

WOLFHART PANNENBERG: HISTORY AS THE VALIDATION OF FAITH IN THE HISTORICAL JESUS

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Introduction

One of the most significant developments in the Quest for the Historical Jesus is the continuing challenge posed by Lessing's ditch between faith and history or Bultmann's impasse on fact and significance. This timeless problem emerged over and over in the history of the church as it sought to respond to new challenges arising from every new age.

Wolfhart Pannenberg is one of the modern Protestant theologians who attempts to bridge this gulf and break this deadlock. He seeks a converging point between christology and modern thought. He also pursues to mend the split between faith and history, thus making his christology eclipsed by rationalism. This governs Pannenberg's christological approach in *Jesus—God and Man* which ignited extensive theological interests and criticisms after its publication.

In dealing with the intricacy of Pannenberg's christological method, this chapter will survey Pannenberg's concept of history in relation to the factuality of confessions and plausibility of formulations of faith in the historical Jesus. Pannenberg's method is one which defines the historical basis of christological formulations in a language relevant and responsive to contemporary historical questions. This chapter will also explore the viability of his method. Lastly it will assess the logic of Pannenberg's apologetic approach of situating his christology in dialogue with contemporary intellectuals.

1. The Cognitive Character of History: Pannenberg's Way Out of Lessing's Dilemma

As discussed in the first chapter, Lessing bequeaths a legacy of a subjective claim to truth by asserting that historical inquiry and its results are conclusively uncertain. This is expressed in his famous dictum: "The accidental truths of history can never become proof of necessary truths of reason."¹ When it is applied to christology, the truths of history cannot provide an adequate basis for the claim that Jesus is the Son of God as he is only a product of God's thought.

In response to this challenge, Pannenberg offers an alternative approach. He looks at history or biblical history as revelation—the overarching content of his theology. To understand history as revelation, Pannenberg traces all events in history to God.² For Pannenberg it is one thing to say that history reveals God; it is another thing to assert that God reveals himself in history. "For history is not a subject which subsists independently over against God. In its very idea, history is constituted by the active presence of the infinite God."³ As such there is no place for any relativization of history and the historical events since Pannenberg considers past, present and future events as part of God's history which is no less than the history of salvation.⁴ God's history is always revealed in the biblical history of redemption which started with the history of Israel and continues toward its final goal in the future. Pannenberg calls such development of salvific history, "universal history."⁵

Decisive in Pannenberg's view of universal history is the inclusion of the history of Jesus in the structure of salvation

¹Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, ed. Paul Rilla (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1968), 12.

² See "Introduction," *RevH*, 3-19. Here Pannenberg picks up Karl Barth's position on the self-revelation of God in history. See Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. I (Zürich: EVZ, 1964), 332-33. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 6th ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), 563-64. Pannenberg cites the seminal work of Richard Rothe on the concept of revelation in *Zur Dogmatik* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Berthes, 1863), 55-57. But he departs from Rothe in the later's inclusion of outward historical revelation through inspiration. "Introduction," *RevH*, 19. See Rothe, *Zur Dogmatik*, 67-68.

³"Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 253.

⁴ *JGM*, 193.

⁵ Here Pannenberg defines the term universal not "as a timeless universal, but as a summation of the events which follow one another contingently in time.... [It] is itself related to time and in a specific way related to the future." "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 256 n. 62. Bracket mine.

history.⁶ That means that God's redemptive act cannot be isolated from the salvific content of Jesus' life and work. The historical Jesus is the converging point of the beginning and the end of history. That is why Pannenberg treats the significance of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's universal history, from Israel's history to its final goal. Pannenberg considers the particularity of Jesus' history therefore as a "unique occurrence" because "the whole of reality is established by the eschatological character of his message, his claims, and his fate."⁷ History understood in this way is not purely finite, since the infinite reality of God has invaded history itself and is manifested through his saving acts.⁸ Human history then becomes intelligible when viewed as God's history. Conversely, God's revelation in history becomes partially comprehensible when it is viewed in its totality.⁹ This position leads to the conclusion that Pannenberg rejects any multiple revelation outside the history of Israel in particular and justifies the primacy of the Christian message in the history of religion in general.¹⁰

Pannenberg develops the theme of biblical history in the light of the tension between "promise and fulfillment."¹¹ From this schema, he constructs his christology. In this framework he sees the decisive role of Jesus Nazareth as the unifying criterion between two biblical traditions, the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹² Like Cullmann, Pannenberg advocates the "principle

⁶"The Crisis of the Scripture Principle," *BQTh* 1: 12-13; "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 139-48.

⁷"Kerygma and History," *BQTh* 1: 94 n. 20. See "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 240-41.

⁸"Introduction," *Revelation as History*, 30-33.

⁹"Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 241-42, 253-56. However Pannenberg looks at God's self-revelation in history not as a full disclosure of God's essence in history but only indirectly. See "Introduction," *RevH*, 8-10.

¹⁰"Revelation of God," *ThH*, 105-9.

¹¹"Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 25-31. It is to be noted however that Pannenberg does not strictly hold to the "promise and fulfillment" schema for historical critical ground. He believes that "as a rule the promises do not enter so literally into a fulfillment as one would assume that they would if they were the word of God effecting history, in accord with the Old Testament self-understanding." "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 259. It is for this reason that he maintains the tension between the concept of promise and fulfillment. Their relation and continuity is however conceivable in terms of the history of transmission in which "the relationship between proclaiming word and proclaimed event" passed on by tradition is critically examined and grasped anew in view of every contingent new event or experience. "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 260.

¹²"Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 26-31. Pannenberg owes his view of the historical continuity of the historical Jesus with the Old Testament and the concept of salvation history to his former teacher, Gerhard von Rad at the

of continuity" in defense of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) pointing to the person of Jesus as the high point of all events.¹³ This is evident in Pannenberg's treatment of the eschatological meanings attached to Jesus' titles like "Christ," "Son of Man," and "Lord" as the promised revelation of God.¹⁴ The historical Jesus is "the fulfiller of the history of Israel," and "the revelation of the one true God" to the non-Jews.¹⁵ This makes the self-revelation of God a "reflex of his activity in history."¹⁶ It is upon the background of the history of God's salvation that Pannenberg judges the validity of all christological formulations about the history of Jesus.¹⁷

1.1 *Verification of the Truth of History*

Since the historical Jesus is vital for Pannenberg in justifying the validity of truth, it is no wonder that he regards the historical Jesus as the "historical particularity" of God's revelation.¹⁸ On this basis Pannenberg explores the connection between God's revelation and history. The historical figure of Jesus as the revelation of God serves as the foundation of the historical process of tradition.¹⁹ That means that God's redemptive history is constituted also in the "intra-historical event" of the historical Jesus. As Pannenberg explains it: "The whole of history will constantly be constituted anew in the process of the transmission of the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth."²⁰

Traces of Hegelian thought are observable here. But Pannenberg departs from Hegel by pointing to the historical Jesus and his resurrection as the realized end of history within history itself. For that reason Pannenberg maintains his position in welcoming historical critical research to justify the historical claims

University of Heidelberg. "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 30 with a reference to von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Essays on the Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. James Luther Mays (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), 17-39.

¹³ See Oscar Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte: Heilsgeschichte Existenz im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), 80-85.

¹⁴ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 25. Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 82-83.

¹⁵ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 68.

¹⁶ "Introduction," *RevH*, 13-14.

¹⁷ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 26.

¹⁸ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 2.

¹⁹ It must be noted here that Pannenberg believes that the foundation of tradition is assumed in the recognition of the historical figure of Jesus as the revelation of God. Furthermore he traces the chain of tradition in relation to the revelation of God from the Old Testament through apocalyptic literature to Jesus' proclamation and Paul's. "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 131.

²⁰ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 158-59.

of the Christian faith.²¹ In this respect a historical given becomes the subject of faith, albeit not its object. Important in Pannenberg's openness to historical criticism is his concern to prove the relevance of the Christian faith to contemporary questions. The demand of testing theological statements is based on Pannenberg's interest in verifiability.²² Yet he qualifies his position by insisting that historians should also orient themselves towards the notion of universal history. That means that biblical history should be treated as integral in the criteria of historical science. Otherwise any historical conclusion to matters of christology will only remain insignificant.²³ Pannenberg explains his point clearly:

The knowledge of God's revelation in the history demonstrating his deity must also be the basis of faith. Faith does not need to worry that this knowledge has been altered because of shifts in historical research, just as long as this current image of the facts of history allows him to reassess and to participate in the events that are fundamental to it. ... The event has its own foundation in that it relies on the God who reveals himself in it.²⁴

In this sense, Pannenberg does not look at history as a closed continuum of cause and effect. Rather history is open to the direct intervention of God. Pannenberg clarifies his point further in *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* where he grapples with the question of historical criteria. Influenced by the thought of the philosopher of science, Karl Popper and the historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, Pannenberg takes a special interest in analyzing the particular implications of their principles of verification and falsification of truth to theology.²⁵ He develops his method of making theology a science as shown in his four criteria for the verification (and falsification) of theological statements. He posits that theological hypotheses are false if the following criteria are not overcome:

²¹ Pannenberg defines historical research as "a method for discovering and reconstructing past events of our choosing under the guidance of contemporary experience of reality." "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 38.

²² "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 159; *Theo & Philo*, 330-31.

²³ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 160.

²⁴ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 138-39.

²⁵ See Mark William Worthing, *Foundations and Functions of Theology as Universal Science: Theological Method and Apologetic Praxis in Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Rahner* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 37-40.

1. they are intended as hypotheses about the implications of the Israelite-Christian faith but cannot be shown to express implications of biblical traditions (even when changes in experiences are allowed for);

2. they have no connection with reality as a whole which is cacheable in terms of present experience and can be shown to be so by its relation to the current state of philosophical enquiry (in the case theological statements are transferred to the critical categories of mythical, legendary and ideological);

3. they are incapable of being integrated with the appropriate area of experience or no attempt is made to integrate them (e.g. in the doctrine of the church as it relates to the church's role in society);

4. their explanatory force is inadequate to the stage reached in theological discussion, i.e. when it does not equal the interpretive force of existing hypotheses and does not overcome limitations of these which emerge in discussion.²⁶

It is obvious that when these criteria are applied to christology, Pannenberg no less assumes the inclusion of theological interpretation of reality. Alongside this argument he does not resort to mere flat differentiation between events and reality. Reality is historical because it is based on events. Apart from whether or not the events are objectively described, their facticity is assumed.²⁷

1.1.1 *The historical Jesus and the question of truth*

With respect to the question of the continuity of the historical Jesus and the contemporary question of truth, Pannenberg hardly ignores the unresolved crisis in biblical theology particularly the chasm "between present exegetical situation of the interpreter and the intellectual world of the biblical texts."²⁸ For instance

²⁶ *Theo & Philo*, 344-45.

²⁷ Ted Peters asserts that in Pannenberg's view, reality as a fact is an accepted preposition based on the assumption that historical events are not static but are continually progressing. "Truth in History: Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Pannenberg's Apologetic Method," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975): 53-54. Similarly Moltmann notes that historical concepts are not confined to facts and objectivity alone. But "the range of historical concepts extends from the 'facts' to the possibilities of existence, for 'objectivity'—in the sense of the exact natural sciences—to the unmistakable uniqueness of human subjectivity and spontaneity." *Theology of Hope*, 244-45.

²⁸ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 8.

Pannenberg cites how Gadamer solves the problem in his theory of "fusion of horizons."²⁹ But Pannenberg notes the danger of diminishing the historical individuality of each context if such an approach is forced into one another. Hence the hermeneutical questions are inevitable:

Can certain biblical conceptions be abandoned as mythological without thereby losing the 'essential content' that they really intended to express? What about the resurrection of Jesus, the Christian hope for the future, and, finally, the very idea of a personal God, in this respect?³⁰

With these questions in view Pannenberg wants to maintain a dialectic between the biblical tradition and modern science on the question of truth. He looks at theology as the unifying factor between contemporary thought or experience and Christian tradition.³¹

Pannenberg undoubtedly considers the New Testament text not only as a historical document but as a theological text as well. Unquestionably he grants the argument that the facticity of Jesus' tradition remains probable at best. He concurs in the judgment of the historicists that a great portion of the gospels did originate from Jesus himself even if it encompasses legendary traditions of Jesus.³² In this regard he does not make a sharp differentiation between the historical and the theological approach to the person of Jesus.³³ If ever there is indeed such a difference Pannenberg attributes it to the absolutization of the New Testament documents as the ultimate "*authoritative guides* for the interpretation of the historical Jesus" including its absolute claim for an unquestionable interpretation of his person which may be "alien to the history of Jesus" itself. On the contrary Pannenberg argues that such an interpretation is "by no means a necessary and absolutely constitutive element of a theological hermeneutic of the New Testament text as witness to Jesus." He maintains that the New Testament text should be opened for investigation especially if the

²⁹ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 9. The fusion of horizons is described as "an expansion of the intellectual horizon of the interpreter to such an extent that it can also encompass the horizon of the text to be interpreted."

³⁰ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 9.

³¹ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 10-14.

³² What Pannenberg finds as real historical accounts about Jesus are Jesus' baptism by John, the features of his actions or appearances (*Auftretens*) and his message, his crucifixion in Jerusalem and the claims concerning Jesus' resurrection. *Apostles' Creed*, 50-51. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 58.]

³³ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 151-52.

interpretation "deviates from the anticipation of meaning that the history of Jesus allows to be advanced for itself."³⁴

Based on this argument, Pannenberg does not therefore make a sharp differentiation between historical and theological hermeneutics in interpreting the New Testament, for both complement each other in validating not only the trustworthiness of the person of Jesus but also the validity of meaning that stems from his person.³⁵ As such Pannenberg sees the logic of going back to the historical Jesus and its historical facticity if faith is to have a historical validity even on at the attainable level of probability and certainty. He believes that "this is the only way of protecting believers from the danger that something may be proclaimed and believed as being the message of Christ which may perhaps have little or nothing to do with Jesus himself."³⁶

In this regard Pannenberg agrees with Kähler in stressing that the particularity of a person is known on the basis of his "permanent influence" and the history of influences is affirmed by the facticity of its source.³⁷ The significance of the message itself cannot ignore the facticity of the event, but rather "the meaning is warranted by a specific event." Pannenberg writes, "the peculiarity of the interpretation of the New Testament texts as witnesses to Jesus can be traced back to the particularities of the history and person of Jesus himself."³⁸ It is this confidence in the historicity of the New Testament accounts that Pannenberg takes the risk of opening the kerygma to historical inquiry. Certainly this preposition allows criticisms to be directed not only to the interpretation of the kerygma but to the historical person of Jesus as well.³⁹ As spelled out in his theological criteria of truth, Pannenberg is also quick to include the condition of historical inquiry if it is to test the kerygma. Any propositions should be tested on the basis of its continuity with the history of Jesus.⁴⁰ On this basis, Pannenberg holds that

³⁴ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 155.

³⁵ See "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 155-56.

³⁶ *Apostles' Creed*, 48. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 56.]

³⁷ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 153-54. Cf. Kähler, *So-Called Historical Jesus*, 63.

³⁸ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 155. See also footnote 17.

³⁹ Pannenberg argues: "If historical research really inquires into the individuality of the historical person in a comprehensive manner, then what theology has found in Jesus of Nazareth cannot in principle transgress the boundaries of historical inquiry—or else theology is not rendering a true account in its explication of the inherent meaning of the historical figure of Jesus." "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 160.

⁴⁰ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 149-50.

the person of the historical Jesus serves as the unifying center between the contemporary society and the primitive Christianity:

Participation in the primitive Christian faith is possible, without falling into enthusiastic self-forgetfulness, only on the condition that this difference is itself a moment in the action among men of the future of God which appeared in Jesus. Only in this way will it be possible to understand the future of God which appeared in Jesus at that time as the future that still holds sway in our secular world.⁴¹

Hence Pannenberg does not see any reason to distinguish between historical and theological hermeneutics in relation to the historical Jesus or between the significance of the message and the particularity of the person. Pannenberg holds that "the source of our knowledge of a historical figure is at the same time an indispensable guide for the understanding of his significance."⁴²

1.2 *The Principles of Universal Correlation and Analogy*

There is no doubt that Pannenberg treats the function and value of the principles of the historical-critical method to christology and theology with ambivalence. For him it is one thing to speak of the historical-critical approach as the criterion for judging the credibility of human experiences. But it is another thing for him to say that historical research judges the historical events in the light of the history of God. Hence Pannenberg directs his thesis to the reciprocal relationship between historical science and faith. His points on establishing faith in history is defined in the principle of universal correlation and analogy which comprise the aspects of historical methods.

The principle of universal correlation stresses the interconnection of historical events and are to be evaluated reciprocally with other historical occurrences. This includes not only biblical events but all other events in the history of mankind. The Bible, while it contains the revelation of God, cannot be the only place which manifests God's deeds of redemption. Revelatory

⁴¹ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 10.

