obedience to the Father does not mean that the Son is ontologically inferior.⁶⁹ Rather, the Son freely subjects himself to the Father’s reign and the reign of the Father depends upon the obedience of the Son.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.; Jenson, *Triune Identity*, 119.

68. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 129-148.

69. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 324.

This means that the monarchy of the Father is the result of the cooperation of the divine persons and not the presupposition for their relations. This allows Pannenberg to conclude that the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has as its content the monarchy of the Father and the establishment of the divine reign over creation.

One practical consequence of this approach to the monarchy of the Father is that it is no longer appropriate to associate the person of the Father with the triune God as a whole. Pannenberg cites the long history of the tendency among systematicians to draw a distinction between a personal use of the title Father and an essential use of the title.⁷⁰ This tendency meant that that title “Father” could be used to designate either the first person of the Trinity or the Godhead. Such a distinction is natural and appropriate if one starts by understanding the relations between the divine persons solely in terms of their origin in the Father. However, given Pannenberg’s emphasis on the mutuality of the relations and his insight that the monarchy of the Father is the content of the active communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit, it is not appropriate to allow such duality of language.

Pannenberg’s understanding of the monarchy of the Father allows him to say that, in his monarchy, the Father is the one God.⁷¹ This position is confirmed by the usage of the word God (Ho Theos) in the New Testament which almost always refers to the person of the Father. However, Pannenberg argues that this position does not mean that the understanding of the One God has to develop from the doctrine of the Father, as opposed to the unity of the divine essence in the Trinity of persons. This follows because the monarchy of the Father is mediated by the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the relation between the Father and the Son, which is mediated by the Spirit is the basis not only for the whole history of Jesus of Nazareth but also for the entire economy of salvation. Thus, Pannenberg agrees with Rahner’s maxim about the identity of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity. He expresses this relation in the following terms:

We cannot clarify the question of the unity of the trinitarian God merely by considering the immanent Trinity before the foundation of the world and ignoring the economy of salvation. Even though we must finally distinguish between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, because God in his essence is the same as he is in his revelation, and is to be viewed as no less distinct from his revelation than identical

70. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948) 1.33.3.

71. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:326.

with it, nevertheless the unity of the trinitarian God cannot be seen in detachment from his revelation and his related work in the world in the economy of salvation.⁷²

For Pannenberg, while there is a distinction to be made between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity, the immanent Trinity and the intratrinitarian unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be discussed apart from the revelation of the Trinitarian God and the work of the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation. The fact that the monarchy of the Father is dependent upon the Son and the Spirit thus demands that God's relations with the world must be brought into the picture when discussing the unity of the divine essence.

To sum up then, in the idea of the mutual relations of the divine persons Pannenberg presents the centerpiece of his understanding of divine personhood. The divine persons cannot be defined solely in terms of their relations of origin. Rather, they must be defined by the full, complex nexus of relations that exists among each of the Trinitarian persons. This development also leads Pannenberg to deal with the intratrinitarian implications of the cross. In this regard, Pannenberg is not only talking about the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that are revealed in Jesus' death on the cross; he is also making a statement about the concept of divine impassibility. He is saying that the inner life of God truly is affected by the Triune God's interaction with the world, once the world has been created. This theme is continued and expanded upon in the following section on the relation between God and the world.

The World as the History of God

Pannenberg begins the last section of his chapter on the doctrine of the Trinity by explicitly discussing his understanding of Karl's Rahner's axiom regarding the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity. Pannenberg views Rahner's rule as a sharpening of Barth's programmatic interest in linking the doctrine of the Trinity to the revelation of the Father in history. It means that the doctrine of the Trinity must proceed by beginning with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and that the eternal essence of the Trinity must constantly be linked to the history of revelation. Rahner's thesis begins from the insight that Jesus Christ is in person the Son of God. As a result, the incarnation "is a specific instance of the intervention of a divine person in worldly reality."⁷³

72. *Ibid.*, 327.

73. *Ibid.*, 328.

While the incarnation is a unique historical event, it is nonetheless one of a number of examples of God's work in the world.

Yet, Pannenberg does not think that goes far enough. In light of his teachings about the mutual self-distinction of the divine persons, Pannenberg argues that Rahner's thesis can be extended to make a general statement about the relation between the life of the Trinity and the life of the world. Consequently, in the economic activity of the Trinity, the created world is brought into the relations of the divine persons and participates in them. There, thus, exists a real relation between the life of the Trinity and the world.

However, this involvement of the world in the intratrinitarian life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit takes place directly only through the work of the Son and the Spirit. The Father is never directly active in the world, but remains transcendent. Nonetheless, the Father does stand in relation to the world through the activity of the Son and the Spirit and their work of establishing the lordship of the Father in creation and handing it back over to the Father at the fullness of time. Despite the indirectness of this relation between the Father and the world, Pannenberg argues that the Father is still "dependent" upon the course of events in the world even in his deity.⁷⁴ This can be seen first of all as the consequence of Pannenberg's doctrine of the mutual dependence of the divine persons. However, he gives credit to Jüngel and Moltmann for being the first to work out the concept of the dependence of the Father in his deity upon the world. In both of their cases this dependence was developed primarily in terms of the cross. Jüngel and Moltmann each argue that the deity of the Father is called into question by the death of the Son on the cross. In response to this questioning, the Father, through the sending of the Spirit, vindicates the ministry of Jesus from the questions that the crucifixion raises for the validity of his ministry. Pannenberg sees the implication of the Father in the relationship of the Son and the Spirit with the history of salvation as an advance over Rahner's more conservative statements about the inseparability of the incarnation from the life of the immanent Trinity. This development of the concept of the dependence of the divinity of the Father upon the activity of the Son and the Spirit in the world is a necessary step which flows naturally out of Rahner's thesis of the identity between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity.

Further, Pannenberg argues that the linking of the immanent Trinity with the economic Trinity must also be applied to the resurrection of Jesus and not simply his life history leading up to the moment of his death on the cross. The whole history of Jesus must be reinterpreted in light of his establishing the

74. *Ibid.*, 329.

dominion of the Father over creation. Moltmann played a key role in developing this element of Pannenberg's theology in that he convinced Pannenberg that the subjectivity of the Holy Spirit is established through his work of glorifying the Father and the Son, and in this way, the Spirit is able to affect the union of the two.⁷⁵ Thus, Moltmann links the eschatological framework of salvation history with the immanent relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The immanent Trinity is thus seen as "the eschatologically definitive form of the economic Trinity" and the Spirit is viewed as "the principle and source of its eschatological consummation."⁷⁶

Pannenberg accepts Moltmann's developments regarding Rahner's understanding of the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity; however, he also wants to avoid overstating the connection. Here, Pannenberg follows Kasper in drawing attention to the commonly held misconception that Rahner's thesis about the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity means that the former is completely absorbed into the latter.⁷⁷ Pannenberg accepts that there is, and must be, a valid distinction between the two terms. First, if the distinction between the two concepts is lost, the significance of the economic Trinity is lost. "For this Trinity has sense and significance only if God is the same in salvation history as he is from all eternity."⁷⁸ This insight goes back to Barth's understanding of the Trinity as the definitive form of the God's self-revelation to humanity. Pannenberg also rejects the notion that Rahner's rule means the absorption of the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity because he wants to rule out any notion of the divine becoming in history. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Pannenberg is clear that he does not intend his doctrine of the Trinity to suggest that the Trinitarian God is the product of history and achieves its reality only at the end of the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom.⁷⁹ He argues that from the historical experience of humanity and as a result of the limits of humanity's perspective, it may seem that the deity of the God of Jesus Christ is only finally demonstrated in the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom. Or, it may seem that God is inconceivable apart from the historical process which ends in

75. Moltman, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 125ff.

76. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:330.

77. *Ibid.*; cf. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 335. Pannenberg is also critical of Kasper's position that the immanent Trinity cannot be deduced from the economic Trinity. However, Pannenberg is prepared to accept that the word "deduced" might not be the best term to describe the connection between the economic and immanent Trinity.

78. *Ibid.*, 331.

79. *Ibid.*

the coming of the kingdom. However, “the eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity.”⁸⁰ The dependence of the Trinitarian God upon the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom simply serves to point out the constitutive significance of this event for the eternity of God. However, Pannenberg clearly means that at the end of the historical process, the Trinitarian God who finally will have fully revealed himself to the world in the flow of history, will be seen to have *always* been the true God. This insight is despite the fact that the limits of human experience will have prevented us from fully realizing this prior to the parousia.

Thus, the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God has an ontological significance for the life of the immanent Trinity, but it also has an epistemological significance in that it is the decisive moment when the struggle between atheism and theism will finally be decided. However, Christians do not have to wait for this moment to support their belief in the Christian God. Rather, in Pannenberg’s view the eschatological consummation of the kingdom has already been established in an anticipatory fashion through Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and his resurrection from the dead which anticipates the corresponding general resurrection from the dead. In this way, Pannenberg agrees with the tendency among the early church Fathers to begin the doctrine of the Trinity from the revelation of the Father in the Son through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

From this starting point, especially when developed in the framework of Hellenic philosophy, Pannenberg is able to understand how the immanent Trinity became increasingly divorced from the revelation of the Father, Son, and Spirit in history.⁸¹ However, he sees this development primarily as an interpretation of the Trinitarian dogmas of Nicaea and Constantinople. When the Son and the Spirit came to be seen as consubstantial with the eternal and immutable Father, then it was only logical to conclude that the entire Trinity must be seen as separate and infinitely removed from all creaturely reality. In this way, the humanity of Christ was able to serve as a buffer for all interaction with finite creaturely reality. This concept was even extended to the doctrine of the Incarnation, which reported that Jesus’ humanity had no effect upon the person of the Son. All of the scriptural passages which refer to some element of becoming in the life of Christ were attributed to change in his human nature.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, 322.

However, Pannenberg argues that contemporary theology has come to realize that this understanding of the Trinity is “one-sided and detaches it from its biblical basis.”⁸² As a result he argues that the doctrine of the Trinity, and indeed the entire doctrine of God, is in need of revision. In his estimation, reuniting the immanent and economic Trinity provides theology with the opportunity to develop a concept of God that is able to grasp both his immanence and transcendence at the same time. It similarly provides a theological framework for addressing the debatability of the existence of God and its effect upon the life of the Trinity while at the same time addressing God’s eternal self-identity and reality.

On the other hand, this re-envisioning of the doctrine of God also poses new problems for theology. Among them is the fact that the unity of God must be reconceived. This is not only because Pannenberg wants to move away from the trend in Trinitarian theology to derive the Son and the Spirit solely from the person of the Father. As we have seen, he argues that such an approach leads toward either Sabellianism or Subordinationism. However, Pannenberg also wants to rework the doctrine of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because their unity with the divine essence is closely associated with the unity of the economic and immanent Trinity.⁸³ The doctrine of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with the divine essence and one another thus must demonstrate both the inward and outward cooperation of the divine persons. However, the notion of the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is insufficient for this task, because perichoresis is only able to establish the mutual indwelling of the divine persons in their relation to history. As it is advanced by John of Damascus and more recently Jürgen Moltman, the notion of perichoresis is based in the traditional understanding of the Trinitarian relations in terms of relations of origins.⁸⁴ Thus, Pannenberg argues that perichoresis is a support for the notion that there must be another more fundamental basis for the unity of the divine persons.⁸⁵

Pannenberg’s main treatment on the doctrine of the Trinity ends in this way. However, he is expressly aware of the deficiencies of his understanding of the divine persons at this point. It is still unclear what constitutes the ultimate

82. *Ibid.*, 323.

83. *Ibid.*, 333.

84. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert, Franciscan Institute Publications, Text Series, vol. 8 (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute, 1955), 1.8; Jürgen Moltman, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 177-8.

85. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:334.

basis for the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit especially in their relation to the divine essence. Moreover, Pannenberg's reflections on the working of the divine persons in history have led him to posit a real relation between the persons of the Trinity and the world. However, the traditional notion of the divine essence makes it impossible to understand the transcendence, omnipotence, and simplicity of the divine essence while at the same time upholding God's presence in salvation history in some way that affects the identity of his eternal essence.⁸⁶ Thus, Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity remains incomplete without some discussion of his understanding of the unity of the divine essence and attributes.

Essence, Substance, and the Unity of the Divine Persons

Having already described the relations between the divine persons in chapter five of his *Systematic Theology*, Pannenberg turns in chapter six to the tasks of describing the unity of these distinct persons and at the same time elaborating upon the existence, essence, and attributes of God. Thus, while this chapter in one sense is separate from the preceding treatment of the Trinitarian persons, it is in another sense inseparable from Pannenberg's understanding of the Trinity and the nature of divine personhood. It is important to remember at this point, however, that while this material is expressly intended to deal with the doctrine of the one God, in the material that has already been discussed Pannenberg repeatedly insisted that the Christian understanding of the one God must be totally dependent upon the doctrine of the Trinity and thus intertwined with it in many ways. This fact must be kept in mind during the following treatment.

Unlike the Thomistic tradition that has been so influential in Roman Catholic theology, Pannenberg follows the Scotus school in arguing that the primary term for understanding the divine essence is rooted in the concept of infinity rather than in the notion of God as the first cause of the universe.⁸⁷ This fact is important for Pannenberg's understanding of God for several reasons. First, it helps to support Pannenberg's understanding of how the

86. Ibid.

87. John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio in Opera Omnia*, ed. Pacifici M. Perantoni, vol. 3 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950) 1d. 3p.1, q 1-2, 3, 6, n. 11. Descartes also picked up on this line of reasoning in a way that is of decisive significance for the modern period (René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. George Heffernan Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990, III). For more on Pannenberg's reading of the history of these developments cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 349-354.

human mind comes to knowledge of the divine. He argues—in a manner in keeping with the logic of both the ontological argument and Descartes’ philosophy—that the most fundamental idea in the human mind is the vague comprehension of the infinite against which all of human knowledge is developed. Thus, all humans possess at their most fundamental level a vague notion of the divine. This intuition leads to the important insight that it is possible to have an indistinct impression of the existence of the divine apart from a complete understanding of the divine essence. As a result, Pannenberg argues against the notion that God’s essence is his existence. Rather, he argues that “the concept of essence is relative to that of existence, which is grasped as something definite and distinct when we see *what* it is.”⁸⁸ Pannenberg’s intended consequence in taking up this position is that it allows him to give a great deal of importance to the indistinct and undefined notion of the infinite that forms the horizon against which all human knowledge is possible. This infinite being, which Christians call God, is thus both transcendent beyond all finite objects, yet at the same time is present in the world and at work in the world. Pannenberg describes the presence of the infinite essence as being manifested in multiple moments throughout time and space.

Pannenberg argues that the indistinct presence of the infinite as experienced by the human knower is “the specific existence of a specific essence.”⁸⁹ If the existence is not limited to this one moment of the manifestation of the essence, then there is a distinction between its essence and its existence. However, Pannenberg argues that this distinction does not constitute a division or true separation. Rather, “only the sum total of the moments of existence is coincident with the unity of the essence.”⁹⁰ If God truly transcends the finite world, then the sum total of all of these events of the divine existence in time define the divine essence. Further, Pannenberg sees these manifestations as a series of events that are spread throughout time. As a result, it is natural that the final manifestation of the divine essence in this sequence has a special significance because it is only from the perspective of the end of the sequence that the divine essence is completely revealed. Each individual manifestation of the divine essence must be seen as only an anticipation of the rest of the series.

These insights are important to Pannenberg’s understanding of the Trinity because they establish his understanding of the relation between the divine

88. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 354.

89. *Ibid.*, 357.

90. *Ibid.*

transcendence and immanence, and therefore also his understanding of the relation between the immanent and economic Trinity.

[God's] revelation in the world through the Son, whose appearing in time anticipates the consummation of the kingdom of God in the world, reveals the eternal Son, in relation to whom the Father has from all eternity his existence as the Father. The Father, then, has his existence in the Son, and the Son reveals the one God, the essence of God, by revealing the Father. . . The essence of the one God is revealed by both the Father and the Son, and by their communion in a third, the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and is received by the Son and given to his people.⁹¹

In light of these comments, Pannenberg refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the “three forms of the existence of God.” He argues that this idea is true not only in the world but also in the immanent life of the Trinity, which transcends the life of the world.⁹² This position also helps to afford a deeper insight into Pannenberg’s understanding of the nature of divine personhood. “The essence has its existence in the person just as the self is manifested in the I. This is, of course, not to say what is specific about personal existence as distinct from that of things. Only living beings, who have a relationship to their own self-determination, are usually called persons.”⁹³ Here Pannenberg draws a direct comparison between the existential nature of human personhood, which we have already discussed in chapter two, and the relationship between the essence and the existence of God. This comparison appears to mean that the divine essence, like the human self which is only concretely manifested in the human “I,” takes form only in the Father, Son, and Spirit both in and beyond the world. Further, the Cartesian field of the infinite, which forms the background of all human knowledge, cannot be defined as the existence of *God* apart from the divine persons. Nonetheless, Pannenberg holds that the specific form of the existence of Father, Son, and Spirit is identical with the “unlimited field of God’s non-thematic presence in his creation.”⁹⁴

In the third section of his chapter on the unity and attributes of the divine essence, Pannenberg takes up the traditional problem of how God’s attributes are related to the divine essence. In medieval approaches to the question, one

91. *Ibid.*, 358.

92. *Ibid.*, 358–9.

93. *Ibid.*, 359. The third sentence quoted here is the author’s translation of the original German which reads: “Nur lebendige Wesen, die zu ihrer eigenen Bestimmung ein Verhältnis haben, pflegt man Personen zu nennen.” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Bd 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 388–9.

94. *Ibid.*

could follow Thomas in arguing that the attributes are distinguished from the divine essence only conceptually, but this approach leads to the challenge of describing how the various attributes of God can be conceived if the divine is utterly simple. The Christian East has tended to follow Gregory Palamas on this issue, who argues that there exists a real distinction between the divine essence and the divine attributes.⁹⁵ However, this approach necessitates that the divine is only known through his attributes, while his essence remains permanently shrouded in mystery. Pannenberg sees this traditional blind alleyway in the history of theology as having given rise to the contemporary critique of the notion of God as purely anthropomorphic.

However, Pannenberg argues that he has found a way out of this maze of false options and dead-ends. In his mind, the insights of both Palamas and Aquinas are rooted in the notion of God as the infinitely transcendent first cause of the universe. Since the time of Aristotle, this emphasis on the transcendence of God has made it difficult to appreciate God's immanence in the world. In Aristotelian philosophical categories, the concept of relation is an accidental quality which has no valid place in the simplicity of the divine essence. However, Pannenberg argues that if one follows the more modern tendency to include the concept of relation at the very heart of the notion of essence, then it is of the very essence of God to be related to another. Yet, he does not intend by following such a shift in metaphysical emphases that the notion of divine transcendence become totally lost, subsumed in the course of history, or reduced to being the correlate to the idea of the world. Rather, despite these potential dangers, Pannenberg argues that giving increased ontological significance to the category of relation helps theologians to answer questions that previously seemed insoluble. The most important of these breakthroughs deals with the relation between the Trinitarian persons and their fundamental unity in the one divine essence. If the category of essence is defined relationally, then the reciprocal relations between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit can be more closely linked to the one divine essence.⁹⁶ However, at this point the link between the divine essence and the Trinitarian persons found in the revision of the notion of essence is tentative. Yet, Pannenberg seeks to develop this link by developing his understanding of divine action.

95. For more on Palamas and his doctrine of God cf. Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) especially 3.12 and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 2, The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 263–267.

96. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:367.

Divine Centers of Action

The description of the Trinitarian persons in the previous sections repeatedly resorted to the category of divine action or activity to explain Pannenberg's understanding of the basis for their self-distinction and differentiation from the undivided divine essence. Further, it demonstrated that he rejects Barth's and Rahner's descriptions of Trinitarian personhood, which use the concepts of "modes of being" and "modes of subsisting." Thus, it should not come as a surprise at this point to see Pannenberg incorporate some elements of a modern understanding of personhood.

If the Trinitarian relations among Father, Son, and Spirit have the form of mutual self-distinction, they must be understood not merely as different modes of being of the one divine subject but as living realizations of autonomous centers of action. Whether we must also view these centers of action as centers of consciousness depends on whether and in what sense we can *apply* the idea of consciousness, which derives from human experience, to the divine life.⁹⁷

The following section will have to deal more precisely with the Pannenberg's understanding of divine activity and his response to the possibility of a multiplicity of divine centers of consciousness.

In the previous section, it was explained that for Pannenberg the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are the concrete forms of the divine essence. This definition is seen particularly clearly in the economy of salvation. However, it has not yet been made clear how these matters relate to existence of God apart from the life of the world. To clarify these issues, Pannenberg turns to the concept of action. He argues that "action is a mode of being of the one who acts, and it is so in the sense of a being which is outside the self as something else is brought forth by the action, and it is decided who the one who acts is and what he or she can do."⁹⁸ Thus, "action" is a concept that is able to link God's presence in the world with his eternal transcendent essence. Nonetheless, if the category of action is to be fruitfully applied to the divine, it must be purged of anthropomorphisms to every possible degree.

In order to develop his understanding of the category of action as the foundation for the link between the divine essence and the divine attributes,

97. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, 1:347. "Wenn die trinitarischen Beziehungen zwischen Vater, Sohn, und Geist die Form wechselseitiger Selbstunterscheidung haben, dann können sie nicht nur als verschiedene Seinsweisen eines einzigen göttlichen Subjekts, sondern müssen als Lebensvollzüge selbständiger Aktzentren aufgefaßt werden." (Author's translation)

98. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:367.

and at the same time the connection between the Trinitarian persons and the divine essence, Pannenberg turns to the late nineteenth century work of Hermann Cremer.⁹⁹ Cremer argued that the actual qualities of the divine essence are revealed through God's activity in creation because activity is always related to the will and the abilities of the actor. Will and ability are directly related to the essential qualities of the one who is acting and thus reveal at least a part of his or her nature. Pannenberg elaborates on this point by indicating that action always connects the actor with the goal of the action. Further, it is impossible that divine activity only reveals a small part of the divine nature because, according to the New Testament witness, God is love. To speak of the love of God, then, is to say that God puts his entire being into willing to be and actually being for the world in the person of the Son.¹⁰⁰ This means that if love is the epitome of God's essence, as the Johannine literature tells, then God puts his entire essence into his actions on behalf of the world. Yet, questions still remain. How are these insights connected to the activity of the Trinitarian persons? And how does the notion of activity relate the divine persons to the divine essence? And if Pannenberg is comfortable with the modern tendency to connect the category person with that of action, how does he feel about the tendency to connect personhood with self-consciousness?

