



Gunther Wenz

Introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's Systematic Theology

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht



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Translated by Philip Stewart

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Foreword

Wolfhart Pannenberg influenced the history of Christian theology and philosophy of religion in the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century both decisively and lastingly, far beyond the German-speaking world. His works, many in number, have been translated into many languages and there is a tradition of international reception. They are exceptional in their theoretical concentration, the breadth of their topical horizon, their interdisciplinary nature and their ecumenical openness, which is aimed towards the unification of Christianity.

Pannenberg is one of the great thinkers of our time. He has offered multiple studies to the history of problems in modern Christian theology, to the relation of theology and philosophy, to the natural sciences and the humanities, and on foundational questions of dogmatics and ethics. His works “Revelation as History”, “Jesus: God and Man”, “Theology and the Philosophy of Science”, “Anthropology in Theological Perspective”, and the magnum opus, his three-volume Systematic Theology, have become classics of the theological science.

My introduction to Wolfhart Pannenberg's systematic theology orients itself thematically to the structure of the Systematic Theology, but takes also into account the monographs, and as such, offers a foundation for the study of the entire Pannenbergian concept of theology. The first edition of the book, published in 2003, was dedicated to my honored teacher and predecessor in office not only in its content, but also formally. This dedication shall remain for the English edition, the existence of which I thank Philip Stewart for heartily. He has, in a selfless manner and on his own authority, applied his great linguistic and theological competence, that this introduction might be available to the English-speaking public. He is also to be thanked for the selection of secondary literature at the end of the volume.

The bibliography in this volume includes the works of Pannenberg which have been published since 1998. The list of publications from 1953 to the beginning of 1988 can be found in: *Vernunft des Glaubens. Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre*. (Festschrift W. Pannenberg), ed. by J. Rohls and G. Wenz, Göttingen 1988, 693–718. The years 1988–1998 are bibliographically documented in *KuD* 45 (1999), 143–154.

Munich, 15 July 2012

Gunther Wenz

Foreword to the German Edition

He wouldn't require of anyone that he read his work, opined Karl Barth in his preface to Otto Weber's introduction to Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. He, however, who would wish to speak of Barth, must have read his work – and it would not be asking too much that he (be the reader not a journalist, but a serious person, or indeed a serious and not a dilettante theologian) have read his work entire. The same can be said with reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology. The text before you, which comes from class material, makes of course no pretension of replacing a more thorough and detailed reading of the original. At best, it offers help in bringing structure.

At the end of the book, one will find a bibliography of selected secondary literature as well as an extended bibliography of Pannenberg's works from 1998 – 2002. Mirjam Rose executed both of these; to her many thanks for her careful work. Additional thanks to Katrin Wirth for her assistance in proofreading and quote-checking. A list of Pannenberg's publications from 1953 to the beginning of 1988 can be found, compiled by Bernd Burkhardt, in: *Vernunft des Glaubens. Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre. Festschrift W. Pannenberg*, hg. v. J. Rohls und G. Wenz, Göttingen 1988, 693 – 718. A continuation for the years 1988 – 1998 from Friederike Nüssel can be found in *KuD 45* (1999), 143 – 154. Additional suggestions for the amendment of the selected bibliography would be received with thanks by the Institut für Fundamentaltheologie und Ökumene der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (Schellingstraße 3/III VG, 80799 München).

On the occasion of the 2nd of October 2003, this book is formally dedicated to my honored teacher and predecessor in office; and that not merely in reference to its content.

Translator's Foreword

The sheer breadth of Wolfhart Pannenberg's thought can be daunting. The arc of development can be traced from his early works into his magnum opus, and there is no easy entry point into Pannenberg's corpus. For this reason, I am pleased to have been part of the task of bringing Professor Gunther Wenz's introduction to Pannenberg's system into English. More than an introduction into the three volumes of Systematic Theology, it is an overview of Pannenberg's systematic theology – the theology of decades of teaching, research, and writing – by none other than a former student and current successor. Such a volume as an entry point into perhaps the greatest systematic theologian of the late 20th century may, I hope, prove invaluable.

The reader may notice some inconsistency in the translation – due to the various translators of Pannenberg's works into English, he often seems to speak with a different voice. I have attempted to keep references in the main body as unified in terminology with the quotations as possible, nonetheless, Pannenberg may sometimes “distinguish” and sometimes “differentiate”, sometimes speak of “fellowship” and “consummation” and sometimes of “communion” and “completion” in this volume. Additionally, some quotations retain British English conventions, while this volume uses those of American English. I have followed the original text very closely, and where ambiguity could occur unintentionally, the German term is given in parentheses. Many of the translations, when quoted, took on a different tenor than the original work – where this has occurred, I have placed a footnote with alternate understandings, or, where necessary, a correction of the original translation so as to preserve both the words of Pannenberg and the context within this volume.