⁴² "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 153. However since the kerygma is a theological statement of the historical event, it cannot in the end justify the historicity of the message including the person of Jesus. What one can glean from the kerygma is not the real picture of Jesus but the theological picture of him whose historical image remains hidden in the past. This implies that the kerygmatic description of the historical Jesus is likewise an improbable picture of him. Perhaps its portrayal is a likeness of the original Jesus but it can never be his photographic picture.

and ordinary histories are not treated as different histories but are relationally connected with each other, since God's act of redemption is historically based.⁴³

The second principle of historical inquiry is the principle of analogy. J. Robert Ross defines it as "the interpretation of any one event in the light of other familiar and similar events."⁴⁴ Pannenberg however expresses reservation with respect to the unrestricted application of the principle of analogy. He sees for instance its tendency towards an "anthropocentric world view," where humanity is regarded the "bearer of historical progress" as a problem to the Christian faith.

Pannenberg does not, by any means, deny that there is an anthropocentric element in all historical interpretation. Yet for him it is not the essential element in historiography. Here he blames the relativizing tendency of Troeltsch's "anthropocentric" approach for the breach in the unity of history.⁴⁵ But the focal point of Pannenberg's objection to Troeltsch's application of principle of analogy for historical research centers on the priority of external historical events and the exclusion of the theological and existential understanding of history to general history.⁴⁶ Furthermore Troeltsch's analogical principle is applied simply to a "universal homogeneity" of reality and is not applied on a "case to case" basis.⁴⁷ Pannenberg believes that when the principle of analogy is employed to some forms of tradition like myth and

⁴³ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 40-43.

⁴⁴ J. Robert Ross, "Historical Knowledge as Basis for Faith," *Zygon* 13 (1978): 216.

⁴⁵ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 40. See Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol II (Aalen: Scientia, 1962), 733. Pannenberg cites Troeltsch's theory of "analogy" which includes 'fundamental homogeneity [*Gleichartigkeit*] of all historical events.' Troeltsch defines the principle of analogy as "analogy with what happens before our eyes and what is given within our selves is the key to criticism. Illusions, displacements, myth formation, fraud, and party spirit, as we see them before our own eyes, are the means whereby we can recognize similar things in what tradition hands down. Agreement with normal, ordinary, repeatedly attested modes of occurrence and conditions as we know them is the mark of probability for the occurrences that the critic can either acknowledge really to have happened or leave on one side. The observation of analogies between two occurrences of the same sort makes it possible to ascribe probability to them and to interpret the one that is unknown from what is known of the other." Quoted by Pannenberg. *BQTh* 1: 43-44. See Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol 2: 732.

⁴⁶ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 44-45. In contrast to Troeltsch's presuppositions, Pannenberg cites the arguments of "introspective psychology" and existential experience as means of knowing. "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 44-47.

⁴⁷ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 44-45, 48.

legends it cannot provide a guarantee of knowledge. The reason is that, positive analogy lacks an "objective reference" to some form of consciousness like visions.⁴⁸ Unquestionably there is anthropocentrism in this approach since the method of knowledge is dependent on the investigator's understanding of facts that are "closer to him." The subjectivism of judgment is inevitable and the historian can produce a one-sided world-view.⁴⁹ It is here that Pannenberg traces the weakness of the theory of analogy which excludes the mysterium or the transcendence of God in the concept of history.⁵⁰ This clarifies the reasons why Pannenberg rules out the application of the principle of analogy to the resurrection of Jesus.

Despite constricting the use and extent of the principle of analogy, Pannenberg still considers it to be valuable to theology, provided that the theologian is aware of its limitations for historical research. Analogies of events should not be treated as homogenous. Instead the application of historical research to theology should

trace the individual and characteristic features of the events from which the biblical witnesses stem, and also the particularity of the different forms of the theological statement in these witnesses, in the context of the biblical tradition itself and in relation to alien material from the history of religions.⁵¹

Pannenberg calls this approach, "analogy from below." This means that the principle of analogy can aid theology in arriving at a rational knowledge if it points out "analogies and bringing the particular into relief in view of the concrete, common features." Therefore knowledge of God and the historical Jesus cannot remain a presupposed knowledge. Rather it should arise "from below" by applying the common tools of historical criticism in a limited degree.⁵²

⁴⁸ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 48-49.

⁴⁹ Here Pannenberg aligns himself with Eduard Meyer in arguing for the value of the varieties of "peculiar, nonhomogenous features, rather than the common ones." "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 46. See Eduard Meyer, "Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte," *Kleine Schriften*, vol I (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1924), 8, 28-31.

⁵⁰ "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 250-51.

⁵¹ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 48.

⁵² "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 51-53.

2. The Cognitive Nature of Faith: Pannenberg's Evidence to Bultmann's Dilemma

Both Barth and Bultmann affirm that the Word of God is the pivotal point of revelation. They maintain that all theological statements should revolve only within the Word of God. On the contrary Pannenberg turns his polemic against dialectical theology and argues that any theological interpretation of the Word is meaningless without any prior historical occurrence.⁵³ He considers Barth's and Bultmann's approach to the interpretation of the "word" as insufficient to explain the action of God.⁵⁴ He takes up the challenge of Heinrich Scholz's "postulate of control" to Barth's view of theology as self-reflection in arguing for a theological statement that is intellectually logical and verifiable.⁵⁵

⁵³ "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 232-33. Bultmann regards the Old Testament as insignificant for the Christian faith, since it is not the Word of God. The Old Testament is significant to the Christian only if it is interpreted through the lenses of christology. Thus he considers the Old Testament a "prophecy" and the New Testament "a fulfillment" in relation to the Christian existential understanding of existence. See Bultmann, "Significance of the Old Testament to the New Testament," *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson (London: SCM, 1964), 32-35. This is the point where Pannenberg departs from Bultmann. "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 226. Cf. Richardson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," 151. It is to be mentioned that Pannenberg equates the notion of word with language. He notes that historical experience and words or language are inseparable, as language brings to expression the individual event. As he explains it: "Every experience, as it finds its precipitation in language, in word, ... already reached beyond the particular occasion with which it began.... The word, ... also says that—and how—God, the power over all things, is present in the individual event." "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 256.

⁵⁴ See *Theo & Philo*, 265-76; "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 226-28. See also footnote 4. Pannenberg cites William Warren Bartley's critique against the theology of the Word as "a retreat to commitment" for an intellectual discussion of theology. See Bartley's *The Retreat to Commitment* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1984), 63-64. See *Theo & Philo*, 44-45. See also J. Wentzel von Huyssteen who finds a trace of Bartley's influence on Pannenberg's thought. *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 60-62, 66.

⁵⁵ *Theo & Philo*, 274-76. Here Pannenberg cites the debates between Scholz and Barth on the viability of theology as a science. Pannenberg however favors Scholz's argument over Barth's on the need for a "postulate control" in theological prepositions, if theology is to be regarded a science. Like other statements, Pannenberg treats a theological statement as hypothetical as well. (*Theo & Philo*, 333, 340-41). In fact he categorizes it as "theoretical networks" verifiable on the basis of "its function in the system of theological formulations." (*Theo & Philo*, 332). See Heinrich Scholz, "Was unter einer theologischen Aussage zu verstehen?," *Theologie als Wissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Sauter (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971), 265-78.

By embracing Popper's and Scholz's fundamental prepositions on scientific arguments, Pannenberg does not therefore respond to logical questions by merely resorting to simplistic answers.⁵⁶ Instead he invokes history because he believes that "history is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology."⁵⁷ Hence Pannenberg sees the significance of history for theology as it is the common point of reference between God who reveals and humanity who responds to that revelation. The significance of history becomes more vivid when it is understood in the light of faith in the history of Jesus. Pannenberg declares,

in saving faith, in the apprehension of its significance for me, the history of Jesus first receives the acknowledgment that it deserves and which matches its unique character. *Mere* historical faith, which is satisfied with the establishment that the event happened and does not allow itself to be grasped by this event, thus has precisely not understood aright the inherent meaning of this history, but has diminished it.⁵⁸

Pannenberg recognizes the value of Kähler's theology of kerygma in the renewal of "the dogmatic theme of the 'Word of God,' which had long been submerged in the doctrine of inspiration."⁵⁹ Kähler provided a bridge between the past and the present by accenting the impact of the kerygma in the life of the followers of Jesus.

However Pannenberg's critique against the kerygma theology focuses on its ambiguous claim to be the foundation of faith. If the kerygma is the content of the Christian faith in the sense that it provides meaning to contemporary life, Pannenberg seeks for a criterion of meaning in the kerygma and the historical origin of the kerygma. Undoubtedly Pannenberg is inspired by von Rad's position on redemptive history where the presence of the kerygma

⁵⁶ See *Theo & Philo*, 270-71. Cf. Scholz, "Wie is eine evangelische Theologie als Wissenschaft möglich?," *Theologie als Wissenschaft*, 221-64 especially 259-64.

⁵⁷ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 15. Alfred North Whitehead expressed the same view: "The appeal to history is the appeal to summits of attainment beyond any immediate clarity in our own individual existence. It is an appeal to authority. ... History has authority so far, and exactly so far, as it admits of some measure of rational interpretation." *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 162.

⁵⁸ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 36.

⁵⁹ "Kerygma and History," *BQTh* 1: 82-83.

cannot be avoided in the transmission of tradition. "The history of the transmission of tradition, including the origins of the traditions and the concrete occasions of their changes, is in itself treated as a historical object, and can hardly be treated in any other way."⁶⁰

This is also true of Jesus' tradition. Jesus' story of redemption is included in God's history which is in the process of unfolding.⁶¹ Faith is therefore secure because it relies on God's revelation in whole history.⁶² For Pannenberg it is important then that an existential interpretation of the kerygma should have a historical basis in order to validate its legitimacy. He contends that if faith in the historical Jesus is essential to the Christian faith then the significance of faith must be anchored in fact. Otherwise the kerygma is devoid of any Christian character:

As long as the Christian message remains a message about Jesus Christ, it must have a 'foothold' in Jesus himself.... Even if the Christian message were only a matter of a self-understanding (in contradistinction to a world-picture), it would still require legitimization by means of a proof of its agreement—even on this point!—with Jesus.⁶³

This implies that one can only understand the truth of the Christian message on the basis of the presupposition that the kerygma about Jesus is true. Only in this way can the kerygma serve as the basis of faith.⁶⁴

On this basis Pannenberg is skeptical of Bultmann's existentialism and Barth's transcendentalism, since they create a dilemma to the historical bearing of the Christian faith. He is particularly critical of Bultmann's treatment of the gospel stories as reflections of the mythological world-view of the primitive Church. Understandably Pannenberg assumes that Bultmann's demythologizing approach would boil down to the devaluation of the historical foundation of faith in God and in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover Bultmann's existentialist explication of the resurrection would reduce eschatology to a present experience without any apocalyptic content. This leads to an equation of a particular "End-time" with any "time of decision," hence

⁶⁰ "Kerygma and History," *BQTh* 1: 93.

⁶¹ "Kerygma and History," *BQTh* 1: 90-93.

⁶² Helmut G. Harder and W. Taylor Stevenson, "The Continuity of History and Faith in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Toward an Erotics of History," *The Journal of Religion* 51 (1971): 43.

⁶³ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 149.

⁶⁴ "The Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 129.

transforming christology to purely an existential experience rather than historical. This reduces the resurrection event and the risen Christ to contemporary objects of faith and removes them from history.⁶⁵

Thus in contrast to Bultmann, Pannenberg opts for the certainty of faith and not for a decision of faith. Faith cannot be reduced to a matter of mere decision.⁶⁶ But if one decides for faith, Pannenberg insists that any decision must be based on a reliable fact.⁶⁷

2.1 *The Logic of Faith*

Pannenberg's central interest in objective faith is occasioned by his desire to make the truth of the Christian faith intelligible. Faith cannot remain in the ghetto of supernaturalism. It needs explanation. If faith is to be explicable it has to step down to the level of the natural.⁶⁸ If the claims for faith are to be formulated formally they have to be as self-evidently logical as possible. If the statements of faith appear unintelligible due to their logical inadequacy, then faith statements cannot become statements of truth. Every christological statement is meaningful because it contains verificatory facts. That means that faith without history is not truth, for the truth of faith is rooted in its history. This is the logic of faith explicable in the a priori of knowledge and reason.

2.1.1 *The a priori of knowledge*

Pannenberg maintains that any theological argument on faith alone is insufficient to produce a picture of the historical Jesus. It cannot guarantee any substantial historical foundation of faith claims.⁶⁹ The credibility of any theological statement remains unfounded in the absence of its historical foundation. Without a well-founded knowledge, faith can be blind and fictitious.⁷⁰

Pannenberg's understanding of faith is best explained in his response to Althaus' view of faith as inseparable from the knowledge of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The point of contention between the Pannenberg and Althaus centers on the relationship between knowledge and faith. For instance,

⁶⁵ See also Alan Richardson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Theology* 74 (1971): 147-48.

⁶⁶ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," *Dialog* (Spring 1965): 128.

⁶⁷ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 138.

⁶⁸ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 56.

⁶⁹ *ST* 2: 286-87.

⁷⁰ "Revelation of God," 130-31.

Pannenberg finds Althaus' view of faith as dubious in his presupposition of faith as

'actual knowledge,' ... namely 'the impression of the credibility of the *report* of facts and events (historical faith [*fides historica*]) contained in the proclamation, thus, of the factuality of the reported history. But this is not yet knowledge of *God's revelation* in the events. This knowledge first comes about with faith itself.'⁷¹

His polemic against Althaus' position lies in the argument that "faith 'itself grounds and includes this knowledge or apprehension'" or "the knowledge that belongs to faith 'is first disclosed in believing reception of the message.'"⁷² Pannenberg raises doubt on Althaus' thesis that understanding is synonymous with the meaning of faith and knowledge. If faith is understood as a gift of God, Pannenberg does not see any reason to link faith to knowledge.⁷³ Pannenberg identifies the problem of Althaus' position in terms of the dependence of knowledge (*notitia*) to trust (*fiducia*). For Pannenberg faith so conceived leads to the psychologization of faith interpreted as a "decision of faith" or "the self-grounding of faith" thus validating the "content of faith." What he thinks is the logic of faith is the assumption that "knowledge of the ground of faith must, as such, logically precede faith."⁷⁴ This implies that the decision of faith is a by-product of knowledge of the historical fact of faith.⁷⁵ Or faith is the effect of knowledge and not the opposite. The certainty of faith is anchored not in one's act of faith but in a decision on the object of faith or on the particularity of a historical event, namely the history of Jesus, which can be the object of knowledge.⁷⁶ Faith is then not reducible to a simple acceptance of any historical given but rather faith is validated and confirmed by the truth of history.

⁷¹"Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 29. Cf. Paul Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube: Bemerkungen zu Wolfhart Pannenberg's Begriff der Offenbarung," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 87 (1962): 325.

⁷² "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 31. Cf. Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube," 325.

⁷³ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 29 n. 2. Cf. Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube," 326.

⁷⁴ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 31 and n. 7. Robert North sees common ground between Pannenberg and the Vatican I in insisting for the necessity of knowledge of God's revelation as preliminary to faith. "Pannenberg's Historicizing Exegesis," *Heythrop Journal* 12 (1971): 387-90.

⁷⁵ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 34-35.

⁷⁶ "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 267-68, 271-73.

Pannenberg maintains that although faith and knowledge are inseparable, they are distinguishable. He considers the act of trust however not as directly synonymous with knowledge. Yet he stakes out the place of *fiducia* in *notitia* and *assensus*.⁷⁷ Knowledge and faith are inseparable only if knowledge is considered a *priori* of faith. Following Paul's view (Rom 6:8f; 2 Cor 4:13), Pannenberg defines knowledge as 'natural' knowledge of faith.⁷⁸ But this is not simply identical with any form of knowledge. Rather 'natural' knowledge of faith is synonymous with "'historical faith' [*fides historica*] or 'historical knowledge' [*notitia historica*]."⁷⁹

Pannenberg acknowledges however that historical faith as such cannot guarantee any certitude to the truth of faith. Historical faith also has its flaws, when it "stops at the level of historical knowledge, and does not let itself be drawn into the event but instead gapes at it as if it were only a theatrical production...."⁸⁰ Pannenberg is cautious to base the notion of faith *merely* on brute facts of history that have no divine bearing. Historical knowledge alone can pervert the Christian faith as God's revelatory event as well.⁸¹

2.1.2 *The reciprocity between faith and reason*

It is wrong to assume that Pannenberg resorts to a purely anthropological conception of faith.⁸² The orthodox notion that God is the foundation of faith is definitely a presupposition in Pannenberg's view of faith. Yet his uncompromising stance against irrational fideism leads him to his openness to the logic of the Enlightenment and distance from orthodoxy. He believes that "the Christian faith manifestly cannot withdraw from every kind of cooperation with rational thought."⁸³ Thus although reason is not the source of faith, Pannenberg recognizes its valid functions for

⁷⁷ He concurs with the classical Protestant dogmatic description of the elements of faith which include knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*). "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 30-33.

⁷⁸ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 31-33.

⁷⁹ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 35. Pannenberg is aware that the relationship between knowledge and faith can be confusing. Yet he contends that this confusion can be overcome if faith, understood as trust [*fiducia*] is treated as "an isolated act of trust." "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 30. See also footnote 7.

⁸⁰ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 37.

⁸¹ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 37-38.