To answer these questions, it must first be recalled that Pannenberg insists that the divine essence is not a fourth person or subject that lies behind the persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit. He formulates his position in the following words: "Only the three persons are the direct subjects of the divine action."¹⁰¹ Rather, the one divine essence has its existence, both eternally and in relation to the world, in the divine persons. Thus, if God is in any sense active, this activity must always be located in the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Pannenberg, however, follows the Cappadocians in insisting that there is properly speaking only one divine activity in relation to the world that is shared by the Trinitarian persons.¹⁰² This insight and the doctrine of the perichoretic unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, however, are an expression of their unity in the divine essence. For the Cappadocians, this unity can only be expressed by deriving the Trinitarian persons from the divine essence which is

99. Hermann Cremer, *Die christliche Lehre von den Eigenschaften Gottes* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1897). Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) was a German Lutheran dogmatician who was trained at Tübingen and who taught at Universität Greifswald.

100. *Ibid.*, 18; also cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:369.

101. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 384.

102. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Quod non Sunt Tres Dei*, PG, 45, 128AC; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 31.14 (PG, 36, 149A).

associated with the person of the Father as the origin and source of the Godhead.

Pannenberg, however, seeks to sidestep this move and the difficulties that he associates with it by re-evaluating the traditional association of the spirituality of God with reason. Since the time of Philo and Origen, the Judeo-Christian tradition has understood the scriptural assertion that God is Spirit through the Platonic and Aristotelian category of *nous*.¹⁰³ Given the schools of ancient philosophy this connection made sense considering the fact that the only other reasonable option for understanding the pneumatic nature of the divine essence was to be found in Stoic materialism. However, Pannenberg associates the tendency to think of the divine essence in terms of reason with the tendency to assign subjectivity to the divine essence. As a result, Pannenberg offers an alternative understanding of the spirituality of the divine essence developed from modern physics. Drawing upon Michael Faraday's work on field theory (and noting its ancient roots in Stoicism), Pannenberg argues that it is possible to reconceptualize the divine essence as an autonomous field that is fully manifested in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁴ Faraday posited the existence of a universal force field in relation to which all material and corpuscular objects are considered secondary. Pannenberg imports this language from the realm of modern physics and uses it to describe the divine essence as a field of power which "can find equal manifestation in the all three persons [of the Trinity]."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, this concept can be opened up to include a number of human persons and the notion of the Church. However, human persons remain independent of the field while the Trinitarian persons are the eternal forms of the one divine essence. Pannenberg relates the proposition more concretely to the divine persons by way of the Holy Spirit. Since Pannenberg has already defined the Holy Spirit as the person who unites the Father and the Son in love, he easily makes the next step in describing the Spirit as the force field of the fellowship of the Father and the Son.¹⁰⁶ In this way the Holy Spirit is both a personal center of action who proceeds from the Father and is received by the Son and the impersonal field of power that unites the Father and the Son in love.

Among the many benefits that Pannenberg sees coming out of this reconceptualization of the divine essence is that the divine persons can now be

103. Jn 4: 24. "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

104. Michael Faraday, *The Forces of Matter, Great Minds Series* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993).

105. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:383.

106. *Ibid.*

seen as subjects without first being derived from the divine essence. “As modes of being of the one divine life [the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] are always permeated by its dynamic through their mutual relations.”¹⁰⁷ Pannenberg thus can define the Trinitarian persons as centers of divine action which do not at all differ from the one divine essence that permeates them all. In other words, the activity of the divine essence takes form only in the work of the Father, Son and Spirit both in their mutual relations and in their activity in the world.

This connection also answers the question posed regarding how the notion of activity connects the divine persons with the one divine essence. As has already been established, the unity of the divine persons which is expressed both in their mutual indwelling and in the commonality of their action reveals their essential unity in that activity and expresses the will and therefore the essential qualities of the actor. “Hence the thought of God’s action links the being of God in himself with his being in the world, the intratrinitarian life of God with economic Trinity, the active presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit with their creatures in the economy of salvation.”¹⁰⁸ Thus Pannenberg understands God’s activity as not only revealing the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but also as giving expression to the unity of the economic and immanent Trinity.

As to the question of Pannenberg’s appropriation of the concept of self-consciousness to the definition of divine personhood, he provides a careful response to this situation. On the one hand, he is extremely wary of speaking of any kind of divine self-consciousness because of Fichte’s critique of the personality of God as anthropomorphic. On the other hand, for much of modern philosophy, self-consciousness is seen as the epitome of reasoning, the height of reflection, and the basis of human freedom. To deny such an attribute to God completely seems perilous. Thus, Pannenberg argues that it is possible to talk of the self-consciousness of the divine persons in relation to one another, but not in relation to the world. Pannenberg accepts Fichte’s claim that self-consciousness requires a form of dependence upon another in relation to whom persons are able to define themselves. While such dependence is acceptable, and indeed central, to Pannenberg’s understanding of the intratrinitarian relations, it is not fitting for the relationship between the divine persons and the world.¹⁰⁹

107. *Ibid.*, 385.

108. *Ibid.*, 385–6.

109. *Ibid.*, 377.

Pannenberg also insists upon a major revision in the concept of self-consciousness if it is to be applied to divine personhood. In human beings, the notion of self-consciousness is the result of a tension and a distinction between the “I” and the self, that is, the human essence and its concrete existence. However, no such distinction can be a part of the notion of divine self-consciousness. He states,

As regards the mutual relation of the trinitarian persons, however, it must be agreed that there is not in them the incomplete self-identity that characterizes our human self-consciousness in its finitude. The identity of each of the three persons may be mediated by its relations to the others, but we have to assume that precisely by this mediation, by self-giving to the others, each of the persons is fully identical with itself.¹¹⁰

It is, thus, impossible to conceive of a gap between the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the divine essence. Pannenberg leaves open the question of whether or not this revision of the concept of self-consciousness so radically alters its content that it no longer is able to function as a meaningful term.

Pannenberg’s definition of the term “person” makes the notion of action absolutely central to its content. The term “person” is most apt to describe the Trinitarian persons in his estimation precisely because of its modern value for describing an individual subject which is capable of reflective action. It is also clear that Pannenberg is prepared to speak of the self-consciousness of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, the use of this term is dependent upon the persons coming to self-consciousness only through their mutual relations. Moreover, in order to apply this concept to divine personhood accurately it must first be purged of the distinction between the “I” and the self which is constitutive of the definition of human self-consciousness.

Love and the Trinity

In the course of describing the divine persons as centers of action, the previous section discussed Pannenberg’s understanding of the divine essence as Spirit. In doing so it established an initial insight into Pannenberg’s understanding of the basis for the unity of the divine persons. However, Pannenberg’s description of the Spirit of God as the field of power in which the divine essence takes concrete form in the persons of the Father, Son, and

¹¹⁰. Ibid.

Spirit is neither the end of his discussion of the unity of the divine persons with the divine essence, nor should it even be seen as his primary understanding of the divine essence. Even more fundamental than the idea of the Spirit as the essence of divinity is Pannenberg's concept of love as the fundamental quality of the divine essence. This final section of the current chapter will investigate the connection between Pannenberg's understanding of the divine essence as love and the persons of the Trinity. Moreover in the process, it will be established that the complete self-giving of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to one another in love constitutes the most important argument for their essential unity.

Nothing could be more fundamental to the description of God found in the New Testament than the idea of love. Both Paul and John argue that love is the primary reason for the Father's sending of the Son into the world.¹¹¹ In addition, Pannenberg finds love as the reason for the sending of the Son as the historical basis for his preaching of the kingdom of God. However, no New Testament statement about the love of God appears to be more central to Pannenberg's claims about the quality of the divine essence than 1 John 4: 8, 16. Here can be found the oft-repeated claim that God is love. Pannenberg interprets this passage not merely as one of the divine attributes, but rather as the most important statement of the very nature or essence of the divine.¹¹²

However, Pannenberg's investigation of the love of God is not dependent solely upon God's acts in the world on behalf of his creation. Rather, he wants to point out that God's love is also expressed in the intratrinitarian life of God.¹¹³ To be more specific, Pannenberg follows Regin Preter in arguing that love is the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, because they do not merely have love as a common quality; rather "they are love in the 'unity of free

111. Cf. Jn 3:16; Rom 8: 39.

112. *Ibid.*, 424. In making this claim Pannenberg is not seeking to displace or circumvent his understanding of the divine essence as Spirit. Rather, the statements "God is Spirit" and "God is love" denote the same unity of essence by which the Trinitarian persons are united to one another. He explains this by saying that the power of the Spirit is the "power of love that lets the other be" (*Ibid.*, 427). Thus love is at the very core of his understanding of the spirituality of the divine essence and constitutes the power of the divine field.

113. This insight is important not only as a basis for understanding the divine persons, but also because he sees it as a response to Feuerbach's critique of the love of God. Feuerbach argued that because in Christianity love is not of the very essence of God it is always possible to think of a subject behind the divine persons for whom it was not necessary to love. Pannenberg accepts this critique in that the traditional approaches to the doctrine of God and the Trinity did indeed make it possible to think of the divine essence as not defined by love. However, he credits Feuerbach's critique as helping to point out what has always been the authentic content of revelation, namely, that love is of the very nature of God. For more cf. *Ibid.*, 425ff.

persons' that can never be separated."¹¹⁴ Each of the Trinitarian persons loves the others: the Father loves the Son; the Son loves the Father; the Spirit loves both in fellowship.

This love is not merely an attribute or an activity of the divine persons; rather, it is part of the definition of their personhood. Pannenberg argues that "persons do not have power over love. It rises above them and thereby gives them their selfhood."¹¹⁵ This insight expresses itself in the mutual relations of the persons because the Father, Son, and Spirit each receive themselves afresh in the self-giving of the other persons. The personality of each of them is constituted by his relation to the others. Thus, each of the Trinitarian persons is ecstatically related to the other persons and the distinctiveness of each of the persons is found in the specific form of his relations to the others. "The Father is the Father only in relation to the Son, in the generation and sending of the Son. The Son is the Son only in obedience to the sending of the Father, which includes recognition of this fatherhood. The Spirit exists hypostatically as Spirit only as he glorifies the Father in the Son and the Son as sent by the Father."¹¹⁶ To the extent that the relations between the divine persons are different, it may be said that the very personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit is different.¹¹⁷ In the person of the Father, the divine essence takes the form of the creative power of existence and as the infinite and transcendent Thou which stands in relation to the world. However, this relation of the Father to the world can take place only through the Son's act of self-distinction from the Father. The Spirit is related to both because he is the loving union between the Father and the Son, and because his hypostatic independence is the result of his self-distinction from the Father and the Son in giving glory to each of them. Given this description of the relation between the divine persons and the essence of God as love, divine personhood is thus also defined as a concrete form of the divine essence. The persons do not exist for themselves, but in eternal ecstatic relation to one another and to the field of the divine essence which is manifest in each of them and in their

114. Ibid., 425, quoting Regin Prenter, "Der God, der Liebe ist: Das Verhältnis der Gotteslehre zur Christologie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 96 (1971) 406.

115. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 426.

116. Ibid., 428.

117. Ibid. This echoes Karl Rahner's emphasis on the uniqueness of each of the Trinitarian persons. In his theology, this principle focused on the idea that only the Son (and not the Father or the Spirit) could have been the subject of the divine incarnation (Rahner, *Trinity*, 28-30).

interrelations.¹¹⁸ The Father, Son, and Spirit achieve their personhood only from the others and not in and for themselves.