Additionally, the capitalization of nouns has not been consistent throughout the translations; I have made no effort to reconcile these to the main body of Professor Wenz' volume. In a language where all nouns are capitalized, a translator must choose what convention to follow in English for words such as Trinity and Christology, as well as with regard to the use of pronouns referring to God. I have often endeavored to refer to “humanity” rather than to man, where possible; especially some of the older translations retain “man” as a common designator.

The selection of secondary literature at the end of this volume limits itself to works in English and works of substance – reviews, even in English, have been left out in preference for articles and monographs. The intent was to create a manageable list.

I thank Professor Wenz for working so closely with me on this volume, and for his availability to answer questions regarding his intent. Any error in the representation of his thought remains mine. I thank also my wife, Karin, without whom this translation would have remained merely a well-intentioned idea.

Munich, 1 August 2012

Philip Stewart

Guide to Abbreviations of Pannenberg's Works

Anthr.	Anthropology in Theological Perspective
BSTh 1	Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie. Bd. 1: Philosophie, Religion, Offenbarung
BSTh 2	Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie. Bd. 2: Natur und Mensch – und die Zukunft der Schöpfung
BSTh 3	Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie. Bd. 3: Kirche und Ökumene
BQiTh	Basic Questions in Theology. Collected Essays Volume 1
BQiTh	Basic Question in Theology. Collected Essays Volume 2
EuE	Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze
GSTh 2	Grundfragen systematischer Theologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze Bd.2
JGM	Jesus, God and Man
M	What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective
MIG	Metaphysics & the Idea of God
Probl.	Problemggeschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland. Von Schleiermacher bis zu Barth und Tillich.
RaH	Revelation as History
ST I,II,III	Systematic Theology Volumes I, II, III
ThPS	Theology and the Philosophy of Science
ThuPh	Theologie und Philosophie. Ihr Verhältnis im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte.

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Introduction (Revelation as History)

Wolfhart Pannenberg was born on the 2nd of October 1928 in Stettin an der Oder. He began his university studies in theology and philosophy in 1947 in Berlin, continuing in Göttingen and Basel, and finishing in Heidelberg. His most influential philosophical teachers were Nicolai Hartmann, Karl Jaspers and Karl Loewith; the theologians who left the greatest impression upon him were Gerhard von Rad, Karl Barth, and Edmund Schlink. The latter, with whom Pannenberg spent time as an assistant, brought home to him the ecumenical problems within Christianity, and, at the same time, convinced him of the necessity of interdisciplinary dialogue, in particular dialogue with the natural sciences.

He achieved his doctoral title in 1953 in Heidelberg; the topic of his dissertation was the dogma of predestination in the thought of Duns Scotus. The dissertation was published in the following year.¹ During his preparation of his as yet unpublished *Habilitationschrift* on the history of the term of analogy in the doctrine of the knowledge of God,² he undertook further research in the medieval Scholastics as well as intensive studies on various general topics of systematic theology.³ The year 1955 brought his ordination as

1 Die Prädestinationslehre des Duns Skotus im Zusammenhand der scholastischen Lehrentwicklung (= Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte Bd.4), 1954. Cf. in this context also: Der Einfluß der Anfechtungserfahrung auf den Prädestinationsbegriff Luthers, in: KuD 3 (1957), 109 – 139. Regarding his youth and time at university, cf. W. Pannenberg, An Autobiographical Sketch, in: C.E. Braaten/Ph.Clayton (ed.), *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, Minneapolis 1999, 11 – 18.

2 Analogie und Offenbarung. Eine kritische Untersuchung der Geschichte des Analogiebegriffs in der Gotteserkenntnis, 1955 – typewritten *Habilitationschrift*. Cf. also Pannenberg's first publication: Zur Bedeutung des Analogiegedankens bei Karl Barth. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Urs von Balthasar, in: ThLZ 78 (1953), 17 – 24. A significant result of Pannenberg's *Habilitationschrift* is the demonstration that the epistemic strength of analogy, instead of the claimed middle position between univocal and equivocal speech, in fact depends on the sameness of the logos analogans. Among medieval theologians, at the latest Duns Scotus and William Ockham had made specific their recognition that analogy itself presupposes a univocal element. With this it was impossible to miss the fact that the spiritual access which should succeed in analogizing, i. e. the organization of the unknown within the schema of the already known, was inappropriate when used in reference to God (cf. in reference to this "Analogie und Doxologie", in: W. Joest und W. Pannenberg [Hg.], *Dogma und Denkstrukturen* [FS für E. Schlink], 1963, 96 – 115; reprinted in BQTh 1, 212 – 238, esp. 222 ff.).