⁸² Pannenberg rebuts the charge that he secularizes the Christian tradition. "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 247-51 and n. 51. See the critique of Althaus, "Offenbarung als Geschichte und Glaube," 327 and William Hamilton, "The Character of Pannenberg's Theology," *Theology as History*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 176-96.

⁸³ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 46.

faith.⁸⁴ Pannenberg values reason as a "discursive agent" in perceiving a theoretical knowledge by impression. At this point Pannenberg turns to the interconnecting relationship between theoretical and practical principles of intellect and conscience, the latter serving as the judge of reason.⁸⁵ Therefore for Pannenberg, neither faith and reason are similar phenomena nor are they contrasting entities.

Pannenberg knows that the cooperation of faith and reason cannot inevitably escape the existence of a dialectical tension. Yet he resolves this tension by stressing the eschatological element present in the unity between faith and reason (I Cor 13:12f.). Pannenberg for instance declares:

Faith which, according to Hebrews 11:1, is oriented toward future things permits the question of historicness to be posed to reason as well. For the truly constant being first comes to light in the future, then such historicness of truth must also have an influence upon reason, at least to the extent that every unhistorical self-understanding of reason and of the truth toward which it is oriented could be condemned to defeat.⁸⁶

Clearly for Pannenberg faith and reason are not much different. Yet he contends that they are not identical. If faith ever insists on the independence of its own knowledge, it can only do so provisionally.⁸⁷ But if reality is understood as a whole and if faith contains an eschatological element, then reason can in no case ignore the reality of the future as a historical anticipation. In this case faith and reason are not in opposition to each other but are constantly in "unity-in-tension."⁸⁸ If reason is the illuminating agent of knowledge of faith, conversely

Faith can assist reason to become fully transparent to itself in its reflections. This would be reason enough—even if there were others available—for theology not to abandon as obsolete its talk about the eschatological future. For it would thereby surrender precisely the positive reference of faith to the essence of reason.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 28.

⁸⁵ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 55; *Theo & Philo*, 341.

⁸⁶ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 59. "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 267.

⁸⁷ "What is a Dogmatic Statement?," *BQTh* 1: 209.

⁸⁸ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 46, 62-64.

⁸⁹ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 64.

The deductive explication of concept of the reason and its function in the rationalization of theoretical knowledge is important in comprehending Pannenberg's notion of knowledge of faith. Inspired by Thomas Aquinas and Luther, Pannenberg argues for the necessity of faith to be illumined by knowledge.⁹⁰ With Luther, Pannenberg looks at the presence of reason in faith not as the dissolution of faith, but rather as the illuminating agent of knowledge of faith. In contrast to Kant, Pannenberg concurs with Wilhelm Kamlah's argument for the historization of reason and for calling reason a "receiving reason" as a protest to the "self-mastering reason of the modern age."⁹¹

The pillar of Pannenberg's interpretation of faith is that he does not sacrifice the existence of reason in faith. He avoids appealing to supernatural knowledge in order to justify the historical grounding of faith.⁹² Instead he uses reason to clarify the content of any faith statement. Pannenberg's intention of relating faith to reason is not to dissolve faith ultimately in the matter of reason. But rather by such a relationship he wants to engage in a rational definition of any faith claim. It is no wonder that Pannenberg is considered a representative of the "Christian rationalism of the enlightenment" in the modern time.^{93 94}

3. The Structure of Pannenberg's Christology

As noted above, the indispensability of history in judging the veracity of faith in the historical Jesus is integral in Pannenberg's christological structure. This is in response to the accusation of the historicists against the triviality of the Christian faith in its belief in the historical Jesus. He reckons the rational interpretation of the Christian formulations as a decisive christological task of making

⁹⁰ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 56. See Thomas von Aquin, *Summa Theologica*, vol. I (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1933), quest 12, art. 5, 221-24.

⁹¹ "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 57-58. Receiving reason is defined as "the reception of that which is, in contrast to the creative character of modern reason." "Faith and Reason," *BQTh* 2: 58. See Wilhelm Kamlah, *Der Mensch in der Profanität: Vernunft einer Kritik der profanen durch vernehmende Vernunft* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1949), 82-91.

⁹² "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 33 n. 10.

⁹³ Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 54.

⁹⁴ It is no wonder that Donald Bloesch considered Pannenberg a representative of the "Christian rationalism of the enlightenment" in the modern time. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 54.

the historical Jesus significant to the modern critical thinking. Hence for him the task of christology should revolve within this two-fold assumptions:

First, it involves the purely systematic derivation of particular insights with regard to Jesus from his history. Second, it must consider how the statements of primitive Christianity about Jesus came into existence in this way within a process of the formation of Christological tradition, even when the derivation of the Christological confessional statements in this process of the development and transmission of tradition is not reflected in primitive Christian literature.⁹⁵

On the basis of the above prepositions, Pannenberg opts for a christology "from below" as the overarching methodology of his systematic christological construction.

3.1 *Christology "from below": A Christological Approach*

It is "from below to above" and not "from above to below" that the history of Jesus was constructed and the confession of the church was formulated. This is the fundamental thesis that governs Pannenberg's christological methodology.⁹⁶ Pannenberg justifies his position by satisfying the *a priori* requirement of historical criteria that truth must be accessible to investigation. He contends that the so-called "christology from above" cannot align with the historical question of truth. His distance from the classical christology has basically three reasons. First, the "christology from above" approach is limited by the problem of substantiating the requirement for an explicit explanation of the presupposition of Jesus' divinity. Second, it undercuts the significance of the "historical particularity" of Jesus to christology, like Jesus' Jewishness which is essential in grasping the context and content of his message and his life as a whole. Similarly it undermines the rational task of christology in explicating the necessity of the divinity of Jesus. Third, the christology "from above" presupposes a historically determined context which appears vague to the modern mind and difficult to comprehend.⁹⁷

In contrast to the christology "from above", Pannenberg maintains his position on a christology "from below" on the application of the principle of historical correlation. The historical

⁹⁵ *JGM*, 30.

⁹⁶ *ST* 2: 288-89; *JGM*, 156 n. 96.

⁹⁷ *JGM*, 34-37.

Jesus can be the object of knowledge on account of his historical dimension. This principle avoids any abstract formulation or any presupposed construction of knowledge about Jesus. Instead it makes relevant the human and historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth as coming from God.⁹⁸ Pannenberg writes:

What is inherently new and contingent in a historical occurrence, and especially in Jesus' history, nevertheless radically qualifies all foreknowledge, even the foreknowledge about God that is unavoidably presupposed. Precisely for this reason, God has 'met' men in Jesus in a way that is not the case otherwise, and one also cannot adequately grasp such differences of historical particularity as merely a matter of degree.⁹⁹

Knowledge of the pre-existence of Jesus is preceded by knowledge of the historical Jesus.¹⁰⁰ Here Pannenberg questions the legitimacy of orthodoxy's proposition that Christian statements about Jesus should be based on faith. But like Althaus, Pannenberg advocates a return to the historical Jesus as the basis of all christological statements. He writes:

Christology must get behind the confessional statements and titles of the primitive Christian tradition, reaching the foundation to which these point, which underlies faith in Jesus. This foundation is the history of Jesus. Christology must ask and show how far this history of Jesus is the basis of faith. It does so by inquiring into the actual inner necessity of christological development in the NT and the continuation of this logic in the christology of the early church.¹⁰¹

Moreover Pannenberg finds it logical that any christological reflection should begin first with Jesus' historical relation to God and not with his deeds. "Every statement about Jesus taken independently from his relationship to God could result only in a crass distortion of his historical reality."¹⁰² Pannenberg thinks it essential then to see the historical Jesus in relation to the

⁹⁸ ST 2: 288; JGM, 204-5.

⁹⁹ JGM, 36.

¹⁰⁰ ST 2: 281-82. Cf. Paul Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit: Lehrbuch der Dogmatik* (Gütersloh: Gert Mohn, 1969), 424.

¹⁰¹ ST 2: 282; JGM, 13-14. Cf. Althaus, *Die christliche Wahrheit*, 424.

¹⁰² JGM, 36. "Revelation of God," 101-2, 104.

economics of the Trinity for the purpose of seeing the total picture of God's saving design for the whole creation.¹⁰³ Obviously for Pannenberg the best possible way to go back to the historical Jesus is to "include the primitive Christian witness to the resurrection of Jesus as the raising of Jesus to a form of fellowship with God that legitimates his pre-Easter work."¹⁰⁴ No doubt he joins the orbit of Albrecht Ritschl and his students in dealing with the problem of providing a substantial explanation to the divinity of the man Jesus or in going back to Jesus as the point of departure to christology.¹⁰⁵ This claim is crucial for Pannenberg in arguing for the historical basis of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is anchored in a historical past and in the person of Jesus.¹⁰⁶

But like the christology "from above," Pannenberg also notes the danger behind the christology "from below" approach. The danger lies when the historical Jesus is mainly constructed anthropologically and ignores theology altogether. To overcome this temptation, Pannenberg suggests a "reciprocal conditioning" in defining the relation between theology and anthropology and a complementary bearing of "from above" and "from below" in christology.¹⁰⁷

3.2 *The Christ Event: The Christological Point of Departure*

While Pannenberg advocates the notion that the historical Jesus should be the starting point of christology, the event of the resurrection is actually the beginning and end of his christology "from below."¹⁰⁸ Pannenberg explains:

The resurrection of Jesus is the event which was, ... the point of departure for the history of Christendom. ... And this starting point is ... the permanent, substantial foundation for that faith. ... In the resurrection of Jesus we therefore have to do with the sustaining foundation of the Christian faith. If this

¹⁰³ ST 2: 291.

¹⁰⁴ ST 2: 283. It is on the basis of the historicity of the resurrection story that Pannenberg joins Robinson in tracing the weakness of the New Quest movement and Bultmann who regards the event as historically doubtful. See footnote 31.

¹⁰⁵ JGM, 36-37; "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 52-53; ST 2: 280.

¹⁰⁶ "Jesu Geschichte und unsere Geschichte," *Glaube und Wirklichkeit: Kleine Beiträge zum christlichen Denken* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1975), 92.

¹⁰⁷ ST 2: 289-90.

¹⁰⁸ ST 2: 284-85.

collapses, so does everything else which the Christian faith acknowledges.¹⁰⁹

This presupposition enables Pannenberg to judge the event of Easter as the "earnest money of the future glory (I Cor 1:22, 5:2; Rom 8:23)"¹¹⁰ or "the daybreak of the eschaton."¹¹¹ And without the historicity of the resurrection, Jesus as the reconciler and savior of mankind depicted in his death will have no meaning at all.¹¹² As such Pannenberg recognizes the urgency of validating the historical character of the resurrection event, for it is the only way to "protect the kerygma against suspicion that it is a mere myth."¹¹³ Parallel to this, Pannenberg prefers to prove the historical facticity of the resurrection rather than shelter it from the historical criticisms. He believes that this only way to justify the certainty of the occurrence.¹¹⁴

3.2.1 *The challenge of natural science*

Pannenberg is not blind to the issues facing the historical discrepancies surrounding the Easter story. Neither is Pannenberg unfamiliar with the problem of discontinuity of world views between the first century's portrayal of the historical Jesus and the eighteenth century's portrayal.¹¹⁵ Aside from the historical and philosophical arguments, Pannenberg is cognizant of the critique of natural science against the Christian interpretation of the resurrection.¹¹⁶

From Pannenberg's standpoint the credibility of the resurrection of Jesus, as in historical-critical criteria, cannot be determined by its conformity to knowledge of natural science, since "everything that happens is contingent." The limitation of natural laws cannot prejudice the absolute possibility of the

¹⁰⁹ *Apostles' Creed*, 96-97. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*: 104-5.] This is the reason for his departure from Herrmann, Bultmann and the New Quest who exclude the resurrection as the basis of faith on the assumption that it is historically dubious. *ST* 2: 284-85. For instance Herrmann defends Ritschl in arguing for the personal life of Jesus Christ as the point of reference of faith in God. See Wilhelm Herrmann, "Der geschichtliche Christ der Grund unseres Glaubens," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 2 (1892): 256-73.

¹¹⁰ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 129; "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 42.

¹¹¹ "Redemptive Event and History," *BQTh* 1: 37.

¹¹² *Apostles' Creed*, 96. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 104-5.]

¹¹³ *ST* 2: 285.

¹¹⁴ *JGM*, 99.

¹¹⁵ *Apostles' Creed*, 46. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 54.]

¹¹⁶ "The Historicity of the Resurrection: The Identity of Christ," *The Intellectuals Speak About God*, ed. Roy Abraham Varghese (Chicago, Illinois: Regnery Gateway, 1984), 259.

occurrence of the event but can only provide a probable conclusion. At this juncture Pannenberg shows his bias for history over natural science in so far as judging the historicity and non-historicity of a particular event goes. He criticizes the approach of natural science for making "an absolutely certain prediction about the possibility or impossibility of single events" like the resurrection.¹¹⁷ There is no doubt that Pannenberg accepts the assumption that the Easter tradition is colored with legendary language. This is shown in his openness to allow the event to be investigated. Yet he is also convinced that with the failure of natural science to provide a scientific explanation for the "usual character of the event," the certainty of the Easter event remains indisputable. Thus what makes the resurrection decisive for Pannenberg is not what happened in the tomb but how the event created an impact upon the early Christians which eventually results in the emergence of Christianity.¹¹⁸

3.2.2 *Historical verification for the resurrection*

What is historical about the resurrection of Jesus? This is the focal question that occupies Pannenberg to defend the historicity of the Christian religion. William Hamilton rightly summarizes three things upon which Pannenberg grounds the historicity of the resurrection. First, the idea of the resurrection from the dead is founded in a specific tradition, namely, the apocalyptic tradition of Judaism. Second, the resurrection of the dead has existential significance: it addresses the longing of humanity. Third, the reality of the resurrection has an adequate metaphorical language in expressing the content of its meaning—waking from sleep.¹¹⁹ These points need further clarification in order to see how Pannenberg justifies the historicity of the resurrection.

3.2.2.1 *The tradition of the resurrection*

Pannenberg opts for the criterion of convergence of evidence and interpretations of evidence in his dispute for the facticity of Jesus' resurrection. For him any independent evidence does not

¹¹⁷ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 135; *JGM*, 98. Pannenberg embraces Popper's position on the hypothetical character of scientific laws in defense of the historicity of the resurrection. See *Theo & Philo*, 36.

¹¹⁸ *Apostles' Creed*, 111-15. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 119-23.]

¹¹⁹ William Hamilton, "The Character of Pannenberg's Theology," *Theology as History*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 182-83.

warrant the historicity of the event.¹²⁰ In reference to this argument Pannenberg's view of the rising of the dead relies heavily on the Old Testament apocalyptic expectation to which he traces the historical foundation of Jesus' resurrection.¹²¹ In this sense Pannenberg does not look at the resurrection of Jesus as an isolated event. He considers the Judaistic background of the resurrection of the dead as the basis for the New Testament's (more particularly for Paul's) understanding of the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of the dead is explained in the New Testament (as in the Old Testament) as waking up from sleep (Cf. 1 Thess 4:13ff., 1 Cor 11:30; 15:6, 51).¹²²

Pannenberg further observes that there is a soteriological relation between the Jewish tradition and the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation is not promised to all. For those who are righteous salvation is awaking for joy (Isa. 26:7ff, 19). But for the wicked, it means awaking "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:1-3; cf. Matt 25:31-46). The same theme is found in Enoch 22 except that the resurrection is rewarded only for the righteous and not for the wicked who will be destroyed (Enoch 22:10; Apoc. Baruch 30:1-5; Psalms of Sol 3:12). Yet generally the notion of universal resurrection is common in the tradition (4 Ezra 7:29ff; Apoc. Baruch 50:2ff.).¹²³

As in the New Testament, interest in describing the nature of the resurrected life is also explored in the Jewish Tradition. In Dan. 12:3, the resurrected righteous people "will shine like the brightness of the heavens and ... like the stars." In Enoch 51, they are like angels in heaven. In the Apocalypse of Baruch 50-51, the transformation for the saved is from good to better and for the wicked, from bad to worst. The transformation will take place however following the judgment. Obviously the New Testament retains the Old Testament idea of hope for future resurrection

¹²⁰ "Response to the Debate," *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?: The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 130.

¹²¹ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 146-47. For instance he cites the oldest biblical reference of the resurrection of the dead mentioned in Isa 26:19. Just as in Dan. 12:2, the idea of the resurrection is described in terms of "awakening and rising from sleep" to an everlasting life. "Did Jesus Really Rise from Grave?," 129; and *JGM*, 74-75. A parallel notion of the resurrection in the Old Testament also appears in the apocryphal literature, see, for example, the Apocalypse of Baruch (30:1) and IV Ezra.

¹²² *JGM*, 74-75.

¹²³ *JGM*, 79. For instance Pannenberg notes that the similitude in Enoch 51 contains double resurrection.

understood as an entrance into a metamorphosed dimension of life.¹²⁴

3.2.2.1.1 *The resurrection as a metaphor*

In his lecture, "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?" (1963), Pannenberg draws new conclusions from the critique against the supernatural explanation of the historical credibility of the resurrection story. He accomplishes this task by applying the literary and historical tools in a constricted approach.