In the end, it is primarily because of the ecstatic nature of Trinitarian personhood that Pannenberg makes reference to the modern concept of human personhood. This reference occurs despite the fact that Pannenberg clearly argues that, historically, the fundamental objection to the use of the modern form of this category is based in his critique of the traditional Western formulation of the dogma of three persons. However, Pannenberg is clear that while there are similarities between his understanding of human personhood and the personhood of the Father, Son and Spirit, there remain at least two essential differences between these two concepts. The first was pointed out in the last section in terms of the human distinction between the “I” and the self. In human personhood as it is experienced in this world there is always a gap in the identity between the self as it is lived out and the awareness of the self. This gap is primarily because in the current age humans are never completely the specific personal other in relation to whom human completeness can be found. However, this is not at all the case for the Trinitarian persons. The Son is wholly himself in his relation to the Father; the Father is wholly himself in his relation to the Son; and the Spirit is wholly himself in relation to the Father and the Son. The second, and for Pannenberg the more important, of the differences between human and divine personhood deals with the primacy of relation for personhood. As individuals, human beings are not wholly constituted by their relation to other human beings. In the end, humans are defined only by their relation to God. The same cannot be said of divine personhood.

In the mutual relations of the Trinitarian persons, their existence as persons or hypostases is wholly filled by these specific mutual relations, so that they are nothing apart from them. Thus their existence as persons is coincident with the divine love which is simply the concrete life of the divine Spirit, just as conversely the one reality of God as Spirit exists only in the mutual relations of the Trinitarian persons and precisely for that reason is defined as love.¹¹⁹

In this way, it is clear that, for Pannenberg, love forms the concrete unity of the divine life and at the same time is the defining element of divine personhood. He shows here that the most important of the reasons for holding onto the term “person,” even in the face of the modern developments of this notion, come from the complete self-giving of the Father, Son and Holy

118. *Ibid.*, 430.

119. *Ibid.*, 431.

Spirit to each other in love. Thus, in the end, his entire doctrine of the Trinity and of the divine essence depends upon his understanding of divine personhood and its relation to the concept of love. In this way, love is not only the nature of the divine essence, but it is also the basis for the fundamental unity of the Trinitarian persons and is constitutive of their relations to one another. For this reason it is difficult to overemphasize the importance of the category of love for Pannenberg's understanding of God.

Summary

This chapter has taken a long look at Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology and traced its development from the revelation of the Father in the work and person of Jesus to the unity of the Trinity as it can be seen in the concept of love. Throughout this process, attention has returned again and again to Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood. By now, it should be clear that it was not at all a difficult task in that if one were to remove all trace of Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" from his doctrine of the Trinity there would indeed be little left. Nonetheless, it is possible to distill Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood to a few key concepts: self-distinction; mutual or reciprocal relations; persons as centers of divine action; the Trinity and love; and the world as the history of God. The following pages will review these concepts to conclude the study of Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" as it is employed in his Trinitarian theology. This procedure will in the end provide a more succinct definition of Pannenberg's concept of divine personhood.

Pannenberg's study of the doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of divine personhood begins with the concept of the self-distinction of Jesus from the Father. Jesus' divinity is rooted in the fact that throughout his life, ministry, and particularly in his death Jesus distinguishes himself from the Father. Chief among the scriptural witnesses to this distinction is Jesus' rejection of the title "good teacher" because only the Father in heaven is good (Mk 10: 17 -19). In fact, one of the major goals of his work is to establish the kingdom on the Father's behalf and then to hand over this kingdom to the Father. However, it is in this act of self-distinction from the Father that the very divinity of Jesus is revealed. This idea follows a thesis from one of Pannenberg's earlier works: "Communion and unity with God increase in the same proportion as the modesty of the creature in distinguishing itself from God."¹²⁰ Thus, in the

120. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 82.

absolute distinction that Jesus draws between himself and the Father, the work of the Father is revealed in the Son. It is this relation to the Father that establishes Jesus' status as the Son, for he is Son only in his relation to the Father and receives his divinity through this relation to the Father. In fact, this element of self-distinction is absolutely central for Pannenberg's understanding of each of the Trinitarian persons. For the Father, Son, and Spirit, each receives his divinity precisely through an act of self-distinction from the others. For the Spirit this self-distinction comes in his work of giving glory to the Father and to the Son—the Son in the resurrection and the Father in the Son's future handing over of the kingdom. The Father distinguishes himself in his receiving his divinity back from the Son and the Spirit. This concept is central to Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity and to his understanding of Trinitarian personhood because the self-distinction of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit establishes the concrete quality of their mutual dependence upon one another. This concept also leads directly into Pannenberg's understanding of the reciprocal relations of the divine persons.

Pannenberg follows the teaching of the tradition dating back to the Cappadocians that the personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit is derived from their relations to one another. For the Cappadocians, the relations of the Trinitarian persons were seen completely in terms of their origin in the Father. Thus, the person of the Son was constituted by his being begotten by the Father, the Spirit was constituted by his procession from the Father, and the Father was identified as the origin of the divinity of the other two and thus the source of the Godhead. However, Pannenberg is concerned that this practice leads to an implicit subordinationism within the doctrine of the Trinity. He argues that defining the divine persons solely in terms of their relations of origin is insufficient. This argument is where he makes use of the principle of self-distinction. For Pannenberg, each of the Trinitarian persons is defined by their relation, not only to the origin of his divinity but also to the other persons. More concretely, the Son receives his divinity not only from the Father who sent him, but also from the Spirit who gives glory to him in his resurrection. The Spirit receives his divinity not only in his spiration from the Father but also in his being received by the Son. Most radically, the Father too is dependent upon the Son and the Spirit for his divinity, in that he depends upon the work of the Son and the Spirit to establish his lordship over creation. It is particularly interesting that this does not mean for Pannenberg that the monarchy of the Father is lost. On the contrary, the monarchy of the Father is seen in this light as the goal of the united activity of the Trinity in relation to the world. Perhaps no element of Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood is more central to his doctrine of the Trinity than his concept of

the reciprocal relations. Pannenberg's argument for the mutual relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the main way that he seeks to correct what he sees as the long-standing problems of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. Each of the other components of Pannenberg's definition of divine personhood either seeks to clarify this point or avoid the potential dangers of this position.

Pannenberg's understanding of the reciprocal relations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit finds concrete expression in the activity of each of the divine persons both in respect to one another and with respect to the world. The Father is dynamic in his act of complete self-giving to the Son and the Spirit and in his sending them into the world. The Son's act of obedience to the Father is the basis for the establishment of the kingdom. The Spirit is defined by his acts of glorifying the Father and the Son. Thus, at the very center of Pannenberg's definition of divine personhood is the notion that the persons are distinct centers of activity. In this way they can be identified with the modern notion of subjects. This idea of three distinct centers of divine activity flows naturally from the awareness that the Trinitarian persons receive their divinity from one another. However, Pannenberg is careful to point out that while each of the Father, Son, and Spirit is an active subject, the Trinitarian persons are completely united in their activity. The Father's act of creation, the Son's work in redemption, and the Spirit's efforts at consummation are all fundamentally identical. Pannenberg understands the traditional doctrine of perichoresis in this way. The same must be said of the activity of the three persons in relation to one another. Each person's activity must be seen as the activity of the one divine essence in that each person depends upon the others for his own personhood. This connection between personhood and activity is important because it gives a distinctly modern cast to Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his doctrine of the Trinity. One of the major concerns that both Karl Barth and Karl Rahner have with the use of the term "person" was precisely the kind of development in the doctrine of the term "person" that Pannenberg seems to be suggesting. It seemed absolutely incompatible with the divine essence to speak of three free and autonomous subjects and three self-conscious subjects. With regard to the concept of three divine self-consciousnesses in the Trinity, Pannenberg has offered a nuanced and limited way in which this concept can be accepted. However, Pannenberg is much more explicit in insisting upon the activity of the divine persons.

With such a strong emphasis on the reality of the distinctions between the Father, Son, and Spirit that it allows for the possibility of speaking of three divine subjects of activity and self-consciousness, it seems clear that Pannenberg must have an equally strong understanding of the unity of the

three persons in the divine essence. In fact, Pannenberg seems to understand and accept this reality. He is clear on the point that when systematic theology takes the doctrine of the Trinity as its starting point and then, only later, addresses the divine essence, the special problem of this approach to the doctrine of God is in establishing the unity of these distinct persons. Pannenberg offers two arguments for the unity of the divine persons. The first is rooted in his re-interpretation of the spirituality of the divine essence along the lines of field theory as developed by modern physicists. He prefers this approach to understanding the divine essence first of all because it disassociates the divine essence from the classical emphasis on the divine mind or reason which he feels has contributed to the stress on the divine essence as the only proper place to discuss the personality and subjectivity of God. He also sees the concept of God as Spirit as providing a better basis for discussing the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, each of whom is an equal manifestation of the divine essence which has no concrete form without the divine persons. Pannenberg's second major argument for the unity of the divine essence is rooted in the scriptural statement that God is love in 1 John 4: 8, 16. Pannenberg understands this verse in personalist terms. The persons of the Trinity offer themselves to one another completely in the act of love. In this way the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit completely give and completely receive their divinity from the other persons. Pannenberg thus understands love to be at the very core of the divine nature since it is what each of the persons shares in common and what endows each with his divinity. This move also serves to link the immanent life of God with the economy of the salvation of the world, since it is the goal of God's action in relation to the world to bring creation into the Trinitarian life of love. Pannenberg's description of the divine essence in terms of love and spirituality add to his relational definition of divine personhood. In fact, it is in these sections that Pannenberg argues most succinctly for making the category of relation more fundamental than substance in the definition of the term essence. For him being is most fundamentally a relational concept.

The final issue for us to discuss here is Pannenberg's understanding of the world as the history of God. By this phrase Pannenberg means that once God chose to create, his very deity was put at risk. If God is truly God then he must be able to demonstrate his lordship over everything. However, God has not yet fully established his lordship over creation. According to Pannenberg, in order to accomplish this fact the Father is dependent upon the work of the Son and the Spirit in creation. This fact echoes the Father's eternal dependence upon the Son, for the Father is only the Father in relation to the Son. Pannenberg's understanding of the world as the history of God once

again serves to show the unity of the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. This position is important to Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" because it shows that the events of the history of the world affect God and each of the Trinitarian persons. It also involves a substantial revision of traditional theological understanding of the immutability of the divine essence. Pannenberg, however, is critical of the importation of this concept from Greek philosophy. He finds the core of its truth in the idea of God's fidelity to himself and to Israel that is expressed in the Old Testament. However, scripture is also able to provide a much more involved portrait of God's interaction with the world than the one that is provided by traditional theism. More concretely this means that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truly affected by the life of the world; for example, there is an actual change in the divine life in the incarnation. In this way, it is through the actions of the Son and the Spirit that creation is brought into a real loving relationship with the Trinity.

The preceding review of the major elements of Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood makes it possible to provide a more concise definition for this term. A divine person is thus defined as a self-distinguishing center of divine activity that is characterized by its mutual relations and self-gift to the other divine persons and which allows the divine essence to form a real relation with creation. This definition not only combines the key elements of Pannenberg's understanding of divine personhood, but it also relates to almost every aspect of his understanding of the doctrine of God. Thus, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of this concept for his understanding of theology in general. However, it is the task of the next and final chapter of this study of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology to analyze and discuss the importance, contribution, and success of his proposals regarding the term "person" as it is applied to the doctrine of the Trinity.

Critical Appraisal

After analyzing Wolfhart Pannenberg's understanding of the term "person" as it is used in his Trinitarian theology and placing Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology in its proper context, this study is now prepared to draw some conclusions about the importance of Pannenberg's work. As a result, this final chapter will seek to give a critical appraisal of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology, while focusing in particular on his use of the term "person" to describe the distinctions within the divine life.