3 Cf. the great number of lexical articles on this topic which Pannenberg published during this period. Among others are: Art. Abendmahl, II. Dogmengeschichtlich – dogmatisch in: EKL I, 6 – 11; Art. Analogie, in: EKL I, 113 f.; Art. Das Böse, in: EKL I, 559 – 561; Art. Johannes Duns Scotus, in: EKL I, 980 – 982; Art. Gnade, III. Dogmengeschichtlich, IV. Dogmatisch, in: EKL I, 1607 – 1614; Art. Gnadenmittel, in: EKL I, 1615 – 1617; Art. Analogie, in: RGG³ I, 350 – 353; Art. Christologie,

well as a lecturing position in systematic theology. In 1958 he accepted a call to the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal, where he taught as Professor for Systematic Theology until 1961, where he changed to the Universität Mainz in the same function.

The relocation to Mainz was concurrent with the publication of the programmatic work "Revelation as History," with which a new conceptual design for theology was announced within German Protestantism. This new concept differentiated itself from both of the leading methods of Wort-Gottes-Theologie, drawing distinct borders from both the existential hermeneutics of the Bultmann school and the religion-critical concept of revelation of the Barthians. The a-historical subjectivity of faith, which, according to Pannenberg's judgment was the indicator of both of these interpretations of dialectical theology, was to be overcome through the rediscovery of universal history as the medium of God's revelation, and through the demonstration of an inherent rationality to faith which trumps all irrationalism and decisionism. Principally, a reconstruction of the history of Christianity was intended, whose origins should be passed on along with its present. As a leading category of interpretation, the history of Christianity was to serve as the thought of universal history which enclosed future events, and was thus eschatologically oriented. In this manner the contingency of each individual occurrence would be taken into account on the future whole. With this insight into the unfinished nature of the course of history, the history of Christianity was to be connected with the awareness of the preliminary nature of all history and all historical representation.

The orientation upon universal history present in the hermeneutic method attempted to avoid the dissolution of theology in a simple theory of faith-speech, and demanded instead the development of a theology based in religious history, a theology which examined the history of revelation with the scientific means of the historical-critical method. Christianity, with its eschatological message of the coming and in Jesus of Nazareth already initiated Kingdom of God, was understood in the context of the historical transmissions from Israel, particularly that of the Jewish apocalyptic literature. The assumption that the end of history and the future of the world had, through God, anticipatorily occurred in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as confirmation of his claim to power was considered a unique aspect

II: Dogmengeschichtlich, in: RGG³ I, 1762–1777; Art. Dialektische Theologie, in: RGG³ II, 168–174; Art. Erwählung, III. Dogmatisch, in: RGG³ II, 614–621; Art. Gott, V. Theologiegeschichtlich, in: RGG³ II, 1717–1732; Art. Ontologie, in: EKL II, 1689–1691; Art. Maimonides, in: EKL II, 1218; Art. Glaube, IV: Im prot. Glaubensverständnis, in: LThK² IV, 925–928; Art. Jesus Christus, II: die prot. Christologie, in: LThK² V, 961–964; Art. Person, in: RGG³ V, 230–235; Art. Prädestination, IV. Dogmatisch, in: RGG³ V, 487–489; Art. Natürliche Theologie, II: Im ev. Verständnis, in: LThK² V, 816–817; Art. Thomas von Aquin, in: RGG³ VI, 856–863; Art. Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst, in: Encyclopaedia Britannica 14 Edition, Chicago-London-Toronto 1962 ff. Vol XX, 72–73; from 1967–1973 Vol. XIX, 1165–1166.

present only in Christianity. Pannenberg's theology represented an attempt to justify this assumption within the forum of a general awareness of truth. The rationality of faith, in particular in regard to the structure of the "openness to God" of humanity, was to be demonstrated anthropologically. At the same time, the claims of the Christian faith were understood as a hypothesis which posited a theory to make sense of everything; a theory whose final validity remained undecided, such that theology received a foundation within the framework of general philosophy of science and could present itself as rational theology.

The foundational concepts which were laid out in "Revelation as History" had already been anthropologically and christologically developed during the time Pannenberg was in Mainz, during which he also spend time as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago, Harvard, and the Claremont School of Theology. Noteworthy during this period are the works "Was ist der Mensch? Die Anthropologie der Gegenwart im Lichte der Theologie" from 1962,⁴ "Grundzüge der Christologie" from 1964,⁵ and the collected essays published under the title "Grundfragen systematischer Theologie" (volume I 1967; volume II 1980).⁶ The continuation of these exists in Pannenberg's intensive research activity and significant literary production since 1968 at the newly-founded Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät in Munich, where he remained, despite multiple renowned calls to other universities and invitations to positions elsewhere, for 26 years, teaching until his emeritus status in 1994. Of the publications in the Munich years, "Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie"⁷ from 1973, "Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive"⁸ from 1983 and the essay collection "Ethik und Ekklesiologie" are of particular import. In addition to these were multiple studies and articles, of which (analogous to the monographs) many were published in English and/or translated into other languages. A bibliography of Pannenberg's works extends today to well more than 600 titles, and the amount of secondary literature is also legion.