As noted above Pannenberg grounds his view of the rising of the dead on the Jewish apocalyptic interpretation (Isa. 26:19 and Dan. 12:2) understood as "awakening and rising from sleep."¹²⁵ He holds however that the expression "resurrection or rising from the dead" is nothing less than a symbolical language or a metaphor.¹²⁶ But Pannenberg is quick to clarify himself in his use of the words. "Only the *name* we give to this event is symbolic, metaphorical, but not the reality."¹²⁷

Pannenberg finds himself generally unsympathetic with the understanding of the resurrection as revivification of the corpse. He grounds his argument on Paul's interpretation of the nature of the resurrected body—"not as a physical body but a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44). Therefore the resurrection as a metaphor is understood "not as a mere resuscitation of a corpse but as radical transformation" like that of Christ's appearance to Paul. Pannenberg finds it difficult to simply equate the resurrection with resuscitation because there is no transformation from the old to the new structure of existence that occurs in resuscitation.¹²⁸ But in interpreting the resurrection from a metaphorical standpoint a transformation of life takes place (1 Cor 15:53). A transformed life is

completely different from all life with which we are familiar, an imperishable life no longer limited by death, which ... therefore must be basically different from the organic form of life with which we are familiar.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ *JGM*, 79-80.

¹²⁵ "Did Jesus Really Rise from Grave?," 129; *JGM*, 74-75.

¹²⁶ "What is Truth?," *BQTh* 2: 26.

¹²⁷ "Did Jesus Really Rise from Grave?," 135. He defines a metaphor in this respect as "a way of speaking of an image.... A special expression for a reality which can always be experienced, but something which normally cannot be experienced directly." "Did Jesus Really Rise from Grave?," 129.

¹²⁸ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 129-130; *JGM*, 76-77.

¹²⁹ *JGM*, 77.

This suggests that Pannenberg has reason to reject the resuscitation theory in Jesus' resurrection, for it would only lead to equating the Easter event with other reports of revivification of the corpse (Lk 7:11-17; Matt 8:5-13; Mk 5:35-43; Jn 11).¹³⁰ Like Rahner, Pannenberg asserts that the Easter event is an unrepeatable event.¹³¹ Pannenberg is consistent in his position that historical research cannot employ strictly its principle of analogy in the resurrection of Jesus. Moreover Pannenberg's metaphorical interpretation of the resurrection squares with his accent on the apocalyptic character of resurrection to which he attaches the Christian hope for future resurrection.¹³²

On the basis of the historicity of the event of the resurrection Pannenberg can refute the claim that Jesus' resurrection can only be established by faith. The historicity of the event can only be confirmed by historical research. Certainly Pannenberg draws a limit to historical method on matters pertaining to the reality of a new creation, a new aeon. In this matter he resorts to a metaphorical interpretation.¹³³ He reasons:

Because the life of the resurrected Lord involves the reality of a new creation, the resurrected Lord is in fact not perceptible as one object among others in this world; therefore he could only be experienced and designated by an extraordinary mode of experience, the vision, and only in metaphorical language.¹³⁴

On the basis of the above position, does Pannenberg not appear to contradict himself in his preference for history? Not at all! Pannenberg turns the question on the historicity of a reality in on itself. As Pannenberg explains his view further:

He [the resurrected Jesus] made himself known in the midst of our reality at a very definite time, in a limited number of events, and to men who are particularly designated.¹³⁵

That means that Pannenberg has no other interest except to affirm that the resurrection is a historical event and to historicize

¹³⁰ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 130.

¹³¹ Cf. Rahner, *Christologie: Systematisch und Exegetisch*, 31.

¹³² "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 130-31.

¹³³ *JGM*, 98-99.

¹³⁴ *JGM*, 99.

¹³⁵ *JGM*, 99. Bracket mine.

any faith claims to the fact of the resurrection. The function of historical method in the resurrection is to establish a point of correlation between the historical event and the emergence of the nascent Christianity. The possibility of a historical reconstruction of the event is made possible in the acceptance of the event as historical as such in consideration of its apocalyptic character. Pannenberg explains his point quite clearly:

If the emergence of primitive Christianity, which, apart from other traditions, is also traced back by Paul to appearances of the resurrected Jesus, can be understood in spite of all critical examination of the tradition only if one examines it in the light of the eschatological hope for a resurrection from the dead, then that which is so designated is a historical event, even if we do not know anything more particular about it.¹³⁶

But where the historical method fails to justify the historical accuracy of an event, the metaphorical approach rules over. There is no sharp distinction then between the historical and the metaphorical interpretations of the resurrection event. Both approaches complement each other in establishing the proof of an event.

By far Pannenberg's most plausible proofs for the historicity of the resurrection event are the appearances of the risen Lord and the empty tomb. These two traditions are decisive for Pannenberg in vindicating the historical foundation of the Christian faith.

3.2.3 *The appearances tradition*

Fundamentally Pannenberg describes the historicity of the resurrection event on the basis of disciples' experiences of Jesus. Yet experiences alone are not enough to legitimate the resurrection. They still require a historical ground from which the faith declaration in the resurrected Christ can have its historical anchor, otherwise they can be reduced to "self-delusion." Hence in defending the historical credibility of the Easter story, Pannenberg departs from the traditional position on the resurrection as a product of the faith of the disciples: "The Easter appearances are

¹³⁶ *JGM*, 98. David McKenzie doubts Pannenberg's philosophical argument for the resurrection as good material for history writing since a "historian is bound by the common-sense beliefs of his milieu." *Wolfhart Pannenberg and Religious Philosophy* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 94.

not to be explained from the Easter faith of the disciples; rather, conversely, the Easter faith of the disciples is to be explained from the appearances."¹³⁷

First and foremost Pannenberg describes the experiences of the disciples of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in psychological terms—they "were overwhelmed by a reality which confronted them...."¹³⁸ His only biblical proof of the historical appearance of the resurrected Jesus is 1 Cor 15:1-11 which narrates Paul's encounter with the Jesus in Damascus.¹³⁹ His reasons are based on literary and historical grounds. In his examination of 1 Cor 15:6, Pannenberg believes that the text indicates a close connection to the original event and shows Paul's "firsthand knowledge of the events which the reports in the gospels did not have."¹⁴⁰ Pannenberg describes the mode of the appearances in a form of a vision (Acts 22:9; 26:13f.) To justify his historical argument of the appearance Pannenberg avoids equating Paul's vision with pure illusion. Instead he explains this vision as an "extraordinary view" not accessible to all. As such he eschews any theory that explains the appearances of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples as simply products of their "enthusiastic imagination" or a "subjective vision hypothesis."¹⁴¹

Pannenberg disputes however the above theory on two grounds: First he appeals to the tradition of the appearances of Jesus as the basis upon which the faith of the disciples was

¹³⁷ *JGM*, 96.

¹³⁸ "What is Truth?," *BQTh* 2: 26.

¹³⁹ Pannenberg doubts the historical credibility of Mark 16. In fact he is convinced that the gospel reports on the resurrection are legendary as they belong to the later strata of tradition. "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 131; *JGM*, 102-3.

¹⁴⁰ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 131. This is further substantiated by 1 Cor 15:3b-5, in which according to Pannenberg the said formulation was verbally transmitted shortly after the death of Jesus. "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 132. Furthermore Pannenberg enumerates the facticity of the appearance in five points: (1) Paul testifies that he really has seen the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 9:1). (2) Paul must have seen "a spiritual body, not a physical one, near Damascus." (3) The appearance came from heaven which explains the glorified figure of Jesus. (4) The appearance may be compared to "a bright light" phenomenon (Acts 9:13f) in reference to Paul's statement in 2 Cor 4:6 concerning "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the form of Christ." (5) Paul heard what he saw. "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 132; "The Historicity of the Resurrection," 260.

¹⁴⁰"Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 133.

¹⁴¹ This theory suggests that the events surrounding the appearances of the resurrected Jesus were no less than subjective mode of mental experiences or a "psychic chain reaction" which can be explained by the aid of parapsychology. "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 133-34; *JGM*, 95.

established. Contrary to the liberal position that the Easter story was created as a product of the emotional stress of the disciples, Pannenberg argues that the appearances were the cause for the survival of the faith of the disciples amidst their stress brought about by the execution of their master.¹⁴² Second for Pannenberg the subjective vision theory cannot hold water in discrediting Jesus' resurrection. The number and stages of the historical appearances of the resurrected Jesus to the 'Twelve,' to 'all the apostles,' and the 'five hundred brethren' add weight to support the verifiability of the resurrection event.¹⁴³

Therefore in view of the absence of "positive points of contact for the application of the psychiatric concept of vision" and in view of the evidence for the historical tradition, Pannenberg discredits the attempt to reduce Jesus' resurrection to the level of pure psychological projection.¹⁴⁴ He postulates that if the early Christians ever had such enthusiastic experiences—which Pannenberg hardly believes—these appearances are rather "only effects of the appearances of the resurrected Lord."¹⁴⁵ In other words Pannenberg does not believe in the historical plausibility of the reports of the post-resurrection appearances. Rather for him they are constructions to establish the historicity of Easter. The

¹⁴² "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 133.

¹⁴³ *JGM*, 96-97. Here Herbert Burhenn notes that Pannenberg's opposition to a naturalistic construction of the resurrection is based on the problem of "conceptual evidence." Conversely he accuses Pannenberg's concept of God acting in history as contradicting the scientific concept on the basis of what he calls "common-sense knowledge." "Pannenberg's Argument for the Historicity of the Resurrection," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972): 374-79.

¹⁴⁴ *JGM*, 97.

¹⁴⁵ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 133-34. Pannenberg stresses further the uniqueness of the nature of appearances of the resurrected Jesus when he restricts it only in Paul (I Cor 15:8; 2 Cor 12:1; 13:4) and does not extend them to the later visionary experiences of the Early Christians. "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 133-34. However, John B. Cobb, Jr. contends that Pannenberg's conclusion on the exclusive mode of appearances of the resurrected Jesus is less convincing in view of the current cases of the appearances of the dead analogous to that of Jesus' appearances to the disciples and Paul. Thus he still wants to see how Pannenberg could link his concept of proleptic resurrection to any present experience. "Wolfhart Pannenberg's 'Jesus: God and Man,'" *The Journal of Religion* 49 (1969): 197, 199. Cf. McKenzie, *Wolfhart Pannenberg and Religious Philosophy*, 97-98. In defense of Pannenberg, Stanley J. Grenz points however to Pannenberg's notion of the church understood as the sign of the Kingdom of God which proleptically represents, "the spiritual body of the risen Lord" in the present. *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University, 1990), 141-42.

reason for such claim is grounded in Pannenberg's effort to separate the risen Christ from the earthly Jesus.¹⁴⁶

3.3.4 *The empty tomb tradition*

The discussions on the authenticity of the empty tomb are also decisive in Pannenberg's defense of the historicity of the resurrection. Citing Althaus, Pannenberg argues, "without having a reliable testimony for the emptiness of Jesus' tomb, the early Christian community could not have survived in Jerusalem proclaiming the resurrection of Christ."¹⁴⁷ Fundamental in his discussion of the empty tomb in Jerusalem is the problem of its connection with the appearances of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples in Galilee.

Whether the discovery of the empty was the reason the disciples of Jesus went to Galilee in the hope of meeting the resurrected Lord there (thus Campenhausen) or whether the disciples returned to the Galilean home because their journey to Jerusalem had come to such a catastrophic end (perhaps already before the execution of Jesus?) so that they met the resurrected One in Galilee, while in the meantime women ... discovered that Jesus' tomb was empty [thus Grass].¹⁴⁸

It is the assumption of Pannenberg that the latter is a highly probable explanation as is the former for historical or situational reasons. The disciples were absent at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. They must have logically gone back to Galilee for security reasons and for lack of interest in the empty tomb. Moreover, it would be illogical for the disciples to go back to the Galilee if they already discovered the empty tomb in Jerusalem. Besides they knew that it is in Jerusalem that God would finally manifest his final judgment on the eminent end of the world.¹⁴⁹ The Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead. If Jesus' tomb was intact it would not be sensible for the early Christians to gather in Jerusalem. Some Jews would be the first to protest against the disciples' proclamation of the resurrected Jesus. But their silence

¹⁴⁶ Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 141. Peter G. Hodgson however objects to this position; he does not see any distinction between the concept of the appearance of Jesus and the reality of the risen Christ. "Pannenberg on Jesus: A Review Article," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 36 (1968): 377-78.

¹⁴⁷ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 134.

¹⁴⁸ "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 134. Bracket mine. See *JGM*, 102-6.

¹⁴⁹ *JGM*, 104.

shows the trustworthiness of the empty tomb.¹⁵⁰ And on the side of the disciples, they would have not had risked their lives had the resurrection of Jesus been a mere "conspiracy."¹⁵¹ On this ground Pannenberg doubts the originality of the gospels' narration on the inseparable connections between the discovery of the empty tomb and the Galilean appearance. He holds that the evangelists' accounts belong to the later tradition.¹⁵²

Simply expressed, Pannenberg's rejection of the historical method on the resurrection of Jesus has a theological ground:

As long as historiography does not begin dogmatically with a narrow concept of reality according to which the 'dead men do not rise,' it is not clear why historiography should not in principle be able to speak about Jesus' resurrection as the explanation that is best established of such events as the disciples' experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb.¹⁵³

In Pannenberg's judgment the principle of analogy should only be applied in its limited sphere. The resurrection event does not need such an analogy, for it is a unique historical event, an "objective, extra-mental occurrence" which could only be "experienced by an extra ordinary mode of experience, the vision and in metaphorical language."¹⁵⁴ In other words Pannenberg's adoption of the term "metaphor" in reference to the resurrection is an approach to justify historically events that are ostensibly difficult to defend on historical grounds. Pannenberg draws a historical statement from metaphorical language because of the significance of the historical event which creates faith and meaning in various aspects of human existence.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ *JGM*, 100.

¹⁵¹ "The Historicity of the Resurrection," 262.

¹⁵² "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Grave?," 135; *JGM*, 104-5.

¹⁵³ *JGM*, 109. This proposal is however rejected by Burhenn in view of the historians' commitment to their historical enterprise. "Pannenberg's Argument for the Historicity of the Resurrection," 372.

¹⁵⁴ *JGM*, 99. Michalson judges Pannenberg's historical scheme of the resurrection as "vague, indeterminate and unhelpful" since Pannenberg's attack against the principle of analogy and his metaphorical proof of the Easter story has no material "synchronization." Michalson maintains that the principle of analogy remains implicit in the historian's method of establishing the historical credibility of a specific event. For him Pannenberg fails to provide a clear idea of what resurrection really means as a metaphor in the historical standpoint. "Pannenberg on the Resurrection and Historical Method," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980): 355-59.

¹⁵⁵ See *JGM*, 73.

For Pannenberg a historical statement is inseparable from a historical event, for it presupposes by "implication" the occurrence of the event. Hence it can affirm the veracity of an event once it overcomes the problem of historical questioning. He explains:

A historical statement ... is a statement of the past on the level of reflection on the problematics of making such statements and on the kind of questioning that is involved in securing whether a statement is really true. But, by implication, every statement about the past is a historical statement.¹⁵⁶

Moreover Pannenberg deals here with the question of "history as experienced" which is not treated as independent from "history as facts." Rather the former is the consequence of the latter. In contrast to Neo-Kantianism and the philosophy-of-life school, Pannenberg joins R.G. Collingwood in rejecting any conscious separation between known fact and experience in the notion of history. He observes:

Every event, if not artificially taken out of context (out of its historical environment, stretching into the past and the future), brings its own meaning for each particular inquirer, brings it with its context, which of course is always a context of tradition.¹⁵⁷

This makes an experience factual and not a product of subjectivism or self-projection, since the factual event and its meaning are indivisible.

Pannenberg's unitive view of history as "experienced" and as a "fact" leads him to validate the facticity of the resurrection. The Easter tradition is historical for it points to the foundation of the Christian kerygma (1 Cor 15:14) and it fundamentally expresses the basis for an eschatological hope of the early Christians for future resurrection as well.¹⁵⁸

Although he argues that not all statements about the past are historical, Pannenberg's conclusion on the plausibility of the historical statements surrounding the resurrected Jesus appears to be a predetermined matter. Factuality is presupposed in the statement of faith in the resurrection. This makes it

¹⁵⁶ "The Historicity of the Resurrection," *The Intellectuals Speak About God*, 259.

¹⁵⁷ "The Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 127.

¹⁵⁸ "The Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 127-28; *Apostles' Creed*, 112-14. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 119-22.]

overwhelmingly clear that no historical research can nullify the credibility of the Easter event.

4. The Post-Easter Jesus and His Retroactive Impact

As seen in the above discussion, the gravity of Pannenberg's christology essentially centers on a theology of the resurrected Jesus. All references to the historical Jesus, his activities, his message and his life are diagnosed on the basis of Easter.