Many dimensions of Pannenberg's work must be considered in providing this appraisal. This chapter will focus on four such dimensions: contribution, importance, influence, assessment. The section entitled "Contribution" will focus on the role that Pannenberg has played in the development of contemporary Trinitarian theology. Next, this chapter will address the importance of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology and especially his understanding of divine personhood for his overall theology. It will then move on to address the influence of Pannenberg's work on Trinitarian theology. In this area, the basis for judgment will be the amount of scholarly study that Pannenberg's theology has generated since its publication. Finally, the last section will endeavor to provide an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology and his position on the term "person." This final section will also have to establish a basis for this evaluation of Pannenberg's theology that takes into account its ability to resolve contemporary theological questions both fruitfully and in fidelity to scripture and the theological tradition.

Contribution

There is much in Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity and in his understanding of divine personhood that sets his work apart from other contemporary theologians. Yet, Pannenberg's distinctive approach is best

understandable only within the broader spectrum of contemporary approaches to the subject. Thus it makes sense to begin an assessment of Pannenberg's work by pointing out what is distinctive in Pannenberg and, when necessary, distinguishing his work from others with whom he is frequently confused.

Without question, one of the most distinctive elements of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology is his understanding of self-distinction or self-differentiation. The concept of self-distinction is not in itself new. Traditionally, the term has been used to explain the process through which the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinguished from their origin in the Father. However, in light of Pannenberg's critique of overemphasis on relations of origin, it is important for him to modify the term's meaning if it is still to be useful. Thus, for Pannenberg, self-distinction is not only a characteristic of the Son and the Spirit in their relations to the Father, but is also characteristic of the Father in his relations to the Son and the Spirit. This understanding of self-distinction stresses the mutuality of the divine relations and forbids a one-sided emphasis on relations of origin.

Stanley Grenz has also seen this issue as one of the most distinctive elements of Pannenberg's theology.¹ Grenz points out that Pannenberg's emphasis on self-distinction helps to distance his theology from Hegel's philosophy and doctrine of the Trinity. Pannenberg's debt to Hegel is undeniable. He sees Hegel as helping to reestablish the doctrine of the Trinity in modern theology. However, Hegel's understanding of the Trinity united the Trinity to the process of history.² Pannenberg explicitly makes use of Hegel's understanding of the Trinity, but he does so in a critical manner. The notion of self-distinction helps Pannenberg link God to the historical process without identifying him with it because God is to be thought of in terms of his relation to this world, but is not limited to that relation. For example, Pannenberg understands both the incarnation and the crucifixion as events which have a real impact on the divine life. They are events that affect the humanity of Jesus and also affect Christ in his divinity. The eternal deity of the Father is dependent upon the work of the Son and the Spirit in the world.³

1. Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 96 and Stanley Grenz, Reason for Hope: *The Systematic Theology of Wollhart Pannenberg*, 2d. edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 93-4.

2. Cf. Grenz, *Rediscovering God*, 28-29.

3. The Fathers of the early church originally wanted to avoid the idea that the incarnation and crucifixion affected the divine essence. This is because they wanted to avoid the implication that God was dependent upon the world and thus not truly immutable. Cf. Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 83-112. Pannenberg rejects the traditional notion of divine immutability while still arguing that God remains faithful to himself.

Another distinctive aspect of Pannenberg's theology is related to his emphasis on the mutual self-distinction of the divine persons. Pannenberg states that "God's being is his rule."⁴ Roger Olson sees this principle as such an important contribution to the Trinitarian theology that he has called it the "Pannenberg Principle."⁵ Pannenberg means that God's being, which is also his deity, is linked to his rule or his monarchy. The result of this position is that the deity of the Father is risked in his decision to create the universe and that the Father is dependent upon the Son and the Spirit to establish this lordship over creation. Concretely, this dependence of the Father upon the Son takes the form of the Father's handing over of his lordship to the Son to be established in creation (1 Cor. 1:24). The Son in turn hands this lordship over to the Spirit to complete the work of establishing God's kingdom in creation. Then at the eschatological fulfillment of the kingdom, the Son and the Spirit will hand the kingdom back over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28). Thus not only are the Son and the Spirit dependent upon the Father, but the Father is dependent upon the Son and the Spirit.

This interaction is significant not only for the economic life of the Trinity, but also for the immanent Trinity. The Trinitarian persons are dependent upon one another for their very divinity as they interact with the world. Pannenberg argues that the Father does not merely *appear* to rely upon the Son and the Spirit to establish his rule over creation while in the inner life of the Trinity he is the totally independent source of divinity. Pannenberg justifies this conclusion based upon his interpretation of Rahner's axiom, which states that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. As Pannenberg understands this axiom, a distinction is to be maintained between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity, but there can not be a real separation between the two aspects of the life of the Trinity.⁶ The immanent life of the Trinity is truly revealed in the economy of salvation and in the working of the Trinitarian persons in relation to the world. Thus, for Pannenberg, the mutual self-distinction and interdependence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which he detects in history reflect the same relations that make up the inner life of the Trinity.

Pannenberg's notion that God's being is his lordship also results in an interesting reinterpretation of the concept of the monarchy of the Father.

4. Wollhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 55-6; Pannenberg, "The God of Hope," in *Basic Questions*, 2:240.

5. Roger E. Olson, "Wollhart Pannenberg's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 199.

6. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 307-8; 330-1.

Traditionally, the Father's monarchy is connected to his role as the Godhead's source. However, since Pannenberg wishes to focus on the mutuality of the relations of the Trinitarian persons, this understanding of the Father's monarchy must be revised. In fact, Jürgen Moltmann, who also emphasizes the mutuality of the divine relations, has argued that because of the full equality of the divine persons it is impossible to make sense of the notion of the monarchy of the Father.⁷ However, in Pannenberg's understanding of the relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Father continues to be associated with the concept of the divine monarchy. For him, the monarchy of the Father consists in the fact that he is the person of the Trinity who hands his rule over to the Son and the Spirit to establish lordship over creation. In addition, at the eschaton, when the work of the Son and the Spirit on earth is completed, they will return the divine lordship over creation to the Father. Thus, Pannenberg, following both the patristic tradition and the work of Karl Barth, emphasizes the Father's special dominion over creation. However, Pannenberg argues that this position does not result in a reduction of the equality of each of the Trinitarian persons. The Son and the Spirit remain fully equal to the Father because the Father is dependent upon them to retain and establish his rule over creation. Thus, the Father would lose his divinity without the Son or the Spirit, and in this way, they share in the monarchy of Father.

Another distinctive element of Pannenberg's theology is his treatment of the unity of the divine persons. He argues that the doctrine of the Trinity must begin with the history of God's relation to creation. For Pannenberg, this is focused in the concrete history of Jesus and his self-distinction from the Father. However, when one begins with the revelation of the Trinity in history and therefore with the divine persons, the great challenge becomes providing a compelling argument for the unity of the persons. In the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, the task of assuring the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is left entirely to the patristic notion of *perichoresis*. For Moltmann, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one because of the mutual indwelling of each of the divine persons that is revealed in their interaction with the world.⁸ However, Pannenberg does not think that the concept of *perichoresis* is sufficient to establish the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the inner life of the Trinity. As a result, Pannenberg develops two models to support the doctrine of the unity of the divine essence.

7. Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 191-202.

8. *Ibid.*, 148-150.

The first model makes use of field theory to describe the way that each of the divine persons acts as a concrete existential form of the one divine essence. A field is an immaterial region/space of influence, whose effects can be seen on concrete material. The field cannot be seen *in se*, but scientists deduce its existence because of its observable effects. From these effects, certain statements can be made about the nature of the field. This language is particularly helpful in thinking about the relationship between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. Part of Pannenberg's concept is that the true nature of the field can only be seen from the effects of the field on other objects. However, what the field does is not strictly equivalent to what the field is. Similarly the immanent life of the Trinity can only be seen in its effects upon the world, which tell about the nature of the divine persons but are not strictly equivalent to them.

Pannenberg also makes use of another important aspect of field theory in his theology. Physicists recognize four types of fields or forces: gravity, electromagnetism, weak forces, and strong forces. Gravity is the force that holds smaller bodies to larger bodies and keeps planets in their orbits. Electromagnetism causes magnets to attract iron filings or to repel another magnet. Weak forces are the ones that hold molecules together, while strong forces are those that hold together the positively charged nucleus of an atom and are the source of nuclear reactions. Scientists believe that these four apparently distinct forces or types of energy are actually the same type of field that has manifested itself in various ways. The theory holds that at the initial moments of the big bang there was only one force. However, as space expanded and particles slowed down, this force began to manifest itself in the four distinct manners just described. Pannenberg understands the persons of the Trinity in the same way. Just as the one fundamental force of all of nature manifests itself in a variety of distinct forms, the one divine essence is expressed in three distinct persons. Pannenberg tends to associate this element of field theory with the person of the Holy Spirit, because the tradition since the time of Augustine has tended to view the Spirit as the principle of unity between the Father and the Son. In this way, Pannenberg's pneumatology plays an important role in his understanding of the unity of the divine essence.

One final, distinctive element of Pannenberg's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is the way that he puts his arguments together. The preceding paragraphs have pointed out some areas of Pannenberg's theology that help to characterize his approach to the Trinity. However, Pannenberg also makes use of some more common arguments and categories to describe the relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but leaves his mark on these concepts by developing them in an original way. Thus, even when he makes

use of traditional arguments and categories to describe the Trinity, he does so in a way that reflects his own theological project. For example, Pannenberg makes significant use of Rahner's axiom regarding the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity. However, Pannenberg uses this idea in a manner that supports his broad orientation toward history as the locus of God's self-revelation. Further, he uses the notion of the identity of the immanent and economic Trinity to support his arguments that God is truly affected by the events of history and for the existence of a real relation between the persons of the Trinity and creation. Thus, in addition to developing new arguments for his understanding of the Trinity, Pannenberg also creatively reinterprets the works of other theologians by putting them in a new context and drawing previously unseen conclusions from some of them.

The preceding paragraphs have shown that there are many distinctive elements to Wolfhart Pannenberg's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of Trinitarian personhood. These elements include Pannenberg's understanding of the self-distinction of the divine persons, the reciprocity of their relations, the identity of God's being with his rule, his understanding of the monarchy of the Father, his use of field theory to describe the unity of the divine persons, and the arrangement of his argumentation. As a result, it is clear that Pannenberg puts forward a distinct theology of the Trinity that addresses a wide range of issues in a critical discussion with both the Christian tradition and contemporary scholarship. However a number of questions remain as to the full impact of his work, including the importance of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology for an understanding of his overall systematic project. This question will be taken up next in an effort to understand Pannenberg's understanding of the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity in relation to other components of a systematic theology.

Importance

The initial chapter of this study pointed out that Pannenberg's work on the doctrine of the Trinity was a late development in his theological endeavors. While he published a few articles on the topic during the early decades of his career, Pannenberg never made the doctrine of the Trinity the focus of an extended exposition until the publication of the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. As a result, some might be inclined to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity does not play a central role in Pannenberg's overall theological project. However, the treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Systematic Theology*

and the significance of this work in relation to the body of Pannenberg's writings make the doctrine of the Trinity a central element in his fully mature theological program.

This impact can be seen in the significance of the work that is being discussed. Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* ought to be seen as the fruition of a lifetime's work in the academic study of theology. His theological career has led him to deal with the full range of theological subjects from Christian anthropology and Christology to spirituality and morality. He had published scores of articles and over twenty-five monographs before the publication of the initial volume of his *Systematic Theology*. Moreover, *Systematic Theology* is Pannenberg's only attempt at a complete academic and systematic treatment of the full breadth of Christian doctrine. He sees this work as built from all of his previous studies. Pannenberg felt it necessary to deal with certain major topics in more detail before turning to the project of producing a systematic theology.⁹ As a result, *Systematic Theology* is supported by the arguments put forward in some of Pannenberg's earlier publications and is dependent upon those works. From this perspective, there can be no doubt that *Systematic Theology* ought to be seen as his *magnum opus*.