The imposing number of students also bears witness to the success of Pannenberg's efforts. His teaching career has, over many years, opened the way into systematic theology to generations of students, and given the a theological foundation for their future service, be that as university professors, pastors, religious education teachers or even in other careers. In relation to this it is particularly worth mentioning that Pannenberg, in opposition to an individualistic narrowing of the Christian faith, always

4 In English as "What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective", Fortress 1970.

5 In English as "Jesus, God and Man", Westminster Press 1968.

6 In English as "Basic Questions in Theology. Collected Essays Volume 1", Fortress 1970 and "Basic Questions in Theology. Collected Essays Volume 2", Fortress 1971; these are pages 1–201 and 202–398 of Pannenberg's first 1967 volume.

7 In English as "Theology and the Philosophy of Science" Westminster Press 1976.

8 In English as "Anthropology in Theological Perspective" T&T Clark 1985.

emphasized the connection between faith and culture implicitly present in the message of Jesus about the coming kingdom of God, a connection which characterizes the history of Christianity even today in its form that is more or less exposed to the secular world. Overcoming the isolated privacy of piety, a state caused at least partially by the confessionalization of Christianity in the modern age, was for Pannenberg not least of value in his efforts towards the unity of the churches – a unity without which, according to Pannenberg, the unity of a society grounded in the foundation of Christian culture was not, in the long run, sustainable. In this sense, his thought represents not only a theology oriented on the common rational criteria of science, but rather equally a church doctrine marked by ecumenism.

The ecumenical nature of Pannenberg's thought and work comes to light particularly in the founding of the Ecumenical Institute in Munich, which he also led. Equally, his research in the so-called Jaeger-Stählin-Circle reaching back into the fifties, which he also co-led for many years as the Protestant counterpart, makes this apparent. This research was, among other things, during the time in which the study on the dogmatic rejections⁹ was undertaken. His leading role in the Commission for Faith & Order in the World Council of Churches, where he served as delegate of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland from 1975 to 1990 is also indicative of this, as he was significantly involved in the development of the "Lima Text" as well as the study "Towards Sharing the One Faith." In addition to his ecumenical work, Pannenberg took worked with a great number of interdisciplinary institutions and took part in many such dialogues, with a focus on the intersection of philosophy and theology. One to be mentioned here is the research circle "Poetik und Hermeneutik."

There was no absence of honors for Pannenberg: He is a founding member of the Academie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses. In 1977 he was voted a regular member of the Bavarian Academy of the Sciences, in their philosophical-historical division. In 1993, he was subscribed as a corresponding member to the British Academy. He received honorary doctorates from the University of Glasgow (1972), the University of Manchester (1977), Trinity College Dublin (1979), The University of St. Andrews (1993) and the University of Cambridge (1997), as well as from the University Comillas in Madrid (1999). In 1987 he received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, first-class, in 1993 the Bavarian Order of Merit, and in 1995 the Bavarian *Maximiliansorden*. His greatest honor, however, was given by himself, in crowning his life's work with the completion of his three-volume Systematic Theology. The first volume was published in 1988 by Vandenhoeck

9 Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend? I. Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute, hg. von Karl Lehmann und Wolfhart Pannenberg (= Dialog der Kirchen Bd. 4), 1986. Können die gegenseitigen Verwerfungen zwischen den Reformationskirchen und Rom aufgehoben werden? In: Lehrverurteilungen.

& Ruprecht, with volume 2 to follow in 1991 and volume 3 in 1993. This opus magnum was expanded by a study on the relation of philosophy and theology in the light of their common history¹⁰ in 1996, a history of theological problems in Germany from Schleiermacher through Barth and Tillich¹¹ in 1997, and through three volumes of collected articles in contribution to systematic theology which appeared in 1999 and 2000.¹² Additionally, a series of sermons has been published.

What follows is an introductory examination of the three-volume Systematic Theology, presented with the goal of demonstrating the structure of Pannenberg's thought by focusing on the systematic baselines of the arguments. This is emphatically for the purpose of assisting the reader as one engages with Pannenberg's original works. The significant monographs on Christology, Philosophy of Science, and Anthropology (including "What is Man?") as well as the considerations present in "Metaphysics and the Idea of God" will be taken into account at the appropriate locations in the structure of the Systematics. The collected essays and shorter studies, due to their volume, will only be able to be considered in places of direct bearing and in footnotes. As an introduction to the whole, we turn now to a brief characterization of the two terms which make up the title of the 1961's "Revelation as History",¹³ as a conceptual understanding of these two terms provides a preliminary understanding of the design of the whole Systematics.