This is also true to Jesus' relationship with God. Pannenberg writes:

Jesus' unity with God in the revelatory event of his resurrection from the dead can be understood only as his unity with God's eternal essence, so that the eternal divinity of God cannot be appropriately conceived except in relation to Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁵⁹

Therefore Pannenberg reads the history of Jesus not progressively but retroactively. This implies that interpretations of the pre-Easter life and ministries of Jesus apart from the resurrection contain secondary value only. Or, any christologization of Jesus' pre-Easter life and works including his birth is legitimate only in reference to the resurrection event. This means that the power of resurrection remains *a priori* to christological constructions. Although chronologically the Easter event is located at the end of the history of Jesus, it is not an appendix of christology. Pannenberg concurs in this judgment when he supports the historicity of the birth of Jesus only unless it is reckoned as legendary or a consequence of a late tradition.¹⁶⁰ In this regard Pannenberg views the concept of the incarnation as a developmental process of God's self-demonstration in the history of Jesus. This defines clearly the scope of his apocalyptic theology of history, since the theology of incarnation is read in the light of the theology of revelation.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *JGM*, 150.

¹⁶⁰ Yet for Pannenberg what is significant about the story of the virgin birth is that it serves as "a preliminary expression for a fundamental element of the revelatory event, namely, that Jesus was the 'Son of God' from the very beginning." *JGM*, 146. See *Apostles Creed*, 76. Here Kenneth Heintz criticizes Pannenberg for decontextualizing the theology of the virgin birth in view of concept of the pre-existence of Jesus as the Son of God. "Pannenberg: Theology 'from below' and the Virgin Birth," *Lutheran Quarterly* 28(1976), 181.

¹⁶¹ *JGM*, 141-58; "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 151.

With respect to this retroactive impact of the resurrection, Pannenberg states that "without the resurrection of Jesus his message would have turned out to be a fanatical audacity."¹⁶² The Easter event validates the pre-Easter activities of Jesus. It does not only confirm God's revelation in Jesus, it also demonstrates the essence of reality in relation to the future dimension of life. It confirms Jesus' proclamation of the imminence of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶³ Thus the event of Easter is the basis for the future transformation of realities. Lastly the resurrection of Jesus also serves as the impetus for Paul to start the Gentile mission.¹⁶⁴

4.1 *The Proleptic Significance of the Christ Event*

The primacy of the resurrection event in Pannenberg's thought is connected with his desire to address humanity's incessant quest for immortality. Such a longing, in contrast to temporary desires, is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. This forms the basis for the universal significance of Jesus' resurrection. Citing Paul, Pannenberg believes that the resurrected Jesus is the "first born from the dead" (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5; cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Rom 8:29; Acts 3:15). Although Jesus' resurrection is not an isolated event which happened only in the history of Jesus, it is an eschatological hope and assurance of future salvation for all humanity. This is the uniqueness of the Easter event: future salvation has already been predecided in the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁶⁵ As Pannenberg postulates:

Through the raising of Jesus, and through the certainty that Jesus as the Risen One lives and will die no more, eschatological salvation is certain and to this extent near to those who are joined to him.¹⁶⁶

In his response to his critics, he states: "The resurrection of Jesus is what it is only as a 'pre-appearing' of the universal resurrection of the righteous for salvation, and thus, a guarantee of future salvation for those who now joined with Jesus."¹⁶⁷ Earlier in his Dogmatic Thesis 4, Pannenberg states the same view: "The

¹⁶² "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 116.

¹⁶³ "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 114-15; "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 146; *Apostles' Creed*, 52-53. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 60-61.] Cf. Rahner, *Christologie: Systematisch und Exegetisch*, 31-34.

¹⁶⁴ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 147.

¹⁶⁵ "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 116, 123-24.

¹⁶⁶ "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 117. See "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 263.

¹⁶⁷ "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 263 n. 74.

universal revelation of the divinity of God is not yet realized in the history of Israel but first in the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth insofar as the end of all events is anticipated in his fate."¹⁶⁸ In this regard Jesus' history (particularly his resurrection) is a decisive event because it demonstrates "a fundamental structural element both of cognition and of language, and of the being of beings in their temporality."¹⁶⁹

It is against this unparalleled structure of the history of Jesus that Pannenberg constructs his theory of anticipation or prolepsis. He conceives the idea of anticipation (*Vorwegnahme*) as far more than having a foreknowledge of what is to come. Rather *Vorwegnahme* "reveals itself by confirming in contemporary life that it is genuinely an anticipation of the future-constituted wholeness of a man's own human being."¹⁷⁰ That is, the idea of anticipation is understood in terms of the relativity of history. Hence, following Popper, Pannenberg can maintain that the idea of anticipation especially on the notion of experience of meaning is a preliminary thought and knowledge in which its historicity can only be validated in the future.¹⁷¹

Pannenberg argues that the provisionality of future events anticipated in the present is indicative of the nature of God's revelation in historical happenings. That means that even the revelatory event itself is not final but is open to verification and the answer to each question of truth is likewise a progressive process

¹⁶⁸ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 139.

¹⁶⁹ "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 260. See also 260 n. 72. Harder and Stevenson argue that the resurrection can be treated as the end of history because it heralds a universal salvation available to all humanity. "The Continuity of History and Faith," 42.

¹⁷⁰ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 169; "Response to the Discussion," *ThH*, 262-63. In developing this definition Pannenberg appeals to Heidegger and Dilthey's philosophical concept of anticipation. Both postulate that the experience of wholeness in the present cannot be summed up in man's awareness of his coming death (Dilthey) or the experience of death as an existential state (Heidegger). *BQTh* 1: 166-67. *BQTh* 2: 61-62. Here Pannenberg construes Heidegger and Dilthey's view of anticipation merely as a matter of "retrospection." He rejects the existentialist position for ontological and historical reasons. On the contrary Pannenberg consistently argues that "the events which mark and determine the direction of our lives right up to our deaths are characterized by contingency...." "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 166.

¹⁷¹ *Theo & Philo*, 333. Here Pannenberg applies Popper's principle of "trial and error" to theology and emphasizes the Popper's position on the "anticipatory character of hypothesis." *Theo & Philo*, 42. See Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 13-14. See also "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 171-73.

that is illuminated in human experiences and is open to the future.¹⁷² Decisive at this point is Pannenberg's concept of revelation located not in the beginning but at the end.¹⁷³ He writes:

God's revelation in Jesus Christ is indeed only an anticipation of the final event, which will be the actual revelatory event. And yet, we have the well-founded confidence that the final event will not bring anything decisively new that was not already anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus. To this extent Jesus, is already the revelation of God.¹⁷⁴

Basic in this presupposition is Pannenberg's conception of revelation as history and the resurrection of the historical Jesus as the summation of the future only in the context of historical faith. But while it is true that faith is historically based, the tension between future salvation apprehended in faith and its manifestation in the normal life remains vague.¹⁷⁵ This makes it difficult to verify faith in daily encounters with different symbols of life and death. It is in this tension that Pannenberg locates the risk of faith which he defines as a trust in the revelation of God in history of Jesus.¹⁷⁶ Faith in the history of Jesus of Nazareth means therefore trust in the future. Faith is hope in the eschatological end. This cannot be falsified because it is anchored in the history of Jesus which already fulfilled that future expectation. The history of Jesus is a realized anticipated future that is not yet.

Pannenberg maintains that the proleptic structure of faith is inseparable from the Christ event. This is where his apologetics of faith is grounded. Faith should accept the reality of God's revelation in the historical Jesus whose life and resurrection

¹⁷² *ST* 1:257. Pannenberg calls such openness of truth the future "anticipation." *Theo & Philo*, 42.

¹⁷³ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 140-41. Pannenberg is convinced that "history of the whole is only visible when one stands at the end." "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 142.

¹⁷⁴ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 44; "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 144-45; *BQTh* 1: 180, 235; *JGM*, 66-69.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Walter Beyerlin, *We Are Like Dreamers: Studies in Psalm 126*, trans. Dinah Livingston (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982).

¹⁷⁶ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 138.

confirm the credibility of future history.¹⁷⁷ Pannenberg states this clearly:

Trustful anticipation of the future is characteristic of faith, but this anticipation is founded in a corresponding proleptic meaning of the Christ event itself, as it offers itself to knowledge. To this extent, knowledge of the revelatory event establishes the believing trust in which it issues. This knowledge is not a stage that surpasses faith. ... Rather, if it is genuine, ... knowledge issues in believing trust.¹⁷⁸

Pannenberg's appropriation of the proleptic character of the resurrection of Jesus can then be summarized by his two presumptions:

[First], the proleptic character of the destiny of Jesus is the basis for the openness of the future for us, despite the fact the Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God of Israel as the God of all men. And, conversely, without this proleptic character, the fate of Jesus could not be the ultimate revelation of the deity of God, since the openness of the future belongs constitutively to our reality.... [Second], the resurrection of Jesus is to be viewed as historical event in this sense, namely, that the disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed by a reality which confronted them, and for which not only they, but we, too, have no other explanation and therefore no other designation than the symbolic talk about a 'resurrection from the dead.'¹⁷⁹

4.2 *The Development of Christological Tradition*

Another area which Pannenberg explores in tracing the influence of the Christ event upon the early Christian is the divinity of Jesus. From this basis Pannenberg views Jesus' resurrection as a criterion for the relationship between humanity and God. Such unity is responsible for the rise of the christological titles of Jesus (e.g. the Son of Man, and the Messiah). Along these lines, the titles of Jesus are expressions used by the early Christians in

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Ted Peters, "Truth in History: Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Pannenberg's Apologetic Method," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975): 52.

¹⁷⁸ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 45; "Dogmatic Thesis," 138.

¹⁷⁹ "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 25-26. Brackets mine.

describing their trust in the historical Jesus as the mediator for salvation understood in terms of its proleptic anticipation.¹⁸⁰

4.2.1 *Jesus as the Son of Man*

The idea that Jesus is the Son of Man is not new. Its appearance in the gospels can be traced to Jewish apocalyptic literature (Ezek. 2:1ff.; Dan. 7; Enoch). Pannenberg links the amalgamation of the Son of Man figure with the historical Jesus in the gospels in connection with Jesus' message of the imminent coming of the Kingdom (Lk 12:8; 9:26; Mk 8:38; Matt 10:32).¹⁸¹ The Old Testament images of the Son of Man merged in the person of Jesus retain their essential character.

First Pannenberg identifies Jesus as the Son of Man as the expected Judge of the world. The development of this tradition is a product of the early Christians thought of the pre-Easter life of Jesus, his proclamation about the Kingdom of God and his resurrection from the dead. Pannenberg notes that the pre-Easter accounts indicate how the evangelists separate the person of Jesus from the figure of the Son of Man. This distinction is however dissolved after the Easter event. The Son of Man and the risen Christ became identical. Second, Pannenberg sees the messianic picture of Jesus as one sitting on the right hand of the Father (not to be understood in spatial terms) as an allusion to Ps 110:1: "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'" (Cf. Acts 2.:34f.). Its identification with the resurrected Christ as the coming Son of Man adds force to the significance of the Jesus as the contemporary judge and king of the world. Thus the title Son of Man is fused with the coming Messiah.¹⁸² The figure of the Son of Man, Pannenberg argues, was a major concept in early Christianity in grasping the eschatological character of Jesus' person.¹⁸³ This affirms the

¹⁸⁰ *Apostles' Creed*, 53-60. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 61-67]. Similarly, Jesus' resurrection evokes new interpretations of the offices of priest, king and prophet present in the Jewish tradition. The post-Easter event provides impetus for the transfer of the three-fold office to the resurrected Jesus. Jesus is called the Messiah. *JGM*, 234-35.

¹⁸¹ *Apostles' Creed*, 119. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 127.]

¹⁸² *Apostles' Creed*, 118-23. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 126-32.]

¹⁸³ *JGM*, 201. Pannenberg explains further that Paul provides meaning to the notion of the coming of a 'new man' realized in the event of the resurrection. He supports Paul's parallelism of "Adam-Christ" in explicating the coming of the historical Jesus as the last man, the last Adam who effected salvation over death caused by the first Adam. (Rom 5:15ff.). *JGM*, 201. Following the Pauline allusion to Jesus as the second Adam, Pannenberg finds the unique importance of the historical Jesus to humanity as the "origin of the new human image" (1 Cor 15:45ff.; Rom. 5:12-19). *ST* 2: 295-97.

rationality of identifying the resurrected Jesus with a divine being.¹⁸⁴

4.2.2 *Jesus as the Messiah*

Jesus' title, "Christ" or "Messiah," similarly carries the same eschatological weight for the early Christians. For Pannenberg "Christ" stands for the salvific significance of Jesus. A confession that Jesus is Christ also implies humanity's participation in the future union with God and in the resurrection into a new dimension of life which the historical risen Jesus has demonstrated.¹⁸⁵ In arguing this point, Pannenberg contends that a confession that Jesus is the Christ implies "that our life only takes its meaning from him, only becomes whole—only becomes *whole*—if he is the focus. This means that our existence viewed in isolation is not 'a whole' or 'whole', although it is the longing of every man that it should be."¹⁸⁶ This is the ground for humanity's trust in the historical Jesus. The person of Jesus brings the nearness of God in humanity's experience of fullness (*Ganzheit*) that is partially realized in the present. But Pannenberg adds that this wholeness

is promised and guaranteed by Jesus' message of the future Kingdom of God and by his resurrection from the dead. From this starting point even the situations, experiences and opportunities of our present life can be lived and experienced as a part of the whole which they cannot of themselves substantiate.¹⁸⁷

This is Pannenberg's theology of hope expressed in his proleptic anticipation theory. Faith in the risen Christ is living in tension between two unidentifiable realms—the present and the future.

Second, a confession that Jesus is Christ not only propounds a trust in Christ who is the mediator of fullness experienced fragmentarily, but it also implies "the bond between Christian faith and history and hopes of the people of Israel." Here Pannenberg stresses the historical foundation of the Christian religion in the history of salvation and of the messianic expectation which began in the Old Testament and was fulfilled in the person of the historical Jesus in the New Testament. This hope of future liberation is the basis upon which Pannenberg includes the history

¹⁸⁴ See "The Historicity of the Resurrection," *The Intellectuals Speak About God*, 263-64.

¹⁸⁵ *Apostles' Creed*, 58-59. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 65-67.]

¹⁸⁶ *Apostles' Creed*, 58. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 66.]

¹⁸⁷ *Apostles' Creed*, 59. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 67.]

of Israel which is integral for understanding the soteriological significance of the historical person of Jesus and his claim for authority.¹⁸⁸

4.2.3 *Jesus as the Son of God*

The title "Son of God," among the titles ascribed to Jesus, is primary in Pannenberg's treatment of the essential unity of Jesus with God. It not only expresses Jesus' material relation with God as a son, it likewise demonstrates the identity of God's divine essence in Jesus. Following this line of argument, Pannenberg puts forward the usage of the title "Son of God" as the key to understanding the preexistence of Jesus and his divinity. He considers all other instances in the history of Jesus where this title is used as secondary explanations to his divinity. In response to the claim that Jesus' divinity was a consequence of his baptism by John and his resurrection, Pannenberg maintains that the divine essence is inherent in Jesus and not installed upon him.¹⁸⁹ Pannenberg writes:

Jesus is the Son of God and thus himself God. Consequently, he is not to be thought of as a synthesis of the divine and the human. The unity of God and man in him is much more intensive than the concept of a synthesis can express. Nor does something new, a third-thing, result from a mixture of the two. Nor is the humanity absorbed in divinity so that it disappears. Precisely *in* his particular humanity Jesus is the Son of God.¹⁹⁰

The idea of God "sending his Son" (Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4) implies for Pannenberg a movement coming from above or "the descent" of the pre-existent Son of God.¹⁹¹ This aspect of Pannenberg's christology defends the divinity of Jesus against mediatory christologies (such as Arianism). Similarly it saves the humanity of Jesus from the christological theory of the docetists.

¹⁸⁸ *Apostles' Creed*, 59. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 67.]; "The Revelation of God in Jesus," 111-12.

¹⁸⁹ *JGM*, 133-34, 137-41. See Walter Künneth, *Theologie der Auferstehung* (Munich/Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch, 1968), 199-21, who rejects the notion of the divine pre-existence of Jesus before the resurrection.

¹⁹⁰ *JGM*, 342.

¹⁹¹ *JGM*, 153.

4.2.4 *The logos christology*

Like other eschatological titles conferred upon Jesus, Pannenberg raises doubt on how the gnostic logos is reduced to a revealer and not a creator. He likewise casts doubt on the Stoic logos which is conceived only as the law of cosmological order and its form.¹⁹² Pannenberg is also convinced of the Platonic explanation of the logos construed merely as a "middle being between the transcendent God and the world"¹⁹³ He accepts however the apologists' philosophical approach of blending the Platonic and the Stoic elements. The logos becomes the mediator between God and the world (Platonic) and the material form of God. The logos comes from God in the appearance of the historical Jesus (Stoic).¹⁹⁴

Of the available philosophical arguments for logos christology, Pannenberg considers Tatian's philosophical approach to be the most convincing. Tatian distinguished the *dynamis logike* (power of reason) which belongs to God's essence from *dynamis logou* (power of word) that comes from it. Applied christologically the *dynamis logike* is the unity of God while the *dynamis logou* is that which "has gone forth from it."¹⁹⁵ Pannenberg compares the distinction of the "thought from the thinker" to the distinction between the Father and the Son. He finds Tatian's concept of the 'self-unfolding of the one God' compelling in overcoming the "antithesis of unity (of origin) and multiplicity (of the appearances)" of the Godhead.