Among these developments, the most important is unquestionably his development of the doctrine of the Trinity, because of the scant attention that the Trinity received prior to his publication of *Systematic Theology* and the central role that the doctrine plays in this work. According to Pannenberg, the goal of theology is to grapple with the notion of God. This goal should be seen in contrast both to Schleiermacher, who made the feeling of absolute dependence within the Christian the focus of theological attention, and Barth, who made the correspondence of the Church's teaching to the word of God the purpose of theology. Pannenberg argues that God is absolutely central to theology. "In theology, the concept of God can never simply be one issue among others. It is the central issue, around which everything else is organized. If you take away that one issue nothing would be left to justify the continuation of that effort that we call 'theology'."¹⁰ Further, Pannenberg argues that the concept of God must start with the person of Jesus Christ, with his revelation

9. "Nor is there in my mind much need to explain why I focused on Christology, anthropology, and theological method as the topics of three voluminous books. In my mind, they were necessary stages before I could produce a systematic theology." Wollhart Pannenberg, "An Autobiographical Sketch," in *The Theology of Wollhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques with an Autobiographical Essay and Response*. ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 17.

10. Wollhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 21.

of the Father, and with the doctrine of the Trinity. As a result, his emphasis on the concept of God must be seen also as an emphasis on the Trinity. Pannenberg is arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity is at the very heart of theology and it deserves a prominent role in the systematic expression of his thought.

However, Pannenberg's statement that the concept of God and the doctrine of the Trinity are at the very heart of theology is not the same thing as actually developing a theology that constantly refers to the Trinity. Many theologians set out to accomplish a goal with specific principles that are never actually carried out in the body of their work. For example, Pannenberg is critical of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner for arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity must begin from revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ and then failing to carry this principle through in their own works adequately.¹¹ While it is not possible here to demonstrate fully how the entirety of his mature thought is imbued with the concept of the Trinitarian God, the second chapter of this work has already made a contribution in this direction by demonstrating the Trinitarian shape of the first two volumes of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*.

The second chapter of this study set out to analyze Pannenberg's overall systematic project and discuss the place of the doctrine of the Trinity within it. To accomplish this task it briefly surveyed the first two volumes of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* and noted the central place of the doctrine of the Trinity and of Trinitarian personhood in these pages. The first four chapters of the work deal with preliminary issues which lay the foundation for a Christian understanding of God. The first chapter deals with the truth of Christian doctrine as the primary theme and goal of systematic theology. The second chapter turns to the idea of God as the central content of Christian doctrine and begins to establish the truth of this notion with the help of the Western philosophical tradition. Having established a general notion of the divine, Pannenberg then turns to a discussion of the phenomenon of religion in order to argue in favor of the Judeo-Christian concept of the one God who acts in history. Finally, the fourth chapter develops Pannenberg's understanding of God's self-revelation in history as the basis for the specifically Christian insight into the concept of God as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In all of this he is building to the point where he is able to turn to the specifically Christian notion of God which he achieves in the fifth and sixth

11. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 300–304. At this point, whether or not Pannenberg's criticisms are well founded is irrelevant because this issue is brought up simply to demonstrate the notion that the methodological principles of a theologian are not always successfully carried out.

chapters of the work. Thus, even a cursory look at these initial chapters supports the thesis that the entire first volume of the *Systematic Theology* reaches its climax in the last two chapters which take up the doctrine of the Trinity of the divine persons and their unity in the divine essence.

Similarly, the second chapter showed that the five chapters of the second volume of the *Systematic Theology* ought to be seen as the concrete unfolding of the doctrine of the Trinity in history. Thus, Pannenberg's seventh chapter dealt with the doctrine of creation as the work of the entire Trinity. In his approach, the Logos acts as the primary agent of plurality and distinction within the fundamental unity of all being. At the same time, the Spirit acts both as the animating principle which brings life to that which is distinct from the Father and as the unifying force which draws all of creation to its consummation in union with the Father. Chapter eight deals with the reality of sin and Pannenberg's understanding of human personhood. Here, it is important to point out once again the similarities between his understanding of divine and human personhood. Pannenberg develops his understanding of human personhood in relation to his previously established concept of the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In chapter nine, he treats both the proper method for Christological reflection (which is closely related to his methodology in developing the doctrine of the Trinity) and the humanity of Christ through which God chose to reveal himself and renew the tarnished divine image in sinful humanity. Chapter ten addresses the personal unity of the man Jesus with the Father. As a result, it is directly related to the doctrine of the Trinity in that it seeks to provide theological justification to the claim that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. Further, it deals with the incarnation as God's self-fulfillment of his presence in the world. In other words, it is through the work of the Son that the kingdom of God is instituted and God begins to reconcile the world to himself. It is precisely this theme that becomes explicit in chapter eleven of *Systematic Theology*, which addresses the doctrine of reconciliation or salvation. Pannenberg once again argues that the work of reconciliation must not be seen solely as the work of the Son, but as the goal of each of the persons of the Trinity.

A cursory glance at the contents of the third volume of the work reveals the same focus on developing a systematic presentation of dogmatic theology which constantly refers itself to the doctrine of the Trinity. Here the topics of ecclesiology, justification, sacramental theology, election and eschatology are developed within the context of the reciprocal relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

After this brief review of the contents of the *Systematic Theology*, it is clear that Pannenberg is not simply setting forth a methodology for his

theology that he fails to implement. On the contrary, the entire structure of Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* reflects the development of the Trinitarian notion of God which he argues ought to be the central focus of the theological task. Further, despite the lack of a major presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early decades of Pannenberg's career, his understanding of the Trinity is a crucial element of the fully mature systematic presentation of his theology. The Trinity is so central to the *Systematic Theology* Stanley Grenz has argued that Pannenberg's entire presentation of the Christian faith constitutes the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and for this reason, Pannenberg returns at every juncture to the discussion of the triune God.¹² Indeed, it must be said that Pannenberg's development of the doctrine of the Trinity represents one of the most significant contributions of his *Systematic Theology*.

Influence

The importance and distinctiveness of Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of Trinitarian personhood must be tempered to some degree by other factors. For example, Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology may be innovative and essential to his overall theological vision, but this is of little consequence if no one is familiar with his work or if he is widely dismissed by fellow theologians. Theology is a collaborative process through which ideas and theories are developed and refined in conversation with others who share a common vision over time. Thus, the great theological ideas and thinkers of the past are great not only because of the profundity and truth of their ideas, but also because of the influence they have had on the theological tradition. As a result, this section seeks to address the influence that Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of the term "person" in the doctrine of the Trinity has had on the broader study of theology.

This task is difficult given the fact that the major presentation of Pannenberg's ideas was published for the first time in German in 1988. Therefore, the influence of his ideas on the doctrine of the Trinity and his understanding of the term "person" as it relates to Trinitarian theology will have to be judged based upon this relatively short period of time. Any long range judgment about the importance and influence of his work for twentieth century theology will have to be reserved until time provides more room for

12. Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 102.

critical distance. Nonetheless, sufficient time has passed to make some preliminary assessments about the influence of his work.

The first of these assessments relates to the speed with which his work was translated from its original language. It took only three years from the publication of the original German version of the first volume of *Systematic Theology* for an English translation to become available. Moreover, English articles investigating Pannenberg's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as treated in this volume appeared even earlier.¹³ In the time since its original publication, Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology* has been translated into many languages and remains in publication today.¹⁴ Obviously, this fact does not tell everything about the influence of Pannenberg's ideas, but it does indicate that he is being read by theologians throughout the world.

Pannenberg's work is also generating theological discussion. For example, many major articles and books published in the last fifteen years that seek to provide an overview of contemporary approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity include Pannenberg as a major contributor to recent scholarly studies of the Trinity.¹⁵ There have also been a number of recent articles and books that seek to analyze, discuss, and evaluate Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity.

The influence of Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology can be seen most clearly in Protestant circles, where he continues to be read most frequently. For example Robert Jenson, who has made a noteworthy contribution to the contemporary study of the doctrine of the Trinity, credits Pannenberg with helping to further his understanding of the Trinity. In fact throughout the first volume of Jenson's own *Systematic Theology*, he makes reference to his indebtedness to Wollhart Pannenberg both for elements of his general theological method and for the specific contents of his doctrine of the Trinity which are also absolutely central to his systematic presentation of Christian

13. E.g. Robert Jenson, "Jesus in the Trinity: Wollhart Pannenberg's Christology and Doctrine of the Trinity," in *The Theology of Wollhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 188-206.

14. This includes translations into Italian, Spanish, and Korean. Cf., Wollhart Pannenberg, *Teologia Sistemática* (Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1990); Wollhart Pannenberg, *Teología Sistemática*, traducción G. C. Marcos (Madrid: UPCO, 1992); *Wollhart Pannenberg, Pannenbergŭkŭ ui chojik sinhak*. Trans. Yong-son Kim, Yong-sop Chong, and Hyon-chol (Seoul: Unsong, 2003).

15. Cf. John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 34-36, 136-139; Stanley Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004) 88-105; Ernstpeter Maurer, "Tendenzen neuerer Trinitätslehre," *Verkündigung und Forschung* 39 (1994) 16-18; Ted Peters, "Trinity Talk," *Dialog* 26 (1987) 133-139.

doctrine.¹⁶ Another example is afforded by the work of Stanley Grenz, who has also made a noteworthy contribution to recent Evangelical theology. Grenz studied with Pannenberg in Munich and has been deeply influenced by his work. This influence can be seen not only in the fact that he is the author of an important work on Pannenberg's theology, but also in that the doctrine of the Trinity became a major focus of his later work. In particular, Grenz developed a theological anthropology that drew its inspiration from the doctrine of the Trinity in the book *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. In the process, he repeatedly drew upon Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology in general and in particular his concept of Trinitarian personhood to develop his own position.¹⁷ However, despite this robust conversation in Protestant circles about the work and Trinitarian theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, he still remains less influential among Catholic theologians.

There does appear to be some agreement among scholars who are familiar with Pannenberg's work that in the final analysis the reception and influence of his work will inevitably be connected with his understanding of the Trinity. For example, Roger Olson made precisely this point when he argued that "the theological community's evaluation of Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity will be crucial for determining the reception and enduring influence of his entire systematic theology."¹⁸ At the same time he predicted that Pannenberg's work would provoke much further discussion of the Trinity because of its creativity, depth of analysis, and provocative nature. Nonetheless, only time will reveal fully the reception that Pannenberg's work will receive and the long-term influence that it will enjoy.

Assessment

In this last section, the time has come to offer a critical appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology. This assessment will also involve judgments about his entire doctrine of the Trinity and theological project. This connection follows from the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for his whole systematic

16. Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

17. Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

18. Olson, "Pannenberg on the Trinity," 202.

theology and from the significance of term “person” for his understanding of the Trinity. Thus, while the comments addressed in this section deal immediately with only one aspect of one element of Pannenberg’s theology, the implications of this discussion carry consequences far beyond his understanding of a particular term. However, in approaching this discussion, it will be easiest to address the strengths of his approach first and then move to discussing some of the major critiques that have been leveled against it.

1. **Methodology.** One of the clearest elements of Pannenberg’s approach to the doctrine of the Trinity is his methodology. Pannenberg’s arguments that the doctrine of the Trinity has too frequently been viewed by theologians as an appendix to the doctrine of the unity, essence, and attributes of the one God are convincing. This tendency has led the doctrine of the Trinity to be viewed as isolated, illogical, confusing, and impractical. Much of the contemporary renewal of interest in the Trinity has sought to correct precisely this tendency. Pannenberg’s methodological decision to treat the doctrine of the Trinity before the doctrine of the one divine essence is a brilliant move in the effort to overcome this difficulty. His approach not only views the doctrine of the Trinity as absolutely essential to the doctrine of God, but also avoids the danger of swinging too far in the opposite direction and making the doctrine of the divine essence and attributes irrelevant.