Revelation and History

The philosophy of German Idealism, and in particular Hegel, is decisive for the significant role which the thought of revelation has played in the modern age, for it is "...the present consensus that revelation is, in essence, the self-revelation of God" (RaH, 4). Revelation does not refer to the manifestation or communication of supernatural truths, rather, the completion of God's disclosure of Himself in His being. As God's being is, however, one, in the strict understanding of self-revelation questions of the unity and uniqueness are already decided. Along with this thought, the idea of a direct and incommunicable self-disclosure of the sole God in the unity of His being is to be rejected as biblically unjustified. Neither through His name, nor His Word, nor even through Law and Gospel is God directly revealed (cf. RaH

10 Studien zum Verhältnis der Theologie und Philosophie im Lichte ihrer gemeinsamen Geschichte. See Chapter 8.1 of this work.

11 Problemgeschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland. Von Schleiermacher bis zu Barth und Tillich. See chapter 8.2 of this work.

12 Beiträge zur Systematischen Theologie (I. Philosophie, Religion, Offenbarung; II. Natur und Mensch – und die Zukunft der Schöpfung; III. Kirche und Ökumene).

13 English 1969.

8 ff.). His self-disclosure is instead completed in an indirect manner, through God's action in history. Corresponding to this is the first of seven theses offered on the doctrine of revelation: "The Self-Revelation of God in the Biblical Witness is not of a Direct Type in the Sense of a Theophany, but is Indirect and Brought About by Means of the Historical Acts of God" (RaH 125, section title). These "dogmatic theses" are proposed as the result of the exegetical studies from Rolf Rendtorff ("The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel", RaH 23 – 53) and Ulrich Wilckens (The Understanding of Revelation in Primitive Christianity", RaH 55 – 121), included in the volume.

Among the types of history through which God is indirectly revealed, one is only to think of individual events under specific conditions. For, one wishes "...to understand the indirect self-communication that resides in every individual act of God as revelation, then there are as many revelations as there are divine acts and occurrences in nature and history. But this destroys the strict sense of revelation as self-revelation of God. Only then is it possible to understand the totality of God's action – and if God is one then that means everything that happens – as his revelation." (RaH 16)¹⁴ In this manner of thinking, two possibilities of understanding are available: one might, in the manner of the classical philosophy of the ancient Greeks, understand the entirety of reality in its cosmic planning as the as the indirect revelation; one might otherwise understand the whole of reality in its temporally extended context of universal history as the indirect revelation of the true God. The latter path is that which was taken by German Idealism, the path taken by such as Lessing, Herder, and Hegel, who "gave a systematic formulation to the conception of universal history as an indirect revelation of God in connection with his explication of the concept of self-revelation" (RaH 16 – 17).

Pannenberg examines the theological problems of God's indirect self-revelation in history in two particular points, the first of which has already been intimated: 1. When it is the case, that history is the self-revelation of God only in its context of universality, and thereby in its entirety, how can a particular event, such as the history of Jesus Christ, have the character of revelation in the strict sense? 2. If the reality of God, which determines all other reality, reveals itself first in the entirety of world history, is the incompleteness of world history a fact which necessarily excludes the absolute meaning of Jesus Christ and the completed salvation in his name? Would the openness of all occurrences to the future reduce the history of Jesus Christ and its effects to the status of merely preliminary? The answer to these two tightly interwoven questions is the central thesis of "Revelation as History", according to which,

14 the final sentence quoted from Pannenberg is perhaps better understood when rendered "It can thus only be valid, that one understand the totality of God's action – and when one is dealing with the One God, then that means everything that happens – as His revelation" (*Es kann also nur gelten, das Ganze des Gotteshandelns – und das heißt, wenn es um den einen Gott geht, das Ganze alles Geschehens – as Offenbarung Gottes zu verstehen*). – Trans.

in the fate of Jesus Christ “the end of all events is anticipated” (RaH 139, section title). As a proleptic anticipation of the eschaton, the history of Jesus Christ is the universal revelation of the Godhood of God.¹⁵