God distinguishes his logical power from himself in such a way that it remains at the same time united with him; thus begins the creation of the world, whose multiplicity is embraced by the one, transcendent God through the Logos in order to be present in the world in spite of his transcendence.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² For Pannenberg's comparative analysis between Gnosticism and Christian claims, see "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 150-51.

¹⁹³ *JGM*, 161.

¹⁹⁴ *JGM*, 161-62. For Pannenberg's philosophical discussion on the indistinguishable relationship between "appearance and essential" in connection with God's unity with the historical Jesus, see "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," *ThKG*, 134-35. For Pannenberg's philosophical discussion on the indistinguishable relationship between "appearance and essential" in connection with God's unity with the historical Jesus,

¹⁹⁵ *JGM*, 162-63.

¹⁹⁶ *JGM*, 163.

This makes the logos universal because it "permeates all creation."¹⁹⁷

While the apologists' logos christology approach dissolves the individualization of the Father, Son and the Spirit, it has not overcome the problem of the subordinate rank of the Son in comparison to the Father. The origin of the Son remains dependent upon the Father who has no beginning. Consequently this loosens the divine nature of the historical Jesus, in whom the "whole Logos ... appeared."¹⁹⁸

Although Pannenberg admits the value of the patristic logos christology in relation to the philosophical world-view of the time, this may not coincide with the current scientific understanding of the world and reality. It is for this reason that Pannenberg approaches the logos christology not in the classical way but through a theology of revelation.¹⁹⁹ He believes that the "unity of God is the presupposition of the concept of revelation and cannot be relinquished as a consequence of it."²⁰⁰ This moves Pannenberg to locate the fulfillment of the eschaton (the higher dimension of life than the earthly) in the historical Jesus.²⁰¹

4.2.5 *The "two-stage" christology*

Another strong feature of his christological argument is the interpolation of Jesus' title "Son of David" with "Son of God." This interpolation preserves the traditional confession of the two natures of Jesus. "This 'adoption' to be the Son of God was preceded by another stage, that was distinguished in a particular way, the Davidic sonship. As Son of David, Jesus at the same time had already been designated for the future reception of the honor of the divine Sonship."²⁰² The Davidic sonship of Jesus connects him to his human origin. Pannenberg dubs this interpolated and interdependent nature and function of Jesus' two titles "two-stage" christology based in Rom 1:3-4. As Pannenberg states, "Even before his resurrection Jesus was already set apart from the multitude of other men by the Davidic sonship."²⁰³

The two-stage christology clarifies the continuity between the pre-existent and the earthly Jesus, or between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus. Pannenberg's treatment of the "Son of

¹⁹⁷ *ST* 2: 292.

¹⁹⁸ See *JGM*, 163-65.

¹⁹⁹ *JGM*, 168-69.

²⁰⁰ *JGM*, 180.

²⁰¹ *JGM*, 171.

²⁰² *JGM*, 135. Pannenberg notes that his usage of the word "adoption" does not refer to Jesus' physical nature but to his function. *JGM*, 135.

²⁰³ *JGM*, 135.

God" and "Son of David" titles demonstrates the process of explaining historically the development of the christological formulation concerning the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. But the two aspects surrounding the nature of Jesus, though distinguished, are not separable, for they constitute the single existence of the historical Jesus.²⁰⁴ Pannenberg's consideration of the above titles provides an alternate explanation to a christology "from above" which can only become understandable when it is first explicated "from below." That is to say, if one begins with the historical Jesus and the historical development of the titles conferred to him, they will explicitly lead to Jesus' divine and glorified origin.

4.3 *Jesus' Structural Unity with the Godhead*

The nature of the relationship between God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit is undeniably an ongoing problem in the history of dogma. This issue has unleashed violent expulsion of proponents of christological theories other than the popular stand of the Church. Pannenberg revives this issue and attempts to unravel the mystery of Jesus' unity with God.

Pannenberg avoids as much as possible any metaphysical argument in defending the Christian religion or christological formulations. But in cases where it is difficult to discern a historical ground from christological formulations, Pannenberg admits that metaphysics can be useful if by resorting to it, christological statements become comprehensible.²⁰⁵ In this way he is able to coherently structure his position on Jesus' relationship with the Godhead. Pannenberg successfully and creatively fuses the christological tradition together to produce a "unitive Christology of essence."²⁰⁶

4.3.1 *Mode of Jesus' unity with God*

Pannenberg considers the problem of the Trinitarian concept not so much theologically as relationally and ontologically. This is most evident in the problem of unity against plurality or one versus many in explaining the Trinity. He begins by defending the position of patristic christology and his prolepsis theory in view of the mode

²⁰⁴ JGM, 155.

²⁰⁵ Pannenberg's treatment of the metaphysical nature of faith as a christological necessity is legitimate only when historical knowledge is an assumed given. Pannenberg gauges the usefulness of metaphysics or "thought of faith" (*Glaubensgedanken*) on its function to make the ground of faith (*Glaubensgrund*) accessible to historical investigation. "Insight and Faith," *BQTh* 2: 31 and n. 7; *Theo & Philo*, 43.

²⁰⁶ Hodgson, "Pannenberg on Jesus," 381.

of God's unity with Jesus. His thesis revolves within the issue of defining the nature of Jesus' indivisible unity with God understood as a "presence." Like his treatment of the idea of the resurrection from the dead, Pannenberg appropriates the Old Testament and Apocrypha in expounding the background of the Spirit subsisting in the symbolical titles of Son of Man, Son of God and Messiah in the New Testament. God's presence in Jesus contains a pneumatological content. Historically Pannenberg highlights the christological problems surrounding the natures of Jesus, divine and human in view of the presence of the Spirit in Jesus. This enables him to propose his theory of the modes of God's unity with Jesus in two categories, namely, substantial and self-revelational presence.²⁰⁷

4.3.1.1 *Substantial Presence*

Contrary to the adoptionistic theory of the second century, Pannenberg follows the Alexandrine patristic doctrine of incarnation which states: "God himself is fully and completely present in Jesus; Jesus Christ is not a mere man, but a divine person. Therefore whoever participates in Jesus participates in the life of God himself, in his immortal 'nature.'"²⁰⁸

For Pannenberg God is always presupposed in the historical Jesus. God's presence in Jesus is similarly God's appearance in him. That is why he accentuates the significance of the historical Jesus as the way to know God, since the historical Jesus concretizes the abstract concept of God. As such Pannenberg emphasizes the theological significance of God's complete unity with the historical Jesus. This position clarifies Pannenberg's method in defending the ostensible direct relationship between Jesus and God's substantial presence in Jesus. In proposing the theory of substantial presence, Pannenberg adheres to Paul's and Mark's concept of the "hidden epiphany of Jesus' divine Sonship in his actions" and to the Hellenistic understanding of the divine meaning of the word *kyrios*. The influence of these two sources is visible in the Johannine christology which affirms the indivisible relationship of God with Jesus as the logos. In other words, Pannenberg believes that God's presence in Jesus is neither an "off" and "on" presence as in the theory of adoptionism, nor is it a temporary presence. Rather it is the presence of the Spirit in Jesus, which is substantially preexistent since the Spirit is the Spirit of God himself.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ JGM, 116-21.

²⁰⁸ JGM, 121.

²⁰⁹ JGM, 172.

Furthermore Pannenberg does not equate the idea of "unity" with uniformity in the God-Jesus relation. He tries to avoid the weakness of modal christology by emphasizing the presence of distinction between God and Jesus in the Godhead. Such a distinction is illustrated in terms of the "Father and Son" relationship—an indelible contribution of the logos christology of the second century apologists to dogmatics.²¹⁰ Pannenberg's central argument in defense of this distinction is that

if Jesus' history and his person now belongs to the essence, to the divinity of God, *then the distinction that Jesus maintained between himself and the Father also belongs to the divinity of God.*²¹¹

In the light of this statement Pannenberg is skeptical of the classical logos christology approach in dealing with the anti-thesis between plurality and unity of the Godhead. This is visible particularly in the Johannine logos christology which fails to clearly distinguish the Creator from the Son of God in their oneness (Jn 1:1; 5:21ff., 30; 6:38; 10:30; 14:28).²¹²

This position opens the possibility for Pannenberg—following the patristic christological doctrine—to reject the mediator christology of Arius, the docetism of the Gnostics, the modalism of Sabellius and the symbolic christology of contemporary theologians like Tillich.²¹³

4.3.1.2 *Revelational Presence*

The revelational presence of God in Jesus is conceived by Pannenberg in terms of the substantial identity of Jesus' essence with God. This constitutes for Pannenberg the idea of revelation of God in Jesus. At this point Pannenberg values Barth's doctrines of the divinity of Jesus and of the Trinity in explicating the concept of God's revelation in Jesus. On the basis of this claim, Pannenberg states:

If God is revealed through Jesus Christ, then who and what God is becomes defined only by the Christ

²¹⁰ The logos christology maintains the differentiation of the individual uniqueness of the Son and the Father without losing their unity as a single God. *JGM*, 160.

²¹¹ *JGM*, 159.

²¹² *JGM*, 160-61.

²¹³ *JGM*, 123-26.

event. Then Jesus belongs to the definition of God and thus to his divinity, to his essence.²¹⁴

Here Pannenberg's notion of God's revelatory presence in the historical Jesus is insightful. He offers an alternative answer to the problem of the hiddenness of God. He shows how the abstract idea of God has been historicized in the fate of the historical Jesus who reveals a knowledge of God.²¹⁵ Thus Pannenberg cannot dispense the value of the Christ event, because it is the only "single revelation" in the self-revelation of God in history.²¹⁶ "Only because of Jesus' resurrection, namely, because this event is the beginning of the end facing all men, can one speak of God's revelation in Jesus Christ."²¹⁷

Pannenberg's main argument for the unity of Jesus and God lies on the salvific purpose of God for humanity which alone can be realized in the incarnation of the historical Jesus. Such a perfect unity is the ground upon which Christians should confess the Lordship of Christ. "This oneness implies that Jesus partakes of everything which belongs to the Godhead, including its almighty power."²¹⁸ Pannenberg interprets this unity in an equation of Jesus with God as the object of faith. Theologically it implies that an acceptance or rejection of Jesus is likewise an acceptance and rejection of God. Or simply expressed, a faith in Jesus is also a faith in God.²¹⁹ Obviously Pannenberg does not interpret such a unity monarchially. He argues for both the fundamental uniqueness of the godhead and its concrete manifestation in the historical Jesus.

4.3.2 *Mode of Jesus' unity with the Spirit*

A significant insight Pannenberg has developed concerning the Holy Spirit is the notion that the Spirit is an eschatological reality. Obviously this eschatological character of the Spirit has its roots in the Old Testament. He is consistent in keeping the continuity between the Jewish tradition and the new experience of the early Christians with the resurrected Jesus intact. Basically

²¹⁴ *JGM*, 130. This echoes Luther's statement that "God does not want to be known except through Christ; nor, according to John 1:18: can He be known any other way. Christ is the Offspring promised to Abraham; on Him God founded all His promises. Therefore Christ is alone the means, the life and the mirror through which we see God and known His will." *Commentary on Galatians*, Chap. 4: 8, 9: 396.

²¹⁵ "Dogmatic Theses," *RevH*, 142.

²¹⁶ *JGM*, 129-33.

²¹⁷ *JGM*, 129.

²¹⁸ *Apostles' Creed*, 124. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 132.]

²¹⁹ *Apostles' Creed*, 51. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 59.]

Pannenberg maintains that the Spirit is not necessarily associated with the source of knowledge as in Wisdom literature (Wis 7:22ff.) since the common manifestation of the Spirit described in the prophetic and apocalyptic Old Testament is that of being the ground and power of life.²²⁰

In stressing the Spirit as a power of life, Pannenberg is doubtless governed by the Hebrew view of the Spirit as *ruah* (breath)—the source of all living creation. Interpreted from the perspective of the Old Testament eschatological understanding of the Spirit, Pannenberg sees a direct correspondence of *ruah* with Paul's *pneuma* (Rom 1:4; 8:2, 11; cf. Pet 3:18)—a "life-creating Spirit." Of significant interest is the problem of interpreting the mode of the Spirit and its relationship with the historical Jesus, the make up of the Spirit and the question of whether the Spirit is a divine person or simply a power.

Pannenberg approaches this pneumatological problem in the light of Pauline christology. The Spirit and the resurrected Jesus are indivisible in their functional relations. The reality of the resurrection of Jesus shows the power and manifestation of the Spirit and a belief in it is consequently the work of the Spirit. As he puts it, "Everything that stands in relation to their reality of the resurrected Lord is filled with the power of life of the divine Spirit."²²¹ The Spirit is not only "the pledge of the Christian resurrection hope (2 Cor 1:22)," but the Spirit guarantees the unity of the community of believers in Christ as well. In virtue of this argument Pannenberg avoids any differentiation between the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit. He contends

If the Spirit who enters into the hearts of those who hear and believe with the message of Jesus' resurrection were not the Spirit of God himself, then the believer would have no true community with God through his message.²²²

The undifferentiated character between God and the Spirit logically heads to the conclusion that the Spirit is divine. Moreover since Jesus is made the Son of God through the Spirit, Christ and the Spirit are inseparable.²²³ And the fact that the Spirit is associated with the eschaton explains why Pannenberg associates the Spirit with the power that resurrects Jesus.

²²⁰ JGM, 169-70; "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 87-90.

²²¹ JGM, 172.

²²² JGM, 173.

²²³ JGM, 172.

The Holy Spirit is the source of people's knowledge and faith in confessing the lordship of Jesus. Therefore the historical Jesus is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Conversely the Holy Spirit is dependent upon Jesus because it is only through the person of Jesus confessed as the "Son of God" that the Spirit is recognized as the Spirit of God, hence divine.²²⁴ This opens up the possibility for Pannenberg to appeal to Paul's texts where the personal character of the Spirit is identified with Jesus. For instance, the Second Adam is also the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:45b) or "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3: 17; cf. Rom 8:9f.). Here Pannenberg wants to point out that the identification between the resurrected Jesus and the Spirit is influenced by the impact of Jesus' resurrection (and ascension) upon the early Christians coupled with their expectation on Jesus' imminent Parousia. But the delay of the second coming of Jesus consequently provides the explanation for the evolution of the difference and independence of the Spirit from Jesus.²²⁵

Indeed Pannenberg recognizes the difficulty of providing a comprehensible explanation of the godhead. Yet the weight of Pannenberg's Trinitarian structure lies in the anthropological significance of the "reciprocity of divine persons" or "reciprocal self-dedication" approach.²²⁶ He states this clearly in the following excerpt:

The dedication of the Son to men constitutes the content of this confession. Jesus is dedicated to men in obedience to the will of the Father who invites all men to trust in him, so that in Jesus' dedication to his mission the love of the Father to men as his children has appeared. Correspondingly, the Holy Spirit mediates not only participation in Jesus through dedication to him, but also the community of the Son—and of the sons—with the Father. In the vital movement of such reciprocal dedication, the unity of

²²⁴ *JGM*, 174-75. Pannenberg locates the criterion of the objectivity of God in the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ as well. "Through Jesus, the Spirit opens the way to community with God. Therefore, the Spirit of Christ demonstrates himself as the Spirit of the community with God." *JGM*, 176.

²²⁵ *JGM*, 178-79.

²²⁶ Pannenberg explains: "The God who reveals himself is essentially person. He shows himself to be such in his revelation as Father in relation to the Son, who as the Son of the Father belongs indissolubly to the divinity of God. Thus the personality of the divine essence is also the presupposition for the differentiation of persons within the divinity. Here the Father, Son, and Spirit confront one another as three distinguished subjects, three Persons." *JGM*, 182.

Father, Son, and Spirit consummates itself in the historical process of the revelatory event.²²⁷

By emphasizing the notion of reciprocity Pannenberg tries to minimize the subordination theory of the logos but maximizes the Platonic theory. Similarly the concept of "self-dedication" in the unity of the Trinity reduces the accent of modalistic theory but increases the value of the classical logos christology. In this way Pannenberg arrives at a revised philosophical version of the classical logos christology by stressing the concrete structure of the correlative relationship between the historical Jesus and the Godhead.

5. The Dialogical Dimension of the History of Jesus to Contemporary Time

In his essay, "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," Pannenberg cites the imperative relevance of the historical Jesus to the world as God's self-revelation and concludes with these statements:

Theology may not and must not withdraw from the world to an exclusive supernatural realm accessible only by that suspect 'decision' of faith, but must understand Jesus in the context of the world and understand all things from Jesus and to him. Then theology will understand the world and God's world, history as the field of his action, and Jesus as his revelation.²²⁸

This statement shows the obligatory role of Jesus' person in God's self-disclosure. Pannenberg believes that the ideal image of true humanity is not a idealistic human projection onto Jesus. Rather Jesus' nature as a true man is an outright expression of his character demonstrable in the particularity of his own history.²²⁹ In Jesus' history, humanity's whole history is contained. And human history finds its significance in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

²²⁷ *JGM*, 183. Pannenberg admits that such reciprocal concept of the Trinity was also reflected in the patristic logos christology. However the influence of philosophical "abstract theism" of the period overshadows the reciprocal relations of the Godhead. *JGM*, 183.