However, while Pannenberg’s methodology leads him to begin his presentation of the doctrine of God with the three divine persons and the way they have revealed themselves in history, he first lays a foundation upon which the Christian notion of God can be built. He accomplishes this move with his arguments that every doctrine of God must first presuppose a preliminary understanding of what is meant by the term “God.” To elucidate this preliminary understanding of God Pannenberg turns to both Greek philosophy and the history of religions, particularly Judaism. Thus, Pannenberg’s prolegomena develop an initial concept of God that is both monotheistic and in line with traditional Christian presentations. It is only when he moves to his explicit understanding of this Christian God that he takes up the concrete revelation of the Father in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Pannenberg’s presupposition of a traditional understanding of God as One should not, however, be seen as a betrayal of his methodological intentions. On the contrary, Pannenberg does indeed develop his understanding of the Christian God from the persons of the Trinity and the concrete life of Jesus. This development is grounded in Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom of God, which began his work of building on and developing the Jewish understanding of God. Thus, Pannenberg’s approach to the doctrine of

the Trinity is perfectly consistent with his reminders that theology must begin from what has been revealed in the concrete life history of Jesus. This consistency helps to demonstrate that his methodological considerations are in keeping with scripture and the earliest inclinations of the Christian tradition.

2. *Reciprocal Relations.* The first major section of this chapter pointed out that one of Pannenberg's most distinctive contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity: his understanding of the reciprocal relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that are established in each person's act of self-distinction from the others. The strength of this move lies in the fact that Pannenberg draws upon what is revealed about God in scripture and in the earliest traditions of the Church. For example, the tradition of the Church has declared for centuries that Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, is the fullness of the revelation of who the Father is. Moreover, it is clear from the work of the Son in relation to the world that there is more to the Son than merely his relation to the Father as the unbegotten origin of the Godhead. This complexity can be seen not only in the relation that exists between the Son and the Spirit, but also in the Son's work in establishing the kingdom of God. A fully developed doctrine of the Trinity must be able to take into account all of the relations that exist among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Pannenberg's doctrine of the reciprocal relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also benefits from the common sense of this approach and from the way that it helps to counteract the modalist tendencies that Pannenberg and many other contemporary theologians have detected in the Western doctrine of the Trinity. While some might take issue with elements of Pannenberg's assessment of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity in the West, it is difficult to dismiss this reading completely. The significance of this line of argumentation is clear not only because the theologians in the East have been pointing this difficulty out for centuries, but also because of the way that most Christians in the West have come to understand who God is. It is hard to disagree with Karl Rahner's insight that the average Christian in his or her everyday life is a simple monotheist.¹⁹ It seems clear that this trend comes from modalistic tendencies in the traditional treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity and its methodology. Pannenberg's reciprocal relations place the emphasis once again on the persons of the Trinity and what they reveal to humanity through their work in the world.

3. *Ontological Priority of the Future.* One of the most important accomplishments of modern historical-critical methods of biblical scholarship

19. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 14. For more on the history of this publication cf. 20-21 above.

has been the recovery of the importance of eschatology to the earliest Christians.²⁰ However, since the beginning of the modern period, many dogmatic theologians have not been clear about how to incorporate these insights into their theology.²¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg is a notable exception to this pattern. Pannenberg's entire theological project has taken history and an orientation toward the future fulfillment of the kingdom as the foundation of his theology. In fact, he places such emphasis on the future fulfillment of the kingdom that the eschaton takes on an ontological priority over the past that is unparalleled in the history of theology.

Pannenberg's treatment of the ontological priority of the future can be seen most clearly in his doctrine of revelation. However, this same trend manifests itself in his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the lordship of the Father. This principle of Pannenberg's theology holds that God's being is his rule and that as the monarchy of the Father is established by the work of the Son and the Spirit in the process of history, the being of God is increasingly made manifest in history. This account of God's presence in history explains the reality of atheism and agnosticism in a world that is ruled by an omnipotent and omnipresent God and the imperfection of Christian knowledge of God despite the fact that God has fully revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. However, according to Pannenberg, it will be obvious in the end to all that God always has existed as triune and always has been the ruler of his creation from the perspective of the eschatological consummation of the kingdom.

While the eschatological orientation of Pannenberg's theology ought to be seen as one of its great strengths, it has also been a focus of repeated critique and controversy. This criticism manifests itself most frequently in two ways. First, Pannenberg's work is repeatedly attacked for being overly rational and for claiming the ability to prove too much through the use of reason alone.²²

20. For the history and major debates of this development see Raymond E. Brown, John R. Donahue, Donald Senior, and Adela Yarbro Collins, "Aspects of New Testament Thought," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1354-1381, especially 1360-1361.

21. While the eschatological element of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God was overlooked by liberal Protestants in the nineteenth century, theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl and Albert Schweitzer made this theme a central element of portraits of the historical Jesus at the turn of the twentieth century. Since this time, the eschatological nature of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God has become a common fixture in Christological studies. Nonetheless, dogmatic theologians have found it considerably more difficult to allow this key element of Jesus' preaching to penetrate to the core of their theological systems. *Ibid.*

22. J. Robert Ross, "Historical Knowledge as a Basis for Faith," *Zygon* 13 (Spring 1978): 209-224; Fred Klooster, "Aspects of Historical Method in Pannenberg's Theology," in

Second, his work has been criticized for making the life of God dependent upon the process of history.²³ Each of these criticisms will be addressed separately in the following sections.

4. **Integration of Faith and Reason.** As noted above, Pannenberg's understanding of the ontological priority of the future has left him open to the charge of rationalism. This criticism manifests itself in relation to Pannenberg's emphasis on historical argumentation and his understanding of revelation. For example, not only does Pannenberg argue that the eschaton will be an event that is manifest to all of humanity; he also argues that it is rational to believe in the resurrection based on an investigation of historical material. However, this position does not make Pannenberg a rationalist. Rather, faith is necessary for Christians in the current state of the world between the resurrection and the eschaton because the lordship of the Father has not yet been fully established in history. Therefore, Pannenberg's claims about what can be established by reason and historical argumentation are always held in check by the finality of God's work in relation to the world. Thus, there is a clear limit to what knowledge and rational argumentation of any variety can hope to achieve.

5. **God's Relation to History.** The second major criticism of Pannenberg's historical orientation is that he draws uncritically from German Idealism and that, as a result, the immanent Trinity is wholly consumed by the process of history.²⁴ At first glance, this assessment seems to be confirmed by Pannenberg's assertion that the deity of the Father is at stake in the creation of the world and in the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. In addition, his insistence that a real relation exists between the persons of the divine Trinity and the life of the world also seems to point to an excessive dependence upon Idealism. As has been demonstrated, this emphasis leads Pannenberg to affirm that God in his divinity is really affected by the process of history. This insight is true not only in Jesus' death on the cross which affects the life of the Trinity, but also with the establishment of the kingdom of God in the creation.

Septuagesimo Anno: G. C. Berkouwer, ed. J. T. Bakker et al. (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J H Kok, 1973), 126; cf. also Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 64–66; Eberhard Jüngel, "Nihil divinitatis, ubi non fides," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 86 (1989): 204–235.

23. Alan Gallaway, "The New Hegelians," *Religious Studies* 8 (1972): 367–371; Ronald D. Pasquariello, "Pannenberg's Philosophical Foundations," *Journal of Religion* 56 (1976): 338–347; William Hill, *The Three Personed God* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 155–57.

24. This critique has been summarized and responded to in an exemplary fashion in the work of Iain Taylor, *Pannenberg on the Triune God*, (London: T&T Clark, 2007), esp. 14–20.

However, it is precisely at this point that Pannenberg's description of the doctrine of the Trinity must be read most carefully. While he affirms Rahner's axiom that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, he does not say that these two moments of the life of God are absolutely identical.²⁵ This position can be seen first of all in the fact that despite his assertion that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are affected by the process of history, God always remains faithful to himself and to his own being. Here, Pannenberg is trying to develop a middle position in the debate over the immutability of God. On the one hand, he seems sympathizes with those such as Jüngel and Moltmann who argue that God is affected by the suffering of humanity and the process of history.²⁶ This position allows him to develop a theological portrait of God who has a close and intimate relationship with creation. On the other hand, Pannenberg is persuaded by the arguments which emphasize God's consistency, stability, and constancy as a corollary to the divine quality of omnipotence.²⁷ To this extent, he argues that God is always faithful to himself and never wavers from his identity with himself. Nonetheless, this middle position on the question of divine immutability that Pannenberg suggests is not fully developed in *Systematic Theology* and thus remains in need of further clarification and explanation.

Pannenberg provides a second rebuttal to those troubled by the idea of God being affected by the process of history and who charge him with subsuming the divine life within the process of history. This response is built upon the fundamental understanding that God freely *chose* to create. If the Father, Son, and Spirit had chosen never to create the universe, there would be no risk to their deity. However, once they chose to create, then it is impossible to think of God as divine without his obviously and undeniably establishing his lordship over creation. The element of free choice in God's decision to create makes it acceptable that there may be a period of time, from the perspective of humanity, during which some fail to acknowledge the existence and lordship of God. Thus, Pannenberg clearly envisions an

25. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:307–308.

26. *Ibid.*, 329. See also pp. 200–207 above.

27. "For this Trinity has sense and significance only if God is the same in salvation history as he is from eternity. Thus the immanent Trinity is to be found in the Trinity of salvation history. God is the same in his eternal essence as he reveals himself to be historically. Refuted herewith is the idea of a divine becoming in history, as though the Trinitarian God were the result of history and achieved reality only with its eschatological consummation" *Ibid.*, 331. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 157–173.

important difference between the life of the immanent Trinity, which is not dependent upon creation, and the persons of the Trinity as they are revealed in the economy of salvation. This observation is particularly true when one considers that humans are able to understand the economic Trinity only from their limited perspective prior to the eschaton. These conclusions are a direct result of Pannenberg's understanding of Trinitarian personhood and the importance of the category "relation" for his overall doctrine of God.

6. **Relationality.** Besides the question of the use of the term "person" in contemporary Trinitarian theology, another major trend in recent years has been to emphasize the importance of the concept of relation for the doctrine of the Trinity. This effort has been seen in theologians as diverse as Eberhard Jüngel, Walter Kasper, Elizabeth Johnson, John Zizioulas, and Pope John Paul II.²⁸ In the case of each of these theologians, the relationality of God is emphasized in order to highlight the biblical notion of God as love and the reality of God's love for the world. This emphasis is particularly important because the traditional understanding of divine immutability and impassibility is difficult to understand in the framework of the modern world.

Pannenberg's emphasis on the use of the term "person" in its modern sense should be seen as an effort to emphasize God's loving relation to the world. For this reason, Pannenberg broadens the notion of the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to include the entire complex nexus of relationships that exist between the persons of the Trinity and not limit their interactions solely to the Son and Spirit's relations of origin. This position follows from Pannenberg's decision to begin his concept of God from the idea of a Trinity of persons rather than from the one divine essence. The doctrine of the Trinity makes the notion of the relations of the divine persons a central element of the divine essence. By making use of a modern understanding of personhood, Pannenberg is able to follow the tendency to place relationality at the core of the divine essence. This move was difficult for theologians who

28. While this list is far from exhaustive, it does provide evidence of a variety of theologians who are seeking to incorporate this idea into their work. For more on each of the authors named cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983); Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1984); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 1997); John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997); and Antoine Nachez, *The Mystery of the Trinity in the Thought of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

were working within the parameters of Aristotelian philosophy.²⁹ For Aristotle, relation was an accidental quality and not an essential quality. By starting from the doctrine of the Trinity, Pannenberg is able to develop a notion of God that is capable of being more intimate than that developed using an ontology of substance because it is his nature to be in relation and to love.