In grounding and explicating this central thesis, Pannenberg interweaves historical and systematic arguments in a manner characteristic for his entire project. The systematic assumption implied in the thought that God’s self-demonstration is indirect, namely, that revelation occurs at the end of the history which is revelation rather than at its beginning (thesis two), is not only confirmed through reference to the eschatological character of the sending of Jesus Christ, but is also historically derived from it. In the same manner, the eschatological character of the sending of Jesus Christ proves itself to be so far in continuity with the Judaic-Old Testament history of tradition, as the primacy of eschatology is not to it foreign. The contrary is, in fact, the case, as Pannenberg makes clear in the foreword to the fifth edition of RaH¹⁶ over against the retractions made by Rendtorff: the scope of the entire Old Testament is an eschatological one. From this both the meaning and the content of the fifth thesis are made clear. It is within this thesis that the meaning of the apocalyptic nature of the tradition is recognized. This thesis claims that the revelatory sense of the history of Jesus is first understandable from the perspective of the traditions of Israel: “The Christ event does not reveal the deity of the God of Israel as an isolated event, but rather insofar as it is a part of the history of God with Israel” (RaH 145, chapter title, Thesis 5).

If then the single, and in its unity unique, self-revelation of God does not refer “*exclusively* to the figure of Jesus Christ”¹⁷, it is at the same time the concrete history of Jesus Christ in its own particularity which is the anticipatory occurrence of the whole of history and which brings history to unity. Within this, the history of the people of Israel within the consequence of the determination put upon them is transferred into the human history of the

15 The foundational importance of eschatology for the idea of history was handled two years prior to the appearance of “Revelation as History“ in the article “Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte”, (*Kerygma und Dogma* 5, 1959, pgs. 218 – 237 and 239 – 288) published as “Redemptive Event and History” in BQiTTh pgs. 15 – 80. It begins with the foundational sentence: “History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology.” (BQiTTh 15). The majority of the motifs which make up Pannenberg’s conception of theology can already be found in this article. In one important aspect, however, Pannenberg quickly changed his view: the thesis that history is the occurrence in tension between promise and fulfillment. In the place of the simple correspondence of promise and fulfillment, Pannenberg developed a perspective on the history of tradition in the study “Kerygma und Geschichte” (in: *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, ed.R. Redtorff and K. Koch (Festschrift for Gerhard von Rad), 1961, 129 – 140), published as “Kerygma and History” in BQiTTh, 81 – 95. This perspective views the promises handed down as to be newly interpreted in the light of each new historical experience. The maxim which drives this is that “the history of the transmission of tradition...has to be seen as a deeper concept of history generally.” (BQiTTh 93)

16 Unfortunately, the English translation is based on the third edition, and thus one must be referred to VIII ff. of the German fifth edition for the foundation of this claim. – Trans.

17 XI of the German fifth edition of RaH.

world. The own particularity of the history of Jesus Christ, in its turn, is brought into the light of Easter, and appears in light of his resurrection from the dead. In this, the eschatological sending is confirmed, and the eschaton is anticipated. Indeed, the universality and finality of the eschatological self-disclosure of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead could be expressed in gentile Christendom through ideas of revelation which were influenced by Gnostic or other Jewish-external sources (cf. thesis 6); the advantage lies with the Jewish-apocalyptic horizon of interpretation and understanding not merely for historical, but also for systematic reasons. This is the case not least because the execution of the proleptic anticipation which is revealed as completed in the history of Jesus Christ allows the sense-structure which permeates all events to be recognized. All historical conceptual grasping is executed as anticipatory understanding, as “all knowledge takes place in view of the anticipation of its results and receives its impulse from this, although the anticipated results that are to establish faith seem to have an undercurrent of an extremely self-critical testing” (RaH 157, note 15 to pg. 139).

It is in this context that one must understand the thesis that the historical revelation of God is, due to its universal character, “open to anyone who has eyes to see it” (RaH 135, section title, Thesis 3). The events of the historical self-revelation of God are not of themselves hidden and require no additional content or event in Word-revelation, rather they are laid out in their nature to be recognized. “When these are taken seriously for what they are and in the historical context to which they belong, they speak their own language, the language of facts. God has proved his deity in this language of facts. Naturally, these experiences are not to be treated as naked facts, but are to be seen in a way different from what would naturally emerge. That these and also other events are veiled from many men, indeed, from most men, does not mean that this truth is too high for them, so that their reason must be supplemented by other means of knowing. Rather, it means that they must use their reason in order to see correctly. If the problem is not thought of in this way, then the Christian truth is made into a truth for the in-group, and the church becomes a gnostic community.” (RaH 137)¹⁸

In an afterword to the second edition of “Revelation as History”, Pannenberg defends these implementations, as well as the thesis that the foundation of faith must lie in the knowledge of God’s revelation within the history which proves His Godhood. The thought of “anticipation of the end” is there explicitly referred to as the “salient point” of the newly conceived term for revelation. Additionally, Pannenberg also makes valid his point that “the