²²⁸ "The Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 133; *JGM*, 191.

²²⁹ *JGM*, 200-204.

5.1 *God's Kingdom and Jesus' Proclamation: a Fused Phenomenon*

Pannenberg stresses, at one and the same time, the nearness of the Kingdom of God and the historical unity of God with Jesus. He states:

The starting point of the whole conduct of Jesus ... was the proclamation that the reign of God, which the Jews had been praying for and expecting before the appearance of Jesus, was now near.²³⁰

The finality of Jesus' unity with God has an encompassing dimension in Pannenberg's theology of the kingdom of God. This is evident in Pannenberg's refusal to separate the message of Jesus from the person of Jesus in order to avoid the problem of distinguishing fact from meaning in the proclamation of God's reign. This is clear in the following:

Rejection of Jesus, who lived only to announce the reign of God, necessarily meant the rejection of God's nearness itself. And where Jesus himself was accepted, that meant that his message was accepted, too. He became one with his message by the exclusive concern for God's nearness that he demanded of men. For him the only important concern in each man's life was orientation toward God whose coming was near. Jesus realized that with the acceptance or rejection of the reign of God as the guiding principle of one's life everything is decided, for better or for worse.²³¹

By emphasizing the embodiment of the reign of God in the person and message of Jesus, Pannenberg shows the affinity of Jesus' activities with Jewish apocalypticism. He maintains that the Jesus tradition has been fashioned by the eschatological anticipation upon which the promise of an eschatological hope is developed. But Jesus modifies it by emphasizing the impact of its imminence upon the present. Pannenberg notes the decisiveness of the message and person of Jesus as the criterion of salvation in contrast to the Jewish emphasis on the primacy of the law.²³² By fusing the future and imminent characteristics of the Kingdom of

²³⁰ "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 103.

²³¹ "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 102-3.

²³² *Apostles' Creed*, 50-51. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 58-59.]; "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 111-13.

God, Pannenberg sees the inextricable interconnection of both present and future events in Jesus' message. Hence he considers Jesus "only a forerunner" of the future. The message of the historical Jesus has a preliminary content and a futuristic accent which allows Pannenberg to recognize the ultimacy of the future.²³³ In Jesus' preaching and person the Jewish future hope of the Kingdom of God becomes present and is no longer an "appendix" to Jewish pietism. Therefore for Pannenberg the appearance of Jesus provides an impetus for the Jews in rethinking and transforming the Jewish concept of God and eschatological expectation.²³⁴

5.1.1 *The Kingdom of God as the power of the future in the present*

Why is it important for Pannenberg to defend the power of the future in the present? Or why is history to be understood in terms of the future? Can the future account for objectivity that it can claim finality for itself?

In contrast to Whitehead, Pannenberg assumes that the future is not a product of a process of events unfolding in the course of history nor is it the outcome of progressive human endeavors. He situates the future in the present by the underlying assumption of the finality of the future coming of the Kingdom of God manifested in the ministry of the historical Jesus. Pannenberg assumes that the anticipatory element is an intrinsic aspect of Jesus' message and is particularly visible in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God.²³⁵ Unlike Bultmann, Pannenberg finds existential value in the reality of the future. "The future [has] an imperative claim upon the present, alerting all men to the urgency and exclusiveness of seeking first the Kingdom of God. As this message is proclaimed and accepted, God's rule is present and we can even now glimpse his future glory."²³⁶ Thus, for

²³³ "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 126.

²³⁴ This point carries important weight for Pannenberg in demonstrating the continuity of Jesus with the Hellenistic world on the other hand. He holds that for the Greeks, the manifestation of the nearness of the Kingdom of God in the historical Jesus evokes a transformation of the philosophical inquiry and abstract categorization of the idea of a divine without destroying in the process the Hellenistic structure of inquiry. The presence of the Kingdom of God in Jesus gives the Greeks a concrete understanding in their search for the known God. "Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 104-9.

²³⁵ "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 174-76.

²³⁶ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 54. Bracket mine.

Pannenberg "the futurity of the Reign of God became a power determining the present."²³⁷

Pannenberg constructs his theology of the Kingdom of God in view of the problem prevalent in the old liberal theology and evident in Marxist humanistic programs. That is, that the concept of the coming of the Kingdom of God can be the source of optimism for human endeavors for ultimacy. It is also against this background why Pannenberg is reluctant to accept the apologetic praxis of liberation theology. In this regard his concept of the Kingdom is a stop gap against the tendency to absolutize and idealize all present efforts.²³⁸ Yet by accentuating the eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God Pannenberg does not advocate escapism from the issues of the society. Rather he wants to stress the overt ethical impact and relevance of the future Kingdom in the present. Consequently the seemingly humanistic interpretation of the present reality of the Kingdom of God can be neutralized. This is a startling contrast. The futurity of the Kingdom does not mean powerlessness in the present nor does it mean "powerless transcendence but an urgent and imminent future." As Pannenberg explains further:

This futurity of the Kingdom opens ever-new possibilities for action while still denying any human institution the glory of perfection that might warrant its making an absolute claim on the obedience of individuals. The futurity of the future guards the freedom of individual from the power of social institutions while, at the same time, enabling the individual to commit himself to the society.²³⁹

Pannenberg does not overlook the fact that the Kingdom of God also constitutes God's wrath and does not ignore the presence of sin in society.²⁴⁰ While he accepts that the eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God does not provide a specific program of action for structural changes in society, Pannenberg is convinced that it can influence and shape particular programs for particular contexts. He believes structurally

²³⁷ "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," *ThKG*, 133, 136; "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 178.

²³⁸ "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 115-16.

²³⁹ "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 115.

²⁴⁰ Here Pannenberg quotes H. Richard Niebuhr, thus, 'A God without wrath brought men without sin into the kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.' "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 115.

that "from such a future spring impulses for relevant criticism and change toward the yet fuller future of freedom, peace, and community life marked by mutual respect and care of its members."²⁴¹ As a general principle Pannenberg considers the future character of the Kingdom of God to be an impetus for human possibilities. The kingdom of God allows humanity to be creative in its preliminary endeavors; it is possible for the present to give a foretaste of future eschatology.²⁴²

Moreover Pannenberg's defense of the future accent of God's rule is dominated by his understanding of humanity's basic anxiety of its own present existence. He shows how such anxiety is rooted in the indeterminateness of the future events. Pannenberg writes:

The more ambiguous the future to which we look forward, the stronger is our impression to its lively indefiniteness, of its unpredictability. Because the future has not yet been decided upon, we attach to it the basic anxiety of existence. Human beings will never overcome this anxiety completely. ... Yet when events which we anticipated in anxiety and/or hope do occur, the ambiguity of the impending future congeals into finite and definite fact. In every event the infinite future separates itself from the finite events which until then had been hidden in this future but are now released into existence.²⁴³

For Pannenberg this implies that the future has an embracing influence upon the present and is not an empty category of events. Rather the future has a unifying function upon human existence and historical events. Moreover it discloses the contingency of events and discredits any claim for absolutism.²⁴⁴ Such presupposition becomes all-important to Pannenberg's notion of the unity of history which explains Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God. As Pannenberg states:

The notion of the Kingdom of God evokes a vision of the unity of each being and the unity of the whole world as flowing from the future. Far from creation being at one end of the time spectrum and eschatology at the other, creation and eschatology

²⁴¹ "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 115.

²⁴² "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 116-17.

²⁴³ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 59.

²⁴⁴ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 56-59.

are partners in the formation of reality. The future decides the specific meaning, the essence, of everything by revealing what it really was and is. At present a being is 'something,' a unity in itself, only by anticipation of its unifying future. The future interprets the present and the past; all other interpretations are helpful only to the degree that they anticipate the future.²⁴⁵

In his theology of the kingdom of God, Pannenberg intends to invert the emphasis of the dialectical theologians like Bultmann and Barth who denigrate the futurity of Jesus' eschatological message by interpreting the words of Jesus in view of the present reality of the Kingdom of God. Pannenberg bases his christology on the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God which is present in the message and person of the historical Jesus. The imminent Kingdom does not mean ultimately present. It is both temporarily extant and eschatologically future oriented.²⁴⁶ In short Pannenberg's defense of the dialectical relation of the future and present power of the Kingdom of God explains his point on the "coming-to-appearance of God in Jesus"—an appearance which is irreversible.²⁴⁷

5.2 *The Kingdom of God and the Social Context*

Pannenberg cites at length the critique of Karl Jaspers against the utopic character of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God which resulted in the extreme passive attitude of nascent Christianity towards society and politics.²⁴⁸ But Pannenberg's argument for the universal validity of Jesus' message lies not in the passivity of Christendom but in its creativity. Christendom continued to survive in a political environment where it was hardly possible for the Christian minority to influence formally and legally the political system of monarchies. The socio-political structure and situations did not allow the early Christians and even Jesus himself to exercise active political responsibility in the "construction of the world" as compared to today. Yet as Pannenberg argues quoting von Campenhausen:

Even though ... there is no such thing as a particular Christian program for structuring the world, the

²⁴⁵ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 60.

²⁴⁶ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 52-54.

²⁴⁷ "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," *ThKG*, 134; "On Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," *BQTh* 1: 178-80.

²⁴⁸ *JGM*, 236-39.

earliest Christianity contains a tendency of the will and a readiness that are valid under all circumstances, but that are expressed in different ways according to particular circumstances.²⁴⁹

Certainly Pannenberg recognizes the value of understanding the context as a precondition to any attempt to construct a program for Christian social participation. But he is reluctant to make a direct literal correspondence between Jesus' teachings and any context. The reason is that Jesus' world and time are different from the proceeding ages. "When one dismisses the situational differences and then follows Jesus' teachings or example ever so literally, one will certainly have done something completely different from that which Jesus had in mind."²⁵⁰

The same is true with the apocalyptic expectation of Jesus and his disciples. Pannenberg believes that the question of the imminent expectation of the Kingdom of God is no longer relevant to modern Christians as in the pre-Easter time of Jesus. This is because such expectation has already been fulfilled in Jesus' own resurrection.²⁵¹ Nevertheless the universal significance of the imminent expectation remains plausible insofar as it confronts

men in every situation with that which is always the ultimate destiny of man, even though it is often hidden by many other things in everyday life. It confronts men with the coming Kingdom of God, which is nothing else than the nearness of the Creator for whom man inquires in the openness of his existence.²⁵²

5.2.1 *The Kingdom of God and the criterion of love*

The indivisible relationship between God and the historical Jesus becomes central for Pannenberg in seeking for the criterion of love in humanity's quest for God and life's meaning.²⁵³ God's love is embodied in the coming of the Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth in his mission. This makes love concrete and is not reducible to pure romanticism.

Pannenberg argues that the radicality of Jesus' view of love is expressed in Jesus' call for people to love and forgive one's

²⁴⁹ *JGM*, 239. Here Pannenberg appeals to von Campenhausen's position in defense of the apolitical stance of the primitive Christianity against Jaspers' criticisms. See *JGM*, 237-39.

²⁵⁰ *JGM*, 240.

²⁵¹ *JGM*, 242-43.

²⁵² *JGM*, 243.

²⁵³ "The Revelation of God in Jesus," *Theology as History*, 101-2.

neighbors unconditionally.²⁵⁴ Jesus' love is "the power imparted to the hearer by the message of forgiveness, by the promise of eschatological salvation, *equipping him in turn in concrete situations to make the future possible for the neighbor in need of such assistance.*"²⁵⁵ Such a creative love through forgiveness manifests the power of the coming Kingdom and opens the possibility to a new life.²⁵⁶ By connecting forgiveness with the promise of salvation which the historical Jesus reveals Pannenberg injects a proleptic element in both concepts. This leads him to an eschatological understanding of forgiveness and love which characterize a forgiving and a loving human community.²⁵⁷ Pannenberg writes:

Love grants *new* existence in spite of the self-asserting arrogance of that which already is. In love we recognize the intrinsic dynamic at work in the eventuating of contingent events from the future and releasing them in the process of time.²⁵⁸

Love as power is not conceived as a commandment but as the effect of an unconditional love in creating a human community.²⁵⁹ In this connection Pannenberg argues that one implication of Jesus' message and act of love to social context is its link with the notion of justice. Love understood as justice does not mean utopia, in the sense of positive idealism. Nor is Jesus' concept of love identifiable with the "intensification of the law." Love and justice are then constitutive in the realization of community life. Love is the "origin of positive legislation, not of an ideal natural law but of the creation of new forms of justice appropriate to a respective situation."²⁶⁰ Pannenberg acknowledges that justice is presupposed by the concept of love

²⁵⁴ *Apostles' Creed*, 52. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 60.]

²⁵⁵ *JGM*, 233-34. Italics mine.

²⁵⁶ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 64-65. "Zur Theologie des Rechts," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 7 (1963): 20-23.

²⁵⁷ *JGM*, 232-33. Similarly salvation and action are inseparable as described in the salt and lamp metaphors (Matt 5:13-16) or in the parable of the pounds (Lk 19:11-27).

²⁵⁸ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 65. Here Pannenberg connects the work of creative love with the creation and does not hesitate to declare that God's love "as the origin of all reality does not violate scientific descriptions of natural processes." "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 67, 70.

²⁵⁹ *Apostles' Creed*, 52. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 60.]

²⁶⁰ *JGM*, 234.

since love is the accent of Jesus' preachings.²⁶¹ Furthermore the dynamics of God's love is not only fair, in the sense that it does not favor anybody. It has also a creative unifying nature. It seeks for the integration of the whole humanity in expressing the motif of the coming Kingdom of God.²⁶² This is Pannenberg's assumption in his argument for the need for specific criterion of God's love in the world and for locating the presence of the Kingdom of God in society.²⁶³

5.3 *Jesus and the Church*

Pannenberg recognizes the indivisible link between ecclesiology and christology in relation to the encompassing power of the Kingdom of God. He emphasizes the importance of the "praxis of confession" of the lordship of Christ which entails faith and love in the God of the whole creation.²⁶⁴ Thus he maintains the indispensability of christology for a genuine theology of the church.

Over and above the conventional notion of the church as a religious community bound by a common faith or as a "communion with Christ," the church is linked to Jesus' title, "Christ," and Jesus' service to the cause of the coming Kingdom of God:

Jesus' whole ministry was determined by his proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God, and the title, 'Christ' refers to the vicarious execution of God's own rule. Therefore, communion with Christ is identical with one's dedication to the Kingdom of God as the future of the world.²⁶⁵

Two significant things are worth noting in the above statements. The first deals with the relational problem between the church and the Kingdom of God. The second focuses on the role of the church as a witness to Christ's presence in the world.

5.3.1 *Christ's Kingdom and the church*

Pannenberg clearly includes an ethical factor in his ecclesiology. This is most visible in his historical and theological analysis of the inseparable relation between the church and the Kingdom of God. He rightly observes that starting from the church

²⁶¹ *JGM*, 234. See Pannenberg's essay, "Zur Theologie des Rechts," *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 7 (1963): 20-23.

²⁶² "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 118.

²⁶³ "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," *ThKG*, 111-17.

²⁶⁴ *Apostles' Creed*, 126-27. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 134-35.]

²⁶⁵ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 76.

fathers, through the scholastics up to Luther, the distinction between the relation between the church and the Kingdom of God has been very fine. In fact both were often identified with each other.²⁶⁶ In contrast Pannenberg, like other modern scholars, finds no logic in confusing the church with the Kingdom of God or in reducing the church to a superpower institution garbed with indispensable power. Although he believes that the church is necessary for the Kingdom of God, he is convinced that "the Kingdom of God is not the church" or vice versa.²⁶⁷

The differences between the church and the Kingdom lie in the provisional character of the former as an institution and in the timelessness of the latter as God's reign.²⁶⁸ Pannenberg clarifies his point further by turning to the theological interpretation and exegetical problem surrounding the identification of the church with "Christ's Kingdom." He cites for instance the interdependency of the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of God:

Christ's rule is nothing else than the preparing of the way for the Kingdom of God. Where Christ's [kingdom] rules, the Kingdom of God is already dawning.²⁶⁹

Elsewhere he states:

Christ points the Church toward the Kingdom of God that is beyond the Church. To the degree that the Church follows his pointing and heeds his reminder, the Kingdom of God will manifest itself through the Church.²⁷⁰

Through the church's kerygmatic task the Kingdom of God is announced to the whole world. This puts the church on an unequal

²⁶⁶ *ST 3*: 33-34. [*STh*, 3: 47.] Pannenberg cites Luther's *Von weltliche Obrigkeit* (1523), *WA* 11, 251. (The Kingdom of God) 262, (The Kingdom of God under Christ), 252-53, 249. Luther's sermon on 25.10.1522 (*WA* 10/III: 379-385). For a fuller discussion of the historical development of the idea of the church and its identification with the Kingdom of God, see *ST 3*: 27-38.