In Pannenberg's theology, this also helps to ground his understanding of the economic Trinity and God's relation to the world. If the mutual self-gift of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in love is at the center of the Christian notion of God, then it is much easier to conceive of a God who is truly affected by the life of the world and the events of history. This connection helps to develop a portrait of God that is in line with our experience and our contemporary ways of speaking. God is truly and personally affected by what happens in the lives of individuals and in this way is deeply moved by our lives and the work of the Son and the Spirit in time. However, it also allows Pannenberg to say that God never changes who he is; rather, God is eternally faithful to himself and interacts with the world without becoming dependent upon it. In classical theism, the claim that God is truly affected by the events of history is at odds with the notion of God's fidelity to himself and to his immutability. However, by reducing the emphasis on the traditional ontology of substance and making relation a category that is essential to his doctrine of God, Pannenberg is able to produce an image of God that is simultaneously involved in the life of the world and its solid foundation.

7. Uniformity in use of term "person." Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology also has the advantage that it is easily integrated with both Christian anthropology and Christology. Pannenberg develops his understanding of the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in such a way that the definition of the term "person" is also applicable in a modified form to human personhood. This development is advantageous not only because of the uniformity of terminology which aids his systematic presentation, but even more importantly because of the way that it corresponds with other elements of Christian doctrine. For example, Pannenberg develops his theology of human personhood and relationality in human beings as an element of the *imago Dei*. Consequently, it is natural that the personhood of human beings reflects in a limited and imperfect way the full personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

29. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the real relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an attempt to understand the category "relation" as a part of the divine essence using Aristotelian categories. However, Aquinas' concept of real relations applies only to the divine persons and not to their interaction with the world. This limitation in the doctrine of relations is a significant aspect of what the contemporary emphasis on relation seeks to overcome.

After having established his understanding of both divine and human personhood, Pannenberg is able to move in the *Systematic Theology* to his treatment of the doctrine of the Incarnation and the important contemporary question of the personhood of Christ. Since Pannenberg has already worked out his definition of personhood in a way that develops the connection between human personhood and divine personhood, instead of emphasizing the difference between the two, Pannenberg can present a Christology that starts from the notion of the full personhood of Christ and then deal with the personal unity of Jesus with the Father. In this way Pannenberg can state unequivocally that Jesus was a complete human person and is not forced into the traditional difficulty of viewing the humanity of Christ as a challenge to his complete divinity.³⁰ This means that Pannenberg's definition of personhood is absolutely central to his attempt to bypass the centuries-old argument between the Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

8. Use of modern notion of person. Pannenberg's criticism of the traditional ontology of substance and his insistence upon relationality both are strong indicators that Pannenberg is operating from a distinctly modern understanding of the term "person." This insistence should be seen as one of the strengths of his position because it allows him to speak in a language that makes sense to a broader audience than the patristic notion of the term. However, the strength of his definition goes beyond this practical issue. Pannenberg's notion of personhood is strongly connected to the actions of an individual. This approach is very much in keeping with the testimony of scripture, which develops its understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit based upon the way that each person works in the world and in the lives of Christians. It also is an important aspect of Pannenberg's definition of relation. The divine persons are related to one another and to the world through their acts. Thus, Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity describes a God that is constantly in action and not passively observing in the heavens like the God of the deists.

However it is important to note that Pannenberg does not wholly accept the modern definition of personhood. For Descartes, human personhood is described primarily in terms of consciousness.³¹ However, Pannenberg expresses his reservations about the possibility of multiple consciousnesses

30. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 386.

31. Descartes famous statement "Ego cogito, ergo sum" is the classic example of this position. René Descarte, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), I, vii.

within the unity of the divine essence. In human beings, the notion of self-consciousness points to the fact there exists a tension between the I of the individual and the self of his or her consciousness. Thus, there is not a complete identity between the I and the self in the individual. This same understanding of self-consciousness can clearly not be applied to either the divine essence or the Trinitarian persons. Rather, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mediate their identity to one another by their mutual self-gift to one another.³² This position constitutes such a challenge to the modern understanding of self-consciousness that Pannenberg openly wonders whether it can be considered self-conscious at all.³³

This is helpful because it recognizes that the term “person” cannot be used in the same way to describe human beings as it does God. Moreover, it helps to respond to one of the major criticisms of modern atheism. The arguments of Fichte, Feuerbach, and Marx against the Christian notion of God are all based on the idea that human descriptions of God are anthropomorphic.³⁴ However, Pannenberg avoids this criticism by pointing out the drastic difference between human and divine personhood. Thus Pannenberg’s understanding of the term “person” does not represent an uncritical acceptance of the modern notion of person. Rather he combines traditional elements of the definition (like individuality and rationality) and with the modern emphasis on relations and action. In this way, he is able to speak to modern Christians and remain faithful to the tradition.

9. Weaknesses. It can be generally summarized that the greatest strength of Pannenberg’s Trinitarian theology and his understanding of the term “person” is that it provides a way of thinking about God that mixes much of the best of the traditional understanding of the Trinity with significant insights from the modern period. Pannenberg’s view of the Trinity is developed in close proximity to the complex relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as attested in Scripture. This view emphasizes the relatedness of the divine persons to creation and the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is clear from Pannenberg’s approach that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be viewed as an isolated and unnecessary appendix to the Christian concept of

32. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:377.

33. *Ibid.* 388.

34. Pannenberg expressly responds to these critiques in the passages cited above. For a similar assessment of these criticisms of the Christian doctrine of God cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 111–151.

God. Rather, it is the specifically Christian form of monotheism.³⁵ Pannenberg's Trinitarian theology also works as a corrective to the modalistic tendencies of Western approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity which place great emphasis on the unity of God before turning to the problem of the distinction between the persons.

However, it is precisely this strength that points to one of the greatest weaknesses of Pannenberg's understanding of the divine personhood. One must also agree that his approach to the doctrine of the Trinity contains a tendency toward tritheism. This difficulty is built into Pannenberg's choice to invert the traditional methodology of the doctrine of God by discussing the divine persons before turning to the question of the unity and essence of these persons. He recognizes that in taking this approach the fundamental question of the doctrine of the Trinity changes from how can the one God be thought of as present in three distinct persons to how can the three divine persons of the Trinity be conceived of as absolutely and perfectly united in the one divine essence.

Pannenberg attempts to answer this question in two ways. First, he turns to an analogy drawn from modern physics and field theory in order to describe the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While this analogy has the advantage of drawing upon the language of modern science and helping to bridge the apparent divide between the natural sciences and theology, the analogy is a weak one. This is because Pannenberg's description of this aspect of his understanding of the concept of God is uncharacteristically vague.³⁶ Is he arguing that just as gravity, electromagnetism, strong and weak nuclear forces are all distinct forms of the one essential form of energy in the universe, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the distinct persons of the completely unified divine essence? It is impossible to know for sure because Pannenberg fails to express in any detail how field theory can help to answer the question of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Pannenberg's second manner of describing the unity of the divine persons looks to the notion of the self-giving nature of love. He states that this approach to describing the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ought to be seen as the more important of the two approaches he provides.³⁷ This

35. Pannenberg develops this position in explicit contrast to Jürgen Moltmann's argument against the notion of Christian monotheism. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 335-336, n. 217.

36. Eberhard Jüngel, "Nihil divinitatis," 222-226.

37. "May one say, then, that the biblical idea of the divine Spirit implies the thought of God as infinite, so that even the infinite is not the essential concept of God from which all the qualities of his essence are to be derived, it is still to be viewed as the initial concept of the divine

statement makes sense because the notion of the love of God is a completely indispensable part of the Christian tradition which can be seen in the Johannine epistles, St. Augustine, Richard of St. Victor, and the modern period. However, Pannenberg appears to rely too much on the arguments of the past here, because the description of the unifying love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit suffers from a certain vagueness. He appeals to the arguments of personalism and speaks of the complete mutual self-giving of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet he assumes too readily that this argumentation will be understood and accepted by his audience. Further, important questions remain unanswered; for example, how does this mutual self-giving of the divine persons essentially unite three individual and distinct centers of action?

In the end, both of Pannenberg's arguments for the unity of the divine persons suffer from an imprecision which is unfitting for such a crucial element of the Christian notion of God. Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity is all the more important when one considers Pannenberg's approach. Yet, Pannenberg fails to argue more forcefully for the unity of the divine essence, despite the added importance of this step which he recognizes. The result is that Pannenberg's doctrine of God treats the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the same way that he criticizes the traditional Western treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity—as an appendix or an afterthought that fails to receive adequate attention.

Despite these serious problems with Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology, his work deserves to be seen as a major contribution to contemporary discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the definition of personhood. Perhaps more than any other contemporary theologian, Pannenberg has successfully argued for retaining the use of the term "person" in the doctrine of the Trinity and has made significant advances in helping to describe how the term can be used in a modified form of its modern meaning. Consequently, he has performed an indispensable service for contemporary theology by helping to make the doctrine of the Trinity more understandable in the context of contemporary philosophical trends. He therefore has also been an important voice in recent attempts to help the doctrine of the Trinity reclaim its proper place at the center of theological discourse. Finally, the difficulties with Pannenberg's imprecision in regard to the manner of the unity of the divine persons, while serious, may not be insurmountable. Minimally, Pannenberg's person-centered approach to the

essence to which all other statements about God's qualities relate as concrete expression of the divine nature?. . . Finally, the statement that God is love will prove to be the concrete form of the divine essence that is initially described as Spirit in terms of the concept of the Infinite." Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:396.

doctrine of God appears to provide a worthy counterbalance to the modalistic tendencies of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Summary

Despite the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity remains one of the most misunderstood doctrines of Christianity in the modern era, it is in the process of a renewal in contemporary theology. Pannenberg's work is an important contribution to this revival of the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular, his definition and use of the term "person" can help contemporary theology to demonstrate the practical importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian concept of God as well as for the spiritual life of everyday Christians. The preceding pages have provided a critical analysis of Pannenberg's use of the term "person" in his Trinitarian theology by investigating its uniqueness, importance, influence, strengths and weaknesses. They have shown not only that Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity offers a distinctive perspective on this most central of Christian mysteries, but also that his Trinitarian theology and his understanding of divine personhood is central to the mature systematic presentation of his theology. This study has also indirectly demonstrated the importance of the category person, in all the dimensions of the term, for his entire theology. Pannenberg's understanding of Trinitarian personhood is deeply bound up with the movements in modern philosophy that have contributed to the current understanding of the term. However, the strength of Pannenberg's theology lies in the fact that he endeavors to draw on what is best in the modern understanding of personhood, namely the emphasis on relationality and activity, and wed it to the best of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. This retrieval is done in a unique way that challenges elements of the classical understanding of the relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and their treatment in Western theology. However, his criticism of the tradition ought to be seen as careful and nuanced, rather than as a wholesale dismissal of fifteen hundred years of tradition. Nonetheless, Pannenberg's marriage of contemporary philosophy and classical theology runs into some difficulties. In placing such great emphasis on the divine persons, Pannenberg fails to defend adequately what has been taken for granted for centuries in theology: the unity of the Godhead.

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