18 The final sentence is *very* freely translated in the English edition of RaH, as Pannenberg does not make any reference to gnostic community, but rather says that “...one would make the Christian truth into a matter for the conventicle.” (...dann würde man die christliche Wahrheit zu einer Konventikelangelegenheit machen. Offenbarung und Geschichte, 100). – Trans.

proleptic structure of the existent as such and particularly of intellectual acts [is to] become intelligible in the light of the prolepsis of the Christ event” (RaH 194), as well as the reverse. A future theology of reason has this challenge to prove. It would, in the understanding of Pannenberg, “describe reason, not as *a priori* capacity, but in its historical structure of sketching and reflecting, but thus also in its essential (not however always factual) openness to a truth always presupposed but never grasped in the act of thinking out the sketch” (RaH 192). In the three volumes of the Systematic Theology, Pannenberg integrates the concept of a theology of reason, and carries it out as well, though one must presuppose the results of the monograph “Theology and Philosophy of Science.” This monograph may not, also, be ignored when the system of the Systematic Theology should be understood, and moreover, when one wishes to understand the content of the first chapters, when Pannenberg speaks of the truth of Christian dogma as the theme of systematic theology.

§1 The Thematic Content and Scientific Character of Systematic Theology (ST I, Chapter 1)

1. The Truth of Christian Doctrine as the Theme of Systematic Theology

The title of Pannenberg's systematic theology is to be "taken quite literally" (ST I, x) and has no desire to avoid the incriminating term "dogmatics": "We shall be expressing the subject matter of dogmatics in all its variety as the unfolding of the Christian idea of God" (*ibid.*) Not one bit less conceptionally important is the program which is demonstrated already in the title, the resolution to develop a portrayal of the dogmatic topics in constant awareness of their historical contexts. In this methodology, it is also the case that the methodology itself is determined by its object, and not to be abstracted from its specific features. This characteristic interaction of historical and systematic work, which is indicative for Pannenberg's entire systematic conception, is an expression of the conviction that the systematic results only make sense in connection with the historical process of their establishment. Dogmatics can only be done properly in the differentiated unity of systematic terminology and historical analysis – this leaves behind the abstract ideas of an ahistorical reason and a relativizing historicism. Two aspects in the Foreword make this foundational assumption apparent: 1. Systematic theology is directed at the rationality of faith; nonetheless, the task of philosophical theology is, in Pannenberg's judgment, "to fix its intellectual point of departure in the historical revelation of God." (ST I, xii) 2. Pannenberg nowhere denies the confessional background of his theological design, nor its geographic background in Europe; this notwithstanding, it is for Pannenberg a matter of "simply the truth of Christian doctrine and the Christian confession."¹ (ST I, xiii)

The exposition of this decision to present the content of dogmatics as the unfolding of the Christian idea of God begins with an examination of the term

1 This method is grounded as necessary both historically and systematically: "As a reform movement ...the Reformation sought not to ground its own separated form of Christendom, but to bring the central core and foundation of Christian faith to its place of honor in all of Christianity, to free it from distortions in theology as well as in the life of the church. This means: to ask after the particular principles of Protestantism, in contrast to the nature of Christian faith in general, is quite simply un-Protestant, so long as the idea of Protestantism finds its measure in the Reformation." (Das protestantische Prinzip im ökumenischen Dialog, in LM 30 [1991], 125–129, reprinted in BSTh 3, 186–193, here 188)

“theology”. Despite its historical ambiguity, one should note the fact that the traditional Christian and pre-Christian term “theology” refers not only to human epistemological effort, but also always and primarily to the message about God which is revealed and communicated by divinity itself: “...the knowledge of God that is made possible by God, and therefore by revelation, is one of the basic conditions of the concept of theology as such. Otherwise the possibility of the knowledge of God is logically inconceivable; it would contradict the very idea of God.” (ST I, 2) If it is the case that theology, due to the dependence of human knowledge of God on divine revelation, constituted by God as its central and comprehensive object, then the differentiated fullness of the Christian traditions can only be unitarily and theologically perceived when God is recognized as both the organizational middle and the central point of reference. This insight cannot be relinquished in the face of the independence of the different theological disciplines. Theology is, in its being, never a discipline simply of cultural studies; the truth of theology is measured only against the question, what right does theology have to speak about God?