²⁶⁷ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 76; *JGM*, 373-74. Aside from the extreme denominationalism of other Protestant churches, Pannenberg likewise traces the root of modern schism in Christendom to the misuse of church authority exercised in the lordship of office-bearers and not in the lordship of God and of Christ. See *The Church*.

²⁶⁸ "Theology and the Kingdom of God," *ThKG*, 78.

²⁶⁹ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 77; *Apostles' Creed*, 125. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 133.]

²⁷⁰ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 77.

level with the Kingdom of God.²⁷¹ It is the object of the Kingdom of God upon which the Kingdom of God is manifested. As such the church exists for the Kingdom. It witnesses to the Kingdom of God in the contemporary world. Following Kant, Pannenberg holds that the church as a community of faith is the representative of the Kingdom of God albeit not identical with it.²⁷² Pannenberg dubs it the "sign" (*Zeichen*) of the Kingdom of God and its instrument in the world but never its ultimate duplicate.²⁷³ Hence it remains only as "an interim community."²⁷⁴

An essential aspect in Pannenberg's ecclesiology is his inclusion of the anticipatory element in the essence of the church.²⁷⁵ This carries important weight in Pannenberg's dialogue with liberation theology.

But in what way can the church be the sign of the eschatological Kingdom in its earthly existence? Here Pannenberg sees the relationship between the historical Jesus and God as an essential point of reference for distinguishing the structural from the eschatological character of a church. "Jesus in his earthly proclamation humbly distinguished himself from the Father and the future of the Kingdom of God."²⁷⁶ So it is for the church.

The church must distinguish itself from the future fellowship of men and women in the Kingdom of God by which its saving future is already present for the people in their own day. If the church fails to make this distinction clearly, then it arrogates to itself the finality and glory of the kingdom, but by the poverty and all too human character of its own life it also makes the Christian hope incredible.²⁷⁷

In this regard the church through its liturgy can make known the contemporary presence of the Kingdom of God and can also influence even the state's concept of social order.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ *Apostles' Creed*, 126. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 133-34.]

²⁷² ST 3: 34. Cf. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 111-19.

²⁷³ ST 3: 31. But Pannenberg sees a correlation between the church and the Old Testament concept of the "people of God." ST 3: 30-31.

²⁷⁴ Hans Schwarz, *On the Way to the Future: A Christian View of Eschatology in the Light of Current Trends in Religion, Philosophy and Science*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 63.

²⁷⁵ ST 3: 31-32, 46.

²⁷⁶ ST 3: 32.

²⁷⁷ ST 3: 32.

²⁷⁸ ST 3: 37, 56-57.

5.3.2 *The church and its tasks*

In his treatment of the role of the church in a secular world, Pannenberg begins by recognizing the validity of the Marxist criticism against the "otherworldliness" of the church.²⁷⁹ But his knowledge of the history of Marxism leads Pannenberg to contradict the Marxist idealization of the humanistic approach and the denigration of God in the ultimate realization of full humanity. He emphasizes that the weakness of any idealization of anthropology as human attempts in the world remain within the boundary of the preliminary. Beyond that and the concern for the Kingdom of God, Pannenberg considers all phenomenologies and efforts illegitimate. It is against the absolutizing tendency of Marxism that Pannenberg finds logic to the preliminary role played by the church in witnessing to the universal significance of the Kingdom of God in history in and through the message and life of the historical Jesus.²⁸⁰ He cites the two-fold task of the church in the secular world:

[Negatively] the Church has the task of demythologizing the political myths of a given time and of sobering up those who become drunk on their possession of power. [Positively] the Church helps to stir the imagination for social action and to inspire the visions of social change.²⁸¹

These missiological functions of the church deserve special attention. First Pannenberg does not minimize the important role of the church in the world. In fact he demands that the church play a critical function in society. He accentuates this point in his statement, "When this critical witness is abandoned, the Church becomes superfluous."²⁸²

Second, the ecclesiological function avoids any radical differentiation between the Kingdom of God and society. As Pannenberg puts it,

We are not called to choose between concern for the Kingdom and concern for society. Rather, in concern

²⁷⁹ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 81-82, 84.

²⁸⁰ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 82-84. Cf. Hans Schwarz, *Responsible Faith: A Christian Theology in the Light of 20th-Century Questions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1986), 327-31; Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why is Communism so Evil?," *The World Crisis and American Responsibility*, ed. Ernest W. Lefever (New York: Association, 1958), 49-60.

²⁸¹ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 85. Brackets mine.

²⁸² "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 83. Cf. Schwarz, *Responsible Faith*, 323-24.

for society we are concerned for its end and destiny, namely, for the Kingdom of God. To act for the sake of the Kingdom is to act for the sake of society, and, in so doing, we act to the benefit of the Church.²⁸³

In this respect Pannenberg has reason to argue that the church should engage in social activities that promote human dignity and peace. A church, if it is to be truly a symbolic presence of Kingdom of God in the world, cannot ignore its participation in the "community of peace and justice." Yet Pannenberg looks at the church's significance in the world not as an absolute support for political movements. Political powers are volatile as evidenced in the transfer of power from one human authority to another which cannot ensure peace and righteousness in society. For Pannenberg the church can overcome this dilemma by basing its tasks solely on the lordship of God and of Christ. In this way the church can become "the symbol and instrument of the unity of mankind."²⁸⁴

Nor is the function of the church narrowed down to purely social welfare or educational activities like administering care centers, hospitals, schools and others which is no less than "a substitute for the political community." Undoubtedly Pannenberg does not undermine the value of such activities. Yet they are only "subsidiary and temporary." The major "irreplaceable" social contribution of the church in society is "the personal integration of human life by confronting man with the ultimate mystery of life, with the eternal God and his purpose in history."²⁸⁵

Pannenberg consistently maintains that the full completion of the Kingdom of God cannot be ushered in by human efforts. It belongs solely to God. But for Pannenberg this does not suggest human pessimism or resignation from the contemporary social and political issues, since it is God alone who can bring the Kingdom of God into its fullness. Rather Pannenberg asserts that the church as an "anticipatory sign" of the Kingdom of God should continue to work for justice and peace for each other and not preoccupy itself by simply waiting for the second coming of Christ. The church,

²⁸³ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 84.

²⁸⁴ *The Church*, 20. In this book, Pannenberg strongly stresses the necessity of Christian unity if the church were to become the "sign and instrument of the unity of mankind"—the phraseology he borrows from the Second Vatican Council and the 1968 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala. Cf. George W. Weber, "Signs of the Kingdom, Luke 7:18-23," *Signs of the Kingdom in the Secular City*, ed. Helen Ujvarosy and compiled by David J. Frenchak and Clinton E. Stockwell (Chicago: Covenant, 1984), 25-29.

²⁸⁵ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 91.

which is conscious of its character as the sign of the Kingdom, has already made the Kingdom of God present by participating in Christ.²⁸⁶ This places the church on its ontological level in the Kingdom of God, thereby eradicating their division.

By stressing the social responsibilities of the church as an expression of its dedication to the Kingdom of God or as a symbol of the Kingdom in the present, Pannenberg provides a distinct identity of the church as an institution in society. The church not only reminds society of its provisionality, it manifests the impact of the future Kingdom of God in all dimensions of the present life as well.²⁸⁷ It allows humanity to participate in the experience of the fullness of life, like the hope for future salvation in a preliminary way.²⁸⁸

It is obvious that Pannenberg advocates political ecclesiology by stressing the church's social and political responsibility outside itself. These ecclesiastical activities are important if the church is to carry out its task of concretizing the presence of the Kingdom in the world. But as a sign of the Kingdom of God, the church can neither be an end to itself nor even the means of salvation. Only God can bring about the ultimate fulfillment of the eschatological Kingdom of God.²⁸⁹

Here Pannenberg's theology of the Kingdom of God limits the radicalism of his political theology within the boundary of the Christian tradition. Thus he rejects any advocacy for violent revolution as a means to change society or for the purely "this-worldly" concerns of liberation theology.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ ST 3: 42-44, 52. That is what faith in Jesus means—a unity with Jesus. In this unity humanity shares both the cross of Jesus and his resurrection celebrated in the eucharistic meal. "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 88.

²⁸⁷ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 90, 92. In the same way, Pannenberg does not overlook the fact that the church exists also in its temporariness. As such the church should be self-critical if it is to serve its tasks in the modern world. For Pannenberg the most pressing need of change is however the authoritarian structure of ecclesiology. See "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 93-101.

²⁸⁸ "The Kingdom of God and the Church," *ThKG*, 86. *Apostles' Creed*, 126-27. [*Glaubensbekenntnis*, 134-35.]

²⁸⁹ ST 3: 45, 48, 55. Here Pannenberg expresses his disagreement with the pluralizing tendency of the World Council of Churches Assembly at Uppsala in 1968 in the name of "political secularism." ST 3: 47-48.

²⁹⁰ *Christianity in a Secularized World*, 55-56.

6. Evaluation and Conclusion

Central in Pannenberg's historical approach to christology is his stress on the provisionality of the present. The defining factor of this provisionality is the finality of the future. The future is not an expected event in a distant tomorrow, rather it can be gleaned from the particularity of the event of Jesus' resurrection. In Jesus' resurrection, the present and the future meet one another and the eternal and temporal converge. In relation to the yearning of humanity for immortality the Easter event is a history of the future that is both already fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled. The story of Easter becomes then the axis of history.²⁹¹ This is the overarching aspect in Pannenberg's theory of proleptic anticipation. In this way, the theory of proleptic anticipation is inseparable from his theology of resurrection.

One thing which is confusing in Pannenberg's application of the theory of proleptic anticipation to his christology is the undefined distinction between apocalypticism and his theology of resurrection. He seems to interweave the notion of apocalypticism into the sphere of present history.²⁹² The consequence of such forging is, C.B. McCullagh notes, that Pannenberg's historical argument for the apocalyptic interpretation of the resurrection is unconvincing. This is due to his reluctance to distinguish between the event and its interpretation. As a result Pannenberg has only proposed an assertion but not an argument of the resurrection event.²⁹³

Moreover Pannenberg's proleptic theory leads him to diminish the impact of Jesus' prophetic preaching to the present. Liberation theologians criticize Pannenberg for almost entirely excluding the theology of the cross from his christology in favor of his theology of the resurrection. Pannenberg avoids specifics in explaining how the resurrection of Jesus can empower people in their quests for meaning. He does not explain the integrative impact of the social aspect of apocalyptic themes like the reign of justice and peace upon the present.²⁹⁴ Pannenberg acknowledges this weakness.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ ST 1:247.

²⁹² See Robert North, "Pannenberg's Historicizing Exegesis," *Heythrop Journal* 12 (1971): 396-99.

²⁹³ C.B. McCullagh, "The Possibility of an Historical Basis for Christian Theology," *Theology* 74 (1971): 516. Cf. Hodgson, "Pannenberg on Jesus," 377.

²⁹⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr. "Pannenberg and Process Theology," *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis. Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 73. Sobrino, *Christology*, 26-28; James H.

His conflict with liberation theology is however clear since what is important for Pannenberg, in keeping with his apologetic interest, is how to defend the truth of faith in the historical Jesus and the universal purpose of God's redeeming work in him. Thus his historical Jesus transcends the concerns of liberation theology for praxis and specifics.²⁹⁶ In addition to that Pannenberg remains suspicious of the political programs of liberation theology and its tendency to reduce theology to ideology. His anti-Marxist or anti-liberal theology attitude reflects his distrust in any human effort or program geared towards bringing about ultimate change in the world.²⁹⁷

As a Christian rationalist, Pannenberg engages in conversation with historians. His position is guided by the premise that all methods of verification whether historical or theological lie on the level of provisionality. This is the reason why he begins with history and not with faith in his christology even if he speaks a different language of verification than historians.²⁹⁸ Yet for Pannenberg this is the only way to demonstrate the historicity of the Christian faith: to make the historical Jesus and the claims of faith in Christ vulnerable to examination and critique. In doing so, Pannenberg is keenly aware that his insistence on history may threaten the foundation of faith and put the Christian faith under siege.²⁹⁹ But he is certain that historical research cannot establish grounds to discredit the historical claims of the Christian faith. The historical verifiability of the resurrection of Jesus and its impact upon the early Christians which gave impetus for the emergence of the church are solid proofs that the Christian faith is historical.³⁰⁰

Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1975, 121-22; Juan Luis Segundo, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics: Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985), 30.

²⁹⁵ "Response to My American Friends," *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 331.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 136.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Ted Peters, "Pannenberg's Eschatological Ethics," *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 256-64. Richard John Neuhaus, "Theology for Church and Polis," *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 231-32.

²⁹⁸ So similarly E. Frank Tupper, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 159 n. 87, who notes that Pannenberg has a broader view of proof defined as "argument which appeals to a reasonable judgment and makes possible at least a provisional decision between contrasting assertions." See *JGM*, 110 n. 117.

²⁹⁹ "Response to Discussion," *TaH*, 273-74.

³⁰⁰ See 1.1.1 The Historical Jesus and the Question of Truth.

Certainly Pannenberg's approach to the historical Jesus may not be compelling enough to convince a historian. His conflict with historians who remain faithful to the rigidity of historical-critical standard is not surprising. On one hand, historians cannot find any strong reason for Pannenberg's inclusion of the theological view of history in the standard of historical-critical enterprise.³⁰¹ On the other hand, Pannenberg accuses historians of holding a narrow historical-critical standard in understanding reality by excluding theological criterion from their method. Historians are right in that future historical discoveries about the historical Jesus are a possibility and welcomed for the interest of finding additional knowledge. Pannenberg is right in that the future is a predecided event in the resurrection of Jesus and no further fundamental knowledge can ever alter the certainty of faith in the history of Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God in history.

On the whole Pannenberg's christological system is admirable in that he does not seek to shelter the life of the historical Jesus from any historical criticism. Pannenberg's primary interest in the anthropological approach to christology is shown clearly in the direction he takes in defense of the historical humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. His view in this respect is more influenced by the universal significance of the historical Jesus than by pure dogmatic concerns. He handles the issue of Jesus' universality in terms of the soteriological power of Jesus' humanity revealed in his deeds and destiny.

In view of the complexity of Pannenberg's anthropological approach to christology, Ted Peters may be right in thinking that Pannenberg's christology is significant only to specialists in theology and philosophy.³⁰² Yet this does not imply that another christological formulation like "christology from above" is easier to explain to non-specialists than Pannenberg's "christology from below." Christology and theology inevitably need metaphysics.³⁰³

³⁰¹ McKenzie notes that by Pannenberg's insistence on the unity between "natural" and "revealed" theologies, he eventually transcends the rational Lutheran theologians of the seventeenth century who separated both. *Wolfhart Pannenberg and Religious Philosophy*, 14.

³⁰² Ted Peters notes that although Pannenberg's views contained in *What is Man* were broadcast over the North German Radio Network in the winter of 1961-62, his audience was still "the scholarly elite of the German tradition of biblically oriented theology." Truth in History," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975): 56; Ted Peters, "Wolfhart Pannenberg," *A New Handbook of Christian Theologians*, eds. Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 373.

³⁰³ See Pannenberg's *Theologie. und Philosophie: ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996), 11-15, 20-36.

This is clearly evident in Pannenberg's christology. To get into the framework of his propositions, one cannot escape his metaphysical explanations. It is hardly surprising that with Pannenberg's approach of blending theology with historical science, his christology "from below" remains a continuing challenge to historicism and the 'authoritarianism' of dialectical theology. But it is also obvious that Pannenberg's apologetic approach may aid Christians in their dialogue with historians. In this way Pannenberg has raised the Christian religion to the level of science. He has attempted to propose a christological paradigm which serves as a defense of christological formulations on one hand and a challenge to historiography on the other hand. His theological-historical proposal cannot be ignored as a possible provisional tool of verification.

Indeed an exploration of Pannenberg's approach to christology requires open-mindedness. Only then can seekers of truth find the value of Pannenberg's historical explanation for the viability of faith in the historical Jesus. Such a christological construction is Pannenberg's contribution to modern systematic theology.

Abbreviations

Wolfhart Pannenberg's Works

- ST* *Systematic Theology*. 3 Vols. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991, 1994, 1997.
- JGM* *Jesus—God and Man*. Trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe. London: SCM, 1968.
- BQTh* *Basic Questions in Theology*. 2 Vols. Trans. George H. Kehm. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970, 1971.
- Theo & Philo* *Theology and Philosophy of Science*. Trans. Francis McDonagh. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.
- ThKG* *Theology and the Kingdom of God*. Ed. Richard John Neuhaus. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969.
- ThH* *Theology as History*. Eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- RevH* *Revelation as History*. Ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, et al. Trans. David Granskou. Toronto/Ontario: Macmillan, 1969.
- Apostles' Creed* *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*. Trans. Margaret Kohl. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.
- "Dogmatic Theses" "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," *Revelation as History*. Ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, et al. Trans. David Granskou. Toronto/Ontario: Macmillan, 1969.
- "The Revelation of God" "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," *Theology as History*. Eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.