In dogmatics as a theological discipline, the truth of Christian speech about God becomes an explicit topic, as dogmatics is the science of dogma.² “The Greek word *dogma* can denote both a subjective opinion as distinct from certain knowledge and also a legally binding opinion or ‘judgment’” (ST I, 9) The truth claim of dogma or dogmas is, according to Pannenberg, is given warrant neither through legal (that is, through judicially authoritarian determination and the obligation to believe) nor through the bare fact of an existing consensus in the church. Rather, warrant is given to its truth claim alone through its subject matter. The subject matter of dogma is developed only through the process of testing, a matter which is not able to be finalized under earthly conditions. “The exposition and testing of dogma in this sense constitutes the task of dogmatics. Dogmatics inquires into the truth of Dogma. It asks whether the church’s dogmas express God’s revelation and are therefore God’s own dogmas. It pursues this inquiry by expounding dogma.” (ST I, 16–17) The task of dogmatics is, then, to “not only unfold the content of church teaching but also attend to the question of the truth of dogma.” (ST I, 17)

Dogmatics undertakes this task in the carrying out of *systematic theology*. The system of systematic theology consists primarily in “systematic

2 The doxological and proleptic structure element of dogmatic statements is discussed in the article “Was ist eine dogmatische Aussage?” in: *KuD* 8 (1962) 81–99, in English as “What is a Dogmatic Statement?” *BQ̄iTh* 1, 182–210. Cf. also “Analogie und Doxologie”, in: w. Joest und W. Pannenberg (eds.), *Dogma und Denkstrukturen* (Festschrift for E. Schlink), in English as “Analogy and Doxology” *BQ̄iTh* 1, 211–238. For the ecumenical aspect of the dogmatic task, cf. “Dogmatische Theologie in ökumenischer Perspektive” in: E. Schockenhoff und P. Walter (eds.), *Dogma und Glaube. Bausteine für eine theologische Erkenntnislehre* (Festschrift for Walter Kasper), 1993, 152–164. A quote from pg. 152 is translated here: “Catholicity is a characteristic trait of Christian theology and the Church in general, not a particularity of the specific Roman Catholic tradition and Church.

presentation itself as a connection is shown between the various Christian doctrinal statements and also between these statements and whatever else is regarded as true. Hence the systematic presentation of the content of Christian doctrine is already related as such to its truth claim. It tests the truth of what is presented. If truth can only be one, the things that are regarded as true will not contradict one another, and they can be united with one another.” (ST I, 19) Coherence is then the necessarily implied condition of each claim to truth. Foundational for the system of a dogmatics whose representation of doctrine is constituted by the systematic demands of such a question regarding truth, indeed, a question which is posed by its very content, is the “recognition of the basic principles of identity and contradiction” (ST I, 21), without which no argumentation is possible, even in theology. “These principles have always been especially presupposed in efforts to present the systematic unity of Christian doctrine. The scientific nature of theological work rests on their thorough application[.]” (*Ibid.*) Although the coherence of the presentation of doctrine according to this principle, in which contradiction is avoided, is indispensable, the systematic reconstruction of Christian doctrine cannot definitively decide the question of its truth. Consensus of judgment and coherence of interpretation do not guarantee correspondence to the way things are, that is to say, to that comprehensive correlation of the interpretation with the facts of the matter which is essential for such an accord. This fact is due at least partially to the priority of the object of theology, which is only graspable in an anticipatory manner. This does not, however, change the fact that “*presupposed* truth can be grasped only in the medium of knowing it *as* truth.” (ST I, 24)

If, then, the truth of the topics of Christian doctrine can only be regarded in the execution of perception and coherence-discursive treatment, dogmatics must “renounce the claim to a prior guarantee of its truth” (ST I, 48). The meaning of this for the so-called prolegomena to dogmatics is developed by Pannenberg in wide-ranging historical excursions, with particular attention to the theme of scripture, the term “religion”, and the consciousness of faith. It is in this latter that the foundations of Pannenberg’s theo-historical conception comes to light. The continuous point of the development is, to repeat, the consistent criticism of the attempt to establish “the truth of Christian doctrine...in advance of all discussion of its content” (ST I, 47). This criticism is based not only on the previously mentioned priority of the content to the act of perception, but equally on the connected interminability of the process of experience. Both aspects, as one can easily see, belong together. Insofar it is valid that “[i]n fact we can validate and appropriate as true only that which our experience confirms.” (ST I, 47) However, individual experience never conveys “absolute, unconditional certainty. At best it can offer no more than a certainty which needs clarification and confirmation in an ongoing process of experience. This subjective certainty does indeed experience the presence of truth and its unconditionality, but only in an ongoing process. The

As one of the great thinkers of our time, Wolfhart Pannenberg has influenced the history of Christian theology and philosophy of religion since the second half of the 20th century. His Systematic Theology and many of his other works have become classics in the science of theology.

In this introduction Gunther Wenz examines the main pillars of Pannenberg's theology: the self-manifestation of God, the Trinitarian God, the creation of the world, Christology, anthropology, pneumatology, eschatology and ecclesiology. The book thereby offers a valuable guide to comprehending Pannenberg's Systematic Theology in the context of his most relevant writings.

The Author

Dr. theol. Gunther Wenz is professor of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology and head of the Institute of Fundamental Theology and Ecumenics at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